



# North Takes All The Right Turns

By Rob Schultz

Follow the simple, direct route and it's virtually impossible to get lost driving from Madison to Eagle Ridge in Galena, Illinois.

Andy North traveled there hundreds of times during the creation of The General, the golf resort's newest course that North and partner Roger Packard designed.

North, however, preferred to drive the back roads.

It's safe to say that he never got lost. It's also a good bet that he cut some serious drive time off each trip. That is just North's way. His life has never followed the simple, direct path on the map. But he has always found a better way to get where he wants to go.

It has been 12 years since North won his second US Open championship at Oakland Hills Country Club outside Detroit. It was a victory that should have put him on a path toward greatness. Instead, a myriad of injuries forced him to take a major detour.

No matter. North persevered and has found success as a golf course designer, a commentator on ESPN's golf coverage and, most recently, as an author. Anybody who has spent more than 10 minutes in the sun should be required to read his riveting article on his bout with skin cancer that was published in Golf Journal magazine.

"I guess I've been lucky enough that I've been had enough confidence in what I've been able to do since I was a little kid to do things the way I think it should be done," said North. "Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

At 47, North can boast that it worked almost all the time on the job and at home. North and his wife, Susan, are proudest of the fact that they raised two daughters who are on their own paths toward success. They are also thrilled with their beautiful home on 40 acres in the Town of Middleton. It includes a separate building for North's office and a golf hole just beyond their backyard.

"We're real happy with what we've done," said North as he sat in his office in mid-July.

Mementos of past successes tastefully decorate the walls. There was a framed photo of Oakland Hills' famed 16th hole that Rayovac presented him. Below the photo were the scorecards of all the winners of the US Open at Oakland Hills leading up to and including his victory there.

There also was a Leroy Neiman original painting of North hitting out of a sand trap en route to winning the Westchester Open. And there was handstitched artwork celebrating his Westchester victory made by Linda Watson, the wife of PGA Tour star Tom Watson.

"Obviously, I would have loved to have been healthier," said North. "But otherwise I've been as happy as I could be."

North is so content that he said it wouldn't bother him if he never played in another golf tournament. But don't think for a moment that North has given up the idea of playing again. Quite the contrary.

In fact, North will soon find himself at another fork in the road. In three years he'll have the option of playing the Senior PGA Tour.

It'll be a tough call. "I have no idea what I'm going to do," said North.

First, North hasn't made enough career money on the PGA Tour (\$1.4 million) to gain an automatic exemption on the Senior Tour. He figures he would get enough sponsor exemption to play in 15 events, which are as many events as North would want to play. "But most of the guys are playing 30, 31 events," said North. "Can I make enough money in 15 events to make the top 31 (on the money list and become fully exempt)? I don't know. But I can't see myself playing in the 31 events."

One reason is North's health. His body hasn't held up to a full year's worth of golf since he won his last US Open. He played in two PGA Tour events last year. He'll play in one—the Greater Milwaukee Open—this year.

"We're going to find the answer to that big question soon because I'm going to start working hard next year," said North, who added that he has played just 20 rounds

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so far this year. "I'll be able to tell if I can do it after I start hitting balls a lot. If I go out and hit balls for an hour or two 14 days in a row, that's great. But I don't know if I can do that. I haven't practiced in 10 years."

North will sacrifice his career with ESPN to a large extent and his design work to a smaller extent if he joins the Senior Tour. Coincidentally, his contract with ESPN runs out the year he turns 50.

If he opts to play golf instead of report on it, North will actually travel less. He made a commitment this year to be at every ESPN golf telecast this year. That means he'll attend all 26 of the tournaments the network is televising plus all four majors, the Anderson Consulting championships and a few special events such as the Fred Meyer Challenge in Portland.

"I made the commitment to see what it was all about and to see if I could do it," said North. "It's been brutal."

The payoff has been more air time and a more prominent role in the telecasts. North admits he's still learning the TV game, but he has drawn high marks as an on-course reporter, interviewer and commentator from the booth. CBS was so impressed they tried to lure him away last year to replace the ousted Gary McCord at the Masters.

His many trips as a golf course designer have also paid off in even bigger, better ways.

There were countless trips to Galena and the result was a masterpiece. Ron Whitten, the architecture editor for Golf Digest, thinks it could be a strong contender for the top new course in its class.

North also has made 15 to 18 trips to Kalispell, Montana, where he and Packard will open a course in a few weeks that they love every bit as much as The General.

"Most of the name architects are on-sight three or four times. One is for the grand opening, another is for the ground-breaking and the other is to pick up a check or two," said North with a smile. "Not me. If my name is on it I want to make sure I have something to say about it."

Whitten said since Tom Weiskopf broke off Jay Morrish, North and Packard are the top Tour player-architect duo in the business. He said he loves the Brown Deer redesign and feels that Trappers Turn in Wisconsin Dells is an underrated wonder. North and Packard are in the process of designing a third nine for Trappers.

"Weiskopf-Morrish were the most successful duo ever and North and Packard are very comparable to them in many ways," Whitten said. "Roger brings a wealth of technical knowledge and Andy brings the intangible feel for golf shots and golf holes that Weiskopf always provided."

Whitten wrote a piece for Golf World that rated the Tour pros as architects. North, who has joined Packard to design eight courses—including the North 9 at the Springs and Cantigny near Wheaton, Illinois—didn't receive high marks for marquee value in the article. But Whitten said that doesn't mean anything.

He called North the best architect among the Tour players. "In my opinion, right now I'd say he is," Whitten said. "You want (Arnold) Palmer or (Jack) Nicklaus for courses with housing. But in terms of Tour pros who are seriously involved in course design, Andy North ranks with the best."

North-Packard also ranks among the cheapest of the top architect teams. They ask for anywhere between

\$250,000 to \$300,000 per design. That ranks below Nicklaus's \$2 million fee or Palmer's \$1 million fee. Whitten said the average is \$500,000.

"I think we're very inexpensive," North said. "We just haven't had the luxury yet of working with an owner who has unlimited funds."

Therein lies the rub. If the owner has unlimited funds, he or she usually hires Pete Dye, Tom Fazio or Jack Nicklaus.

"That's frustrating when you do as good a work or better," North said. "We'll be in the hunt for a lot of projects and maybe make it to the last three that get interviewed. But at some point the owner decides he wants Nicklaus instead of North."

North-Packard would like to complete about two courses a year. That's the limit that probably wouldn't put a crimp on his playing time if he wants to join the Senior Tour. Such thoughts are what seem to be pushing North toward returning to the game.

"I look at the Senior Tour and there's a group of players who, if they play anywhere close to their ability level, will finish in the top third of every tournament. There's another group that if they play to their ability level, will finish in the bottom third. And then there's a group in the middle who—in good weeks can move up and in bad weeks move down," said North, who speaks as an authority since he covers many of the Senior Tour events for ESPN. It has given him a huge head start since he already knows much of the field, not to mention the courses they play on.

"Looking at that, I know there's one group I don't fit in. And I think I'll be closer to the other two groups. And if you're in those two groups you can make a living."

North will have some competition. His class will include Tom Watson, Tom Kite and Lanny Wadkins.

He expects Kite and Watkins to play a great deal on the Senior Tour. Watson's another story.

"He only plays 15 events on the regular Tour. What makes you think he's going to play 30 on the Senior Tour? It's not going to happen," said North.

"It's be interesting to see what happens," he added. "But I'm in no hurry to get there." ♣



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