



Memories of Pinehurst No. 2

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Several months ago I received a surprise phone call. Sometimes surprises require a lot of searching before something positive can be found, but this time was different. This time the surprise was an opportunity to attend the 1999 U.S. Open at Pinehurst. It took me a few seconds to respond, but eventually my mouth began working and I eagerly accepted what could easily be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

I flew out of Madison late in the day on Wednesday June 16 headed for Raleigh, North Carolina. The chauffeur, who had been standing in the baggage terminal with one of those signs like you see the actors holding on TV, led me to a white stretch limo. (Not a bad way to leave the airport, in my opinion).

The only other passenger in the car was the owner of an ag chemical dealership from Texas. On the way to the hotel we discussed several things. Most of the conversation centered on the likely impact of the 1996 Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA). It turned out the gentleman was on one of the national committees for FQPA and had more straight information on the legislation than most people to whom I've spoken regarding the act.

First and foremost he told me golf course uses for pesticides were not being directly looked at as the EPA evaluates pesticides with a view to reducing exposure risk to children. The real danger, of course, lies in the potential for many of our commonly used pesticides to simply not be reregistered by the companies which own them due to the costs required to acquire the data to pass EPA registration. As for himself, he was deeply concerned the loss of pesticides for turf and ornamental use would severely hamper his business.

The talk turned to the merger of AgrEvo and Rhone-Poulenc into the Aventis company, and the likely spinoff of smaller companies in the near future as the few mega-companies lose interest in "minor" markets (turf and ornamental pesticides).

The gentleman, who was about 60, also told me of a new book by Tom Brokaw titled *The Greatest Generation*. He claimed the book was a compelling tribute to those Americans who put their lives on hold during WWII: the generation which accepted the hardships of the 30's, the rationing of the 40's, and who eventually built the greatest economy the world has ever seen, all without ever asking anything for themselves. I got to bed that evening around midnight,

already richer for the experience with my fellow passenger.

My bus left at 6:45 the next morning for Pinehurst. On the way there I sat next to the owner of a lawn care company from Florida. You should have heard him when I said I was from Wisconsin. "Man", he cried, "y'all have bentgrass up there, don't ya? Down home all we've got is bermuda. I got to play on bentgrass before-there's no better grass for putting." Not wanting to disagree with someone who was right, I admit I did get a certain sense of satisfaction hearing how nice our golf courses are "up North."

After an hour and thirty minute ride we arrived at Pinehurst. After a brief stop in the hospitality tent for some breakfast and a map, I set off with a turf advertising executive from northern Illinois to see the course. Our game plan was to walk the course, stop-

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Bunkers at Pinehurst

ping at certain holes for brief periods of play. On Friday, the next day, we would then know the best places to sit for the entire day.

If you're a Star Trek fan you might realize the course layout at Pinehurst No. 2 resembles the starship U.S.S. Enterprise. Number one, two, three and four holes are all in a row, with five, six, and seven coming straight back before eight breaks off to the left of number seven green. The remaining holes form a circular pattern before eighteen green comes back to rest near number one tee. The thing that impressed me as we began walking the course was how narrow and close the layout was of the course. Much of the time I felt it was possible to throw a stone from one side of a fairway across to the far side of the adjacent fairway. The closeness made it difficult to control crowd noise, for the ushers could be urging "Quiet,



Corey Pavin

please" on one hole, while a crowd was clapping less than 30 yards away on another hole. The fairways for the most part were long and straight. There were no blind greens, and only two partial doglegs on the course. The 16th hole had the only water hazard on

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the course. It didn't take me long, though, to discover the true challenge of Pinehurst.

About 9 am we arrived at number five green and found it fairly empty. We parked ourselves next to the ropes where we were within 40 ft. of the green as our schedules showed several key groups would soon be arriving. Players like Greg Norman, Davis Love, Tiger Woods, Corey Pavin, Lee Janzen, and Payne Stewart were all back-to-back. Although I rarely have time to follow professional golf, even to watch it on TV, I was pleasantly surprised to find I recognized quite a few of the players.

Kaname Yokoo, Bob Glider, and Madison's own Jerry Kelly were coming up to the green when we arrived. I had read number five was ranked the most difficult hole on the course. A long par 4 (482 yards), the only difficulty to me seemed to be the four bunkers placed along the sides of the apron and the green. As I watched the three fire their fairway shots, though, the ultimate test of the championship unraveled before me. Though all three shots hit the green, all three shots rolled away from the pin. The shots rolled towards the edge of the green. Then the shots rolled off the green. Then the shots rolled down the hill, away from the green. The true test, it seemed, was the skill to have sufficient backspin to stick the

green. If not, the balls rolled off the turtle-back shaped green. At Pinehurst, the collar didn't stop the balls, because the collars on the greens had all been purposely scalped. As I learned later that day, such practice didn't come without cost from a superintendent's point of view. A few weeks earlier, as the mowing height was lowered, the scalping was so severe there was consideration the turf would have to be replaced. They never did replace the turf, but it was noticeably brown in many areas due to the sudden drop in cutting height.

We stayed at number five green all morning. We watched putts turn into chip shots. We watched double putts score as bogeys, and triple putts as double bogeys. We watched Tiger Woods, who hit the green in two but couldn't stick it, bogey the hole and disgustingly throw his club across the green, where his caddy caught it in midair. Payne Stewart, who eventually won the tournament one-under, couldn't break par on the hole. For nearly five hours we watched some of the game's greatest golfers play on the fifth green. During the whole time we saw only three pars, no birdies, and a lot of bogeys, double bogeys, and worse.

After lunch we took bleacher seats on number 18 green. We arrived in time to see most of the golfers we'd watched earlier at number five finish their day. It



UM, BOSS... I THINK I'M ALLERGIC TO GRASS.

was amazing how fast the time passed.

The next day my new friend and I finished walking the course. At lunch we sat next to a 14 year old boy whose mother proudly prompted us to ask his handicap. The boy blandly replied "two". Not bad for one so young; perhaps the next Tiger Woods?

The afternoon I spent simultaneously watching number 16 green and 17 tee which were separated by no more than thirty feet. With a spot like this I was happy to have a bleacher seat to take full advantage of the situation. This day I was able to see most of the rest of the ultimate "favorites" up close: Jack Nicklaus, Curtis Strange, Fuzzy Zoeller, Hale Irwin, Ben Crenshaw, and Fred Couples. Jose Olazabal would have been in the lineup but for a broken hand he'd suffered the day before.

At the end of the day I headed for the pro shop in the clubhouse. I'd been in the main merchandise tent the day before to view the merchandise, but didn't want to leave without seeing Pinehurst's pro shop. Prices were stiff, of course, but many items were actually a bit less than the merchandise tent. The registers were all packed, walking was difficult, and it was impossible to stand back to look at the merchandise.

Waiting in the checkout line, I began to calculate the amount of money involved in the U.S. Open. The "cheap" shirts started at \$56 and went up. Some of the hospitality tents, of which there were at least two score, supposedly had more than \$300,000 worth of furnishings alone. The players, I learned, don't stay in a hotel, even the prestigious Pinehurst Hotel. Instead they rent private homes for the week. The homes surrounding the course were beautiful and obviously elegant, but I was amazed when I learned the going rates were \$100,000 per week and sometimes higher. My vote is to have the next U.S. Open at Stoughton Country Club-I'll gladly rent out my house, even for half-price, and still pay off my mortgage!

Apart from two sleepless nights (someone kept pulling the fire alarms, forcing everyone out of bed and to the great outdoors about 3 am on Thursday and Friday nights), I had a great time. I hope to get another opportunity like this sometime in my life, but even if I don't, I still count myself lucky. At the airport I even bought *The Greatest Generation* to read on the flight back home, and it too turned out to be all I had expected. ♣



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