

U.S. Amateur - A Tale of Two Courses

By David Brandenburg, Editor, The Grass Roots

The 11th USGA U.S. Amateur Championship offered golfers and spectators a chance to see Blue Mound Golf and Country Club and Erin Hills Golf Club. The two layouts are very different in age, structure and architectural layout but both courses were able to challenge the worlds best amateur players. The field of 312 players played 18 holes of stroke play at each course before the field was cut to 64 players and match play began at Erin Hills Golf Club.

The Historic Blue Mound Golf and Country Club was formed in 1903 and moved to its current Wauwatosa location in 1926. The golf course was designed by the historic

Seth Raynor and has largely been left as originally designed with elevated greens protected by steep banks and deep flat bunkers.

The links has hosted many tournaments over its history including the 1933 PGA Championship won by Gene Sarazen ("The Squire") who beat Willie Goggin 5&4 to win \$1,000. The 1940 Women's Western Open brought "Babe" Didrikson to town as she narrowly beat Blue Mound member Lucille Mann in the finals.

The PGA Tour stopped in 1955 for the Miller High Life Open won by Dr. Cary Middlecoff over Snead, Boros, Bolt and Ford.

Blue Mound has hosted the Wisconsin State Amateur 10 times and in 2010 held the Western junior Championship.

Blue Mound's superintendent Tim Venes joined the courses staff 22 years ago after entering the golf industry while looking for a teaching job. Tim started at Kettle Moraine Golf Course and Willow Run Golf Course working for Dewey Laak and then moved to Blue Mound as 2nd assistant before working his way up.

Erin Hills may be new but it has quickly risen to be a premier public golf facility while making its own history. The course was designed by Dr. Michael Hurdzan, Dana Fry and Ron Whitten but many of the holes were laid out 10,000 years ago when the glaciers cut depressions and left hills across Wisconsin. It is hard to believe most of the property was just mowed down, while fairways were killed with roundup and overseeded.

Bob Lang purchased the 652 acre site in 1999 and immediately began working with the United States Golf Association to bring a championship his new course. The USGA was impressed enough to award the 2008 U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links before the course was seeded and then award the 2011 Amateur in February 2008.

In fall of 2009 Lang sold the course to Andrew Ziegler to finish his dream and modify the course to attract the biggest tournament of all, the USGA's U.S. Open.

Ziegler and his team modified 10 holes, added a second clubhouse, guest cottages, upgraded

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Erin Hills (Left) Hole 2 offers sloped natural looking bunkers while Blue Mound (Right) offers flat groomed bunkers with grass faces.



Erin Hills (Left) new clubhouses, cottages and caddieshack from the first hole. Blue Mounds (Right) 9th hole leads to the Lannon Stone Clubhouse built in 1926.



Erin Hills (Left) 1st hole shows the transition from fescue fairway, fescue first cut and fescue primary rough while on the Right Blue Mound offers bentgrass fairways and Bluegrass Rough.

irrigation and drainage systems and built a new maintenance facility.

The changes on the course were overseen by Golf Course Superintendent Zach Reineking and his assistants Brian Moesch and John Jacques.

Reineking came to Erin Hills in 2005 after Graduating with a Bachelors in Soil Science from University of Wisconsin Madison and was promoted to Superintendent in Spring of 2008. Zach grew up in Sheboygan Falls and joined the golf industry as a 13 year old caddie at Pine Hills in Sheboygan.

He originally studied landscape architecture but realized he liked the build side of the industry more than the design side. As a student he had a internship at Blackwolf Run and had opportunities to leave the state for his second year but found the opportunity to help with the 2004 PGA Championship at Whistling Straits a great chance to learn about tournament golf.

To prepare for the Amateur Reineking and his staff killed off 150 acres of hodge podge pasture grasses that made a very inconsistent rough and seeded it to fescue. Zach figures the fine tuning the rough areas will be a 3 to 5 year process but often depends on the weather. A wet season after seeding caused the fescue to be thick and hard to play from so this spring the staff burned the “native” rough and used herbicides to kill off weeds and undesirable grasses.

Many of us have realized that “native” or “natural areas”

are anything but low maintenance as we strive to keep out thistle and milkweed while providing a playable surface. The efforts at Erin Hills paid off for the Amateur it as most of the fescue roughs looked thick from a distance but were thin up close allowing players to find and play their ball.

Reineking explained to me the Amateur was a great test for the turf as he was able to push the A1/A4 greens to the limit and later in the week had no problems maintain-



ing speeds of 13 plus. The weather did cause some delays forcing a 7:15 and 7:30 unanticipated shotgun. The staff handled the changes and the balls left on the course overnight in stride.

The fairways present a different kind of challenge but walking the course during the event I was amazed at how dry they looked and how fast they rolled. The fescue really does not need much water and Zach is able to keep

them dry when it is not raining.

Despite limiting water the fairways do have some poa annua in them thanks to allowing riding carts the first couple years of operation. The carts forced the staff to use more fertilizer and water than normal to encourage re-growth in wear areas.

Cutless and Velocity will be used to help reduce the poa annua populations despite Wisconsin’s wet periods and summer humidity.

Looking forward to 2017 and the U.S. Open Zach is looking forward to working with the USGA and plans to make a few recommended changes to the course for the Open soon so the last two seasons the staff can prepare the playing surface while making accommodations for bleachers and T. V. equipment.

One challenge for the Open in 2017 may be the June date. The staff will start experimenting with the native areas to encourage early seeding of the fescue’s and hope for dry conditions. This year the crew was supplemented with 15 volunteers and for the Open Zach plans to use 50 or more to prepare the course for the most prestigious golf event in the world.

2017 will be here soon and the eyes of the golfing world will be on Wisconsin, Erin Hills, Reineking and his staff.

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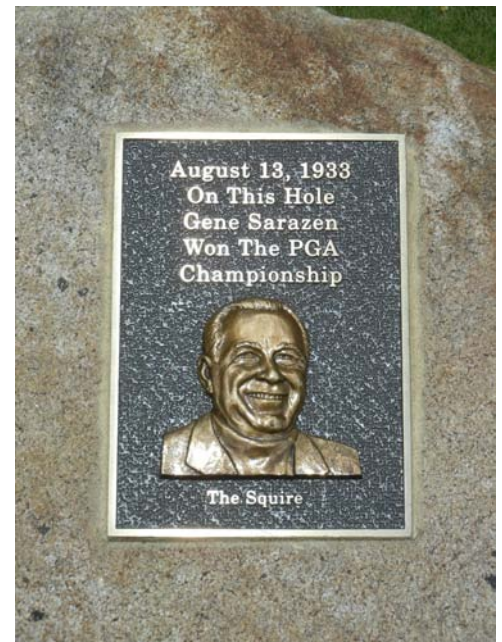
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Member 9 With Zach Reineking

1. **First Vehicle?** *Pontiac Grand AM GT*
2. **Favorite Piece of Golf Course Equipment?** *Verticutter*
3. **18 Hole Handicap?** *Was about 8 but it raised to 25 working in the industry.*
4. **Current Vehicle?** *GMC Sierra.*
5. **Favorite TV Show?** *Modern Family*
6. **Favorite Pro Sports Team?** *Brewers.*
7. **Favorite Main Course Meal?** *Lasagna*
8. **Pets?** *Labradoodle, Buster (As a warning no one gave me, Buster will greet you loudly at the maintenance facility door.)*
9. **Favorite Thing About Working In Golf Industry?** *How dynamic the job is. We are accountants, agronomists, pathologists and Human Resource Directors all wrapped into one.*



Blue Mound Golf & Country Club celebrates its history with a statue of Seth Raynor who designed the course in the 1920's and a plaque on the 5th hole where "The Squire" Gene Sarazen won the 1933 PGA Championship.



WISCONSIN'S FUTURE MAJOR GOLF TOURNAMENTS

2012 U.S. Women's Open Championship - Blackwolf Run, Kohler

2015 PGA Championship - Whistling Straits, Sheboygan

2017 U.S. Open Championship - Erin Hills, Erin

2020 Ryder Cup - Whistling Straits, Sheboygan

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Host Superintendents - Zach Reineking (left) from Erin Hills and Tim Venes from Blue Mound



(Left) Without carts Erin Hills offers narrow packed walking paths to prevent hillside erosion. (Right) Blue Mounds Par 3 - 7th Hole offers 167 yards to a green surrounded by deep bunkers.



Erin Hills (Left) Par 4 - 11th Hole plays 458 yards with challenging tee shot over natural fescue. Blue Mounds (Right) Par 5 - 18th Hole plays 558 yards with cross bunkers in the fairway landing area.

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Below - The “fast and firm” fescue fairway on Hole 10 at Erin Hills followed by a close-up of the same.

Right - The Par 4, 432 yard 12th hole at Erin Hills from the tee (top), landing area (middle) and behind the green (bottom) shows the tremendous topography changes the glaciers left behind.

