

THRU THE GREEN



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The Golf Course Superintendents Association of Northern California

— Committed to Responsible Turfgrass Management —

“Crenshaw a Fitting Winner of Old Tom Morris Award”

By: Bob Costa

GCSAA Director Tommy D. Witt, CGCS said it best. “The selection of Ben Crenshaw, this year’s recipient of the Old Tom Morris award has raised the standards for future winners.” Witt’s comments were made at the conclusion of a press conference held prior to the Gala 97 Celebration at the recently concluded GCSAA Conference in Las Vegas.

In the soft spoken manner which has earned him the name Gentle Ben, Crenshaw spoke with passion and sincerity about the game in which he has influenced as a player, Historian, designer and agronomist.

His accomplishments as a professional golfer are well documented, with his 1995 victory at Augusta perhaps serving as the exclamation point of his storied career. In spite of his legendary success on the links, stories of birdie putts were not what those in attendance came to hear. Rather the questions he fielded for over an hour were centered on golf course design and issues affecting the game.

Crenshaw’s fascination with golf course architecture came to life in 1986 when he joined forces with architect Bill Coore, who he praises. “Bill has a strong agronomic background and as a result is sensitive to the needs of the golf course superintendent.” When asked what skills he brings to the design team Crenshaw replied, “playability and a style which is rooted in timeless architecture, which is the best guide.” Asked for his thoughts on the increasing trend of touring pro’s participating in golf course design Crenshaw stated, “It’s driven by economics. In many cases the notoriety they receive is an injustice to architects who have worked so hard.”

The Coore/Crenshaw partnership has already made an impact in golf course design. One of their projects, Sand Hills Golf Club, was voted as the best new private course for 1995 by Golf Digest. In spite of their success, Crenshaw says two



Ben Crenshaw Old Tom Morris Recipient

projects is all they will consider per year. “It’s important to fall in love with the ground,” was the way he put it. “We like to spend a considerable amount of time on a project. Two projects a year allows us to do that.”

As a professional golfer, with a career spanning over 23 years, Crenshaw has experienced first hand the dramatic changes in equipment, most notably the advent of the big driver. What impact has this had on a new design and the playability of older courses Crenshaw was asked? He drew laughter from the crowd when he commented, “Clubs now days resemble those plastic sets for kids.” His thoughts quickly turned serious when he said, “We are at a critical redline for equipment.” In spite of the threat some of the new equipment poses, Crenshaw said he believes the character of the ground keeps the game in check. “The use of water can make it more of a shot makers game.” When asked about alternative spikes Crenshaw was little more evasive. “A well kept green is less prone to spiking,” he said. “Turf variety and moisture

seem to be a big factor.” His personal experience with alternative spikes seemed to receive mixed reviews. His only comment being, “I slipped once during a shot.” That may have been his polite way of saying, I’m

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