

## **An interview with a golf course**

By Greg Martin

This past spring I had the opportunity to sit down for a short interview with a golf course for a brief conversation.

### ***What's your favorite color?***

All shades of green with a hint of tan.....

### ***Favorite Movie?***

This Old Sod...it's a movie about an older golf course that has withstood time, renovations and all the elements....but remains a fan of the game and its traditions. It's sappy but good.

### ***Favorite Book?***

The Confidential Guide to Golf Courses

That guy, Doak....what a pistol. He's full of himself, but he really set the design industry on fire.

### ***Ok, now for some tougher questions. Where did you come from?***

I was a twinkle in the eye of my owner....He loves golf and when he saw my mother, it was love. He loved her soft rolling hills, the curves, the swales, the trees....well, you know the rest.

### ***Your owner has an ego, doesn't he?***

Most certainly. He wants so much for me, but I'm better for it because he didn't spoil me. He had big ideas for me but luckily the architect was prudent, and my owner was smart enough to listen. The architect helped to keep his ideas in check. My owner was ready to spend money, but it was decided that I would be better off keeping it simple.

### ***Your Owner is a good golfer.***

He sure is. He carries a very low handicap. He wanted me to be big and strong, and hard. He kept talking about length..."make it long, make it hard". The architect fought him on that one. My property wasn't big enough to handle the length; especially since the ball is flying farther. Again, it was better that the architect fought him about that very idea, because I think I'm tough enough. Not only that, but I get a lot of golfers here that may not otherwise play me if I were harder. Everyone enjoys a challenge.....but the game is hard enough.

### ***But you are considered a great golf course.***

Yes, I am. But I am fun to play. Between the architect, owner and contractor, they made a lot of changes for the better during my construction. They call it "value engineering" ...I was lucky like that. They all wanted the best for me, so when changes were discussed, everyone had the same goal in mind.

***You are not a high profile golf course, so what makes you so great?***

I think my greatness is in my greens and green surrounds. You'll see that everyday golfers, the older guys and younger guys can access the greens without fear, but its tough to get close to the pins. When I have tournaments, they can tuck the pins behind hazards and watch the better golfers scratch their heads. Not just the challenge, but my natural beauty, the ease of walking and my sense of humor.

***You have a sense of humor?***

This is golf, I'm a golf course.... you'd better have a good sense of humor!

***So your greatness is because you can cater to any golfer?***

I guess so. Who's to say what is great. All I know is that just about everyone who plays here enjoys it. The architect talked about placing a premium on the approach shot. I'm not that long, so the long hitters can still bomb it....but everyone has to hit the proper approach....and from the right position in the fairway.

I'm also attractive, don't you think. Maybe not beautiful...but certainly pleasing to the eye. And I don't reveal everything right away. I am not that kind of a golf course.

***Tell me about the architect.***

He's good. Not one of the bigger names. He really worked me over. He kept working the routing plan until he was satisfied with the right "site strategy". He never seemed satisfied. He and the contractor worked hard at trying to make the golf course the best it could be. Then all of a sudden, I came together.

***Why didn't the Owner go with one of the big name architects?***

Who knows.

***Does the architect have an ego?***

Are you kidding? Of course. But it didn't get in the way of making good decisions about my well being. He made sure I had good drainage, thank goodness. He often talked about shot values and the essence of the site and a bunch of other stuff. It all sounded corny at first, but I feel better because of it...he knew what I should look and act like. He was always taking clues from my topography, my vegetation and my surroundings. He also kept asking my owner who would be playing.

***What's his favorite hole?***

He takes a lot of pictures. It's kind of weird, but I guess he appreciates me. He likes my par 4's, the short ones. He says they're fun.

***What else.***

My superintendent is great. He nurtured me during grow-in. That's a tough time for a golf course. I was particularly troublesome during my youth. I have sand based greens and my soils are sandy. That made me even more temperamental. That makes it tough to keep enough water and food on my new turf. That was hard. But he kept an eye on the construction and I am grateful for his attention. It's entirely different now that I am older. I don't need as much nurturing, but I do get sick now and then, mostly when it gets hot.

***What makes him so good?***

He keeps me in great shape. Most superintendents do, but he keeps me really fit. The Owner sometimes asks to get me green and lush, or whatever. But the superintendent likes me lean...he calls it "hard and fast". He doesn't overfeed or over-water me and I feel better because of it, and I don't get sick as much as some of my friends.

***Do you have a favorite time of year?***

You would expect me to say winter when I get to sleep. But actually, it's September. That's when I look and feel the best. The nights are cool and the days are warm. Assuming I get through the summer, I look and act great in September.

***How do you feel now?***

Great. But I know that I'll need some work soon. Probably some bunker renovations. It happens to all of us. Some of my older neighbors have had two or three major surgeries already. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. All you can hope for is a good architect, contractor and owner.

***Anything soon?***

There's always something going on around here. The superintendent stays busy making sure everything works. This year I'll have trees removed that have been causing me some slight discomfort.

***Do you admire any other golf courses?***

Sure do. Shinnecock Hills & Cypress Point are a couple. They have a natural elegance to them. They don't pretend to be anything but what they are. There are dozens of others, but those two really offer the standard.

***What do you want to be remembered for?***

I don't want to pretend to be anything than what I am. I like what I am and want to react to my environment as naturally and gently as possible. The game will be better off for it.

## Part II

### ***What problems do you see for golf?***

The biggest is that golfers are choosing not to play golf. That's worse than stagnation.

### ***Why are golfers choosing not to play?***

Three reasons...and its not complicated....Golf is too hard. Golf takes too much time and Golf costs too much.

### ***What happened to the Golf Boom? The Tiger Factor?***

The golf industry missed out on the opportunity. There were too many high profile, high end courses built during that boom. Golf needed affordable, playable and enjoyable golf courses.....and Golf still needs it.

### ***What can be done?***

First, end the obsession with length. Distance and technology are creating lots of problems with golf, golf courses and the cost of the game. I believe that a good golf course shouldn't have to rely on length. In fact, look around. The busy golf courses are the ones that are not that long, and could be considered less than 'championship'.

### ***Isn't distance necessary to determine better golfers?***

Yes, but it shouldn't be THE determining factor. In fact, golf is too dependent upon par. If there was more of a focus on match play, the way golf was originally designed, more golf courses and golf holes would stand up to the scrutiny.

### ***What do you mean, "too dependant on par"?***

Robert Trent Jones Sr. who is the father of modern design philosophies, said "tough par, easy bogey" and considered himself a "protector of par". Well this was a fashionable statement, but its ramifications have been significant. The industry is too infatuated with maintaining par as a benchmark. Golf was a sport played against an opponent....it has become a sport to be played against the golf course, with opponents. It is a small, but significant difference.

### ***How would that change golf?***

If we played more match play, or match play type events, then par is less important. Golf holes can be designed to encourage thinking rather than to defend par. Less effort would be spent on the technology of the game, and more time would be spent talking about shot-making, feel, strategy and thought.

### ***But par is part of the game. How do we remove a par from a game built on par?***

Golf wasn't built on par... The industry of golf today was built on par. Par was offered later as a baseline for play, not for scores. Match play is the soul of the game. Match Play provides such intrigue for the game, it is a shame more tournaments aren't played with those conditions.

***That's a dramatic change.***

Yes it is. But removing par eliminates much of the frustration of the game. Removing par allows average golfers to play at a pace that is reasonable.

***Will Match Play solve the problems in golf?***

No. But it would go a long way. There are numerous problems in the game. The biggest problem is that golfers are choosing not to play. I hope that I am a golf course that allows for any ability at any time.

***What else?***

Eliminate the need to standardize the game. Golf is a game built on a simple theme. Numbers are ruling and ruining the game. The effort is to standardize and simplify it, but its ruining the game

***Is there hope?***

Sure. Golf is a great game, but it needs to remember its soul, its simplicity, and remember that it can solve

***This is subject you've been thinking about...***

Yes it is. I'm a good golf course with a yardage that doesn't satisfy many better golfers. But I can hold my own.