



Course Architect and USGA Committee Member Espouses Designs "For the Good of the Game"

Steve Smyers works to combine the classical with the contemporary to make golf a fulfilling experience for all skill levels.

INSPIRED BY THE TRADITIONS of golf yet motivated by its contemporary requirements, Steve Smyers has become both one of the game's leading architects and a member of the USGA's Executive Committee. Since founding Golf Course Architects in Lakeland, Florida, Smyers has utilized the time-tested principles of such early 20th Century masters as C.B. Macdonald, Alister MacKenzie, Donald Ross, and A.W. Tillinghast to design 30 courses across the United States and 10 worldwide. Since joining the USGA governing boards in 1999, Smyers has sat on and/or chaired various committees, all intended to provide the best possible experience for skilled and recreational golfers alike.

THE MERRY MEX, MR. X, AND THE HAWK

Smyers' commitment to the game began as an adolescent in Houston, where he witnessed several defining moments. He said, "Before Lee Trevino joined the Tour in 1967, I watched him at an exhibition. Trevino shot lights out and hit these low, screaming hooks off the tee that caught the far right side of the parched fairway and rolled another 75 yards to the far left side. Another time I caddied for Miller Barber in the 1969 U.S. Open at Champions Golf Club. He had a three-shot lead after Saturday, but Orville Moody won the tournament. I also watched Ben Hogan frequently, and I saw his final competitive swing in 1971."

Somewhere in-between Trevino's "learning he could talk to a fade because a hook wouldn't listen" and Hogan's "hanging up his spikes," Smyers showed enough talent to earn a golf scholarship to the University of Florida. With teammates that included Andy Bean, Gary Koch, and Andy North, the Gators won



Steve Smyers

the 1973 NCAA's. Earning a degree in business and a minor in agronomy, he joined an architectural firm out of college and served a seven-year apprenticeship. Even today, Smyers still sports a +1 handicap and participates in amateur events.

ISSUES OF COURSE DESIGN

Once on his own in 1983, Smyers proved how his appreciation for the history of course design blended in nicely with the modern issues of property, ecology, technology, and budgets. Smyers said, "I have to read the site carefully to develop that setting appropriately with its accompanying water hazards and prevailing winds. I want the greens and the tees close enough to encourage walking and a four-hour pace of play. Holes must vary in length and vary with ups and downs and lefts and rights so that every club in the bag must be used. I want to offer a pleasing balance of risk and reward, and I want the emphasis to be upon strategy not penalty. I am also facing the trend of increased distance and must design courses that won't be obsolete in a few years. Ultimately, I want to challenge and accommodate all golfers, to get them to hit shots that will excite and exhilarate."

"The use of water is another critical issue and continuing trend. Courses must use less water by constructing resourceful irrigations systems and by including more animal habitats and native areas. I cannot overemphasize the architect's responsibility to create an environmentally sound design that will not demand huge maintenance costs over the years. Many courses now have water budgets that exceed \$300,000 per year. You can imagine what that can do to the club's bottom line."



(Above) Bella Collina, a Bobby Ginn community, in Monteverde, Florida. (Below) Scientists at the USGA's Research and Test Center analyze balls and equipment for conformity and study the industry's latest trends.

MODERN CLASSICS AND TRADITIONAL NICK FALDO

Two of his courses, Old Memorial in Florida and Wolf Run in Indiana, have been declared Modern Classics by *Golfweek*. Other courses of note include Cypress Lakes in Australia, Marion Golf Club in Illinois, and Lochenheath in Michigan. Smyers has also redesigned Isleworth, Tiger Woods' home course in Florida, and Olympia Fields' South Course in Illinois.

Smyers has collaborated with Nick Faldo on courses in England, Iceland, Indiana, and, most recently, at Bella Collina in Monteverde, Florida, an exclusive Bobby Ginn property. Smyers explained why his relationship with Faldo has been successful. "We have been friends since 1980, and he is obviously a great student of the game. His expertise in understanding the shot-making tactics presents the options necessary to play the hole."

USGA VISION AND DESIGN

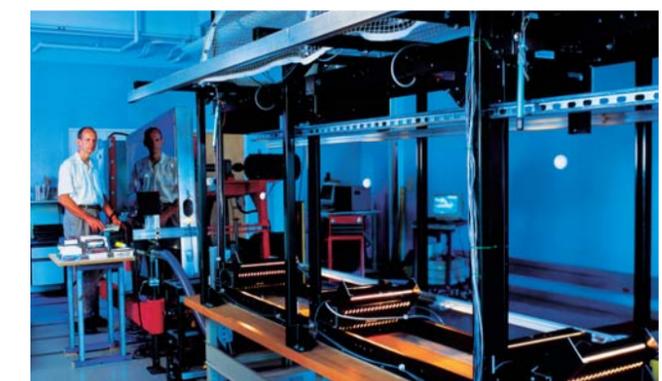
Steve Smyers has taken his wealth of knowledge to his USGA committees: Championship, Equipment Standards, Green Section, International Team Selection, and Turf Grass and Environmental Research. He is currently the U.S. Captain of the Copas de la Americas, a competition between North and South America in June, 2009, in Argentina. He said, "My focus in the USGA has been two-fold: first, to provide superior venues so that each championship will thoroughly test the talents of its participants; second, to protect the integrity of the game so that future generations will be playing the same game that we are playing today."

"A common misconception," he stated, "is the USGA's lack of control in ball technology. Not true. In 1976, the USGA, reacting to the manufacturing industry's inven-

tion of the two-piece solid ball design [Top-Flite and Pinnacle Gold], implemented a distance standard of 297 yards, based upon the 109 mph mechanical swing of 'Iron Byron.'"

In 2001, because of the introduction of the solid core, non-wound Pro V1x, the USGA took into consideration the improvement in club technology, athleticism, and swing biomechanics and upped 'Iron Byron' to 120 mph and an overall distance of 320 yards. The ball must also match specified weight, size, and launch (initial velocity, spin rate, and launch angle) conditions.

Smyers is confident that the USGA will continue to monitor the manufacturers' innovations and will anticipate future inventions that could impact the game. He said, "The Research and Test Center is a state-of-the-art facility run by Senior Technical Director Dick Ruge. With six full-time scientists, the Center continuously analyzes balls and equipment for conformity and studies



the industry's latest trends to see where that technology might be taking the game."

Overall, from his profession and his Executive Board position, Steve Smyers is optimistic about the game. He said, "Golf has never been easier to play because of the technology and the instruction, course conditions have never been better because of turf management proficiency, junior and The First Tee programs have never been so healthy, and the game has never been more affordable to the public. What a great time to enjoy the trip around the landscape!" ■

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