

# U.S. Open Championship 2018

Monday, June 11, 2018

## Architectural Forum

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Hi, everyone. My name is Mike Trostel, and I'll be moderating the 2018 Golf Architecture Forum. Thank you for everything you do for USGA. Pleased to be joined by Nick Price, first three-time Major winner, World Golf Hall of Fame member, and most recently a member of the USGA's Executive Committee.

Next to Nick is Mike Davis, the CEO of the USGA.

Next up is Wayne Morrison, golf course architecture historian and author.

And Charles Stevenson, greens chair here at Shinnecock Hills. Been in that position for just over 20 years.

We're here today to talk about this wonderful golf course and this golf club, Shinnecock Hills being one of the five founding clubs of the USGA back in 1894, this year hosting its fifth U.S. Open.

Of course, 1896, James Foulis; 1986, Raymond Floyd; 1995, who can forget Corey Pavin's great 4 wood into the 72nd hole; 2004, with Retief Goosen winning; and now this year and coming up again in 2026. Very excited to be here for the fifth and already looking forward to the sixth U.S. Open at Shinnecock.

It's the only club to host a U.S. Open in three different centuries, a very cool milestone for the club.

I was working on a piece for the U.S. Open program this week on the 1986 U.S. Open, talking to some of the players who participated in it.

And every single one of them I talked to, they said this was one of their favorite courses in the world, bar none. It really is a testament to the course and how good it is that such a wide variety of players, whether those playing in the '80s, those playing today all say the same thing, how much they love this course.

Mike, I want to start with you and really hear from everybody on the panel about this. What makes Shinnecock unique, and what makes it such a comprehensive test?

MIKE DAVIS: Mike, I think you set this conversation up beautifully in terms of when you think about

Shinnecock Hills -- and I know this is an architectural forum, but beyond this, this is a club that's had a profound effect on the game in our country here. It was one of the five founding clubs of the USGA. It hosted the second U.S. Open, the second U.S. Amateur, the 1900 Women's Amateur.

If you think about it, here in the United States, we have more golf courses than any country in the world, and we have more great golf courses than any country in the world, and this golf course deserves very high praise.

It's been a club since 1891, and I guess it was in 1929 that William Flynn, truly one of the greatest architects of all time, came in and designed it. The course was open in 1931.

To me, great golf courses, at least most great golf courses, start with a good choice of property, and this is a wonderful rolling piece of property that's well draining, it's sand-based. And if you look out over this property, it just lays on the land beautifully. There's just nothing artificial about Shinnecock Hills.

From a competitive standpoint, wind and firmness mean so much for the elite game, and you've got both of those things at Shinnecock Hills. And I think that if you look at an aerial of Shinnecock, it's routed in such a way that rarely do any holes go in the same direction.

So if you get wind, you're playing in different directions, and it's not as if the wind, while a southwest wind tends to be the prevailing wind here, it comes from different directions.

So I think when we think about Shinnecock Hills, it not only is an incredibly important part of what we do at the USGA in terms of the U.S. Open, but it's a great part of American history, and it just sets up beautifully for the world's best players.

In some ways, what we try to do is just get out of the way of ourselves and just let this course speak for itself because it will test them beautifully.

THE MODERATOR: And Wayne and Charles, Mike mentioned William Flynn, who designed this course in 1931. What can you tell us about William Flynn, and

what are some of the design characteristics that he put in place here at Shinnecock that are still extremely relevant today?

WAYNE MORRISON: Flynn really, I think it's important to understand where this course sits both geographically and in the timeline of American golf architecture because building the golf course both right next to National, where there was a change in golf course philosophy that moved away from the Victorian era of golf architecture represented by the Willie Davis and Willie Dunn iterations, then McDonald, then Flynn.

But I think knowing how in 1931 -- 1929 to 1931, it's really the golden era of golf design because the Depression hit, and then World War II hit. So there wasn't very much advances in golf architecture. In some cases, it led to the dark ages of golf architecture in some ways.

I think if you look at Shinnecock, in a lot of ways, it's the high water mark of golf architecture of that era. A sense of naturalism that you see here. Things don't look manmade. There is some manmade out there, but it's made to look natural. That's why Flynn sort of jokingly dubbed himself the nature faker, because he would use nature as much as possible but then mimic nature as needed.

But there's certain tendencies that we saw Flynn evolve as you study drawings, as you study photographs, and it's all on best display here at Shinnecock, I think.

The routing you mentioned, Mike. There's a lot of triangulation so even though the wind may come from different directions at different -- there's a prevailing wind, but the wind comes from different directions. It changes as you play the round of golf.

National, next door, is an older version, an out-and-back kind of look, and the wind is more predictable, and you sort of -- I can't say from a golfer's perspective of your caliber, Nick. But certainly, when the wind changes like that, you always have to consider things in a little bit different way than getting set into a routine.

But the short grass areas around the greens that were restored over the last ten or so years created a lot of options that you didn't have when there was just rough near the greens. So Flynn was very -- I guess a pathfinder in some regards in how he would use modern, what he called scientific principles of golf design; offset fairways, offset greens. There's alternate fairways. There's so much out there that people should really try to consider.

And looking at an aerial or looking at a routing map of

the golf course is a really good way of trying to determine what the architectural intent was, and thankfully it's back where it was.

And if I might just say one more thing, the bunkers are in the same place they were when Flynn designed the course. There was some lengthening, but there's not wholesale changes that are needed to be made to Flynn's golf courses, which is why, with only 40-some golf courses, more than 100 USGA events have been held on his courses.

THE MODERATOR: You sent an e-mail to a few of us at the USGA, and Mike, you were on that too. It's remarkable, looking at the golf course in the 1930s and what it is today, and the bunkers were in the exact same spots with very few exceptions.

We're going to get into the restoration talk and what's been done at Shinnecock. But Nick, I want to ask you first. You played at 20 U.S. Opens, including two here at Shinnecock in 1995 and 2004. What were your impressions of Shinnecock and what do you remember about those experiences playing here?

NICK PRICE: I think you guys said it very well about the uniqueness and the perfect facility; from the sand base, having some relief to the property, where you have some roll to the ball. I've always been a firm believer that golf's two games, it's one on the ground and one in the air. And the more that you bring the ground into play, the tougher it gets, and this is a perfect example.

But one of the things that I learned over the years, the subtle idiosyncrasies and nuances of the wind here. You have holes that have a southwest or a south wind, you play across the wind, and it's very hard to read, whether it's slightly quartering into you or slightly going with you, and that can make a difference of one club, and that one club can put you in a lot of trouble on this golf course and get you on the wrong side. So that's the one thing that you really have to be on your toes on this golf course.

And, also, knowing where to hit it on these greens. Although those greens look quite big, the actual playing area is small. And in that, I mean that there is a lot of help and support from around the edges of the greens where it will kick the ball in, but you still have to hit the ball in the correct place determined by the pin position. So there's so many subtleties to it, and I think that's what makes the challenge.

You know, with the weather forecast the way it is this week, I think we're going to see three different wind directions that's really going to test the players' ability to adapt and also -- not only off the tee, but with the

approach shots into the green.

So a wonderful test of golf, and it's just wonderful. I've seen three different setups. And to be honest, this is the one that I've enjoyed. I've said to Mike -- we've walked the property of the golf course a few times now and played it two weeks ago, and this would be the setup that I think I would enjoy the most playing.

And it's much easier on the outside, trust me, than being inside the ropes, but it is. Mike's done a phenomenal job, and the superintendent and everyone here, of setting this course up.

MIKE DAVIS: Thanks.

THE MODERATOR: I think the course will look a little different than when you were last here, Nick, in 2004, and the world really last saw Shinnecock in 2004.

Charles, can you give us an overview to some of the changes that were made here at Shinnecock and really what the goals of that renovation or restoration were for the club?

CHARLES STEVENSON: Sure. The course was built back -- this modern course, Flynn's course was put together around 1930. So it's a long time from there.

And the changes that occurred in the first 50 or 60 years of its life span were changes in a negative direction, from lack of maintenance, lack of maintenance budget. And the focus at the time was simply to mow grass.

And when an irrigation system was put in in the late '50s, there wasn't enough money to put in a modern irrigation system that really could pump a lot of water, and we are now watering out of 400 or 500 gallon a minute deep wells. We just use one at a time, but you water directly out of the aquifer.

In those days, they pumped water in to a pair of 10,000 gallon water tanks and at night could then water from those. But it was an under powered system, so when they went to put the system on the greens, they couldn't water Flynn's greens without putting the sprinkler heads in those greens, and you can't putt over sprinkler heads reliably.

So they then shrank the greens in those days down to the circle that sprinkler heads that would water. And then those, for the next 30 years, became Shinnecock's signature postage stamp greens. That was so for the '86 Open.

And P.J. Boatwright, I think, in those days, well, we've got to do something. So between the greenside

bunkers and the green that had retreated away, they put a ring of rather deep rough, and that was a bad idea. That is long gone.

And now we've expanded the greens back. We've actually erased the changes of a sort of natural progression from a grassland, which we were, to a forest. So we removed trees, opened it up to the wind again, restored the green sizes, began to dry the course out so that it would be firm. There would be roll.

And so that the game that Nick referred to, the game where you're playing some of it on the ground, you can't just fly the ball to the hole and velcro it right there. You're going to have to contrive how to fly it and land it so it bounces and rolls up to the hole. It's a whole different subtlety for the game.

And the width of Flynn's fairways have been commented on, and actually they look wide, as the greens look large, but the place you want to hit the ball is not big.

So what Flynn has given you is choice. Many golf courses set up for a championship have extremely tight requirements, and you must execute the shot that the guys who set it up dictated. Out here, you can choose how to play the hole.

For instance, on the 8th hole, somewhat of a dogleg to the right. If you're dumb enough to play the inside of the dogleg, your second shot is very difficult to get it to stay anywhere near the hole. So it takes away birdie opportunity, except for a lucky long putt.

If you have the skill and the sort of wisdom to hit it to the outside of the dogleg, your second shot into the green, although longer, the green defenses are now wide open so you have a birdie opportunity.

So when you finish playing the course, some of the times, I think, in many golf courses, you just feel beat up. And, you know, if you play it again, you're going to feel punished again.

When you finish Shinnecock, you think, I got outsmarted. I didn't get beaten up. It fooled me. It fooled me into trying things I didn't have the skills for. It fooled me into picking the wrong line, both where to put it in the fairway and where to put it near or on the green.

So I think you get some enjoyment here that the better you are as a golfer, the more the course can perform to entertain you with the options you see.

THE MODERATOR: And, Mike, you were here in 2004

doing some U.S. Open course setup, back here again this year. What are some of the changes that have been made from '04 to '18, and how might that affect the strategy of some of the players in this 2018 Championship?

MIKE DAVIS: Mike, I even think back to 1995, and the restoration -- and by the way, folks, the person two people to my left is really -- Charles, you know, you've really led this initiative from the club standpoint and done it in a very quiet and humble way. But kudos to you and the club for doing this. It's just been terrific.

But I think back to 1995, and there was a change from '95 even into '04 that a lot of the trees and brush were removed. So it was a much more open property. It felt like more, when you looked at some of the aerials from 1930, when Flynn designed it. You know what that also did, forgetting about operations for an event like this, which just makes it so much better, more spectator friendly, neat grandstand locations, but it allows for more wind.

And certainly now fast forward to now -- and I'll talk a little bit about fairways -- but there's, simply put, more options.

Back in 1995 and '04, the fairways were much narrower. I think, Charles, you said it beautifully. They were just hallways that really took some of the options and skill and angles out of it.

I mean, Charles mentioned the 8th hole. It's such a neat hole. We built a new tee back there, simply put, to bring those -- to bring that bunkering into play to say if you want to hit it down the left side, which is the better angle, much better angle hitting into that green, you've got to hit a better tee shot. There's a longer carry. So we've done those kinds of things.

But to me, there's been five basic things happen since then. One is the clearing of brush and trees, which, again, has helped wind and aesthetics.

The second thing is the closely mown areas around the putting greens, that really was a restoration. If you look out here this week, it will be very evident. And so many of these greens, if you miss it, these closely mowns are just going to take you away from the greens.

There was certainly some of that, a little bit of that in '95, more of it in '04. But what we tended to see in '04, maybe it was the 5th green that sits way up over the hill, you went over the side, it was closely mown, and the ball would roll out and go into the rough.

Now when it goes up the hill, it stays in closely mown.

So from a player's standpoint, it gives them really three options. They can try to pitch the ball, they can hit a bump and run, or they can putt it.

You're going to see this week that doesn't necessarily mean that it's easier. In some cases, you watch these players, and they can't figure out whether they want to hit a putt or whether they want to pitch it. And just that little bit of doubt, I'm convinced, just is enough to maybe put some self doubt, and maybe they just don't execute as well.

So closely mowns have been a big thing. We added ten new teeing grounds. And, you know, folks, we did not do that just to add distance for distance sake. It was roughly 450 yards.

We did it because if you look at those holes where we added distance, it really was because, looking back, that's the way Flynn wanted the hole to play.

Look at the 2nd hole. That's the long par 3 here, traditionally plays downwind, and there's an area short of the green to, once you hit it over the carry bunker, to bounce it in. That's an example.

We added a new teeing ground on 3, which kind of brings more of that upper tier and the hillside into play. 4 brought the fairway bunkers on the right into play. 5, we saw the last go-round in 2004 where we were seeing 9 irons and 8 irons because it predominantly plays straight downwind. So that par 5 really wasn't playing like a par 5. I could continue on, but teeing grounds were added.

To me, I think the biggest thing of all were really the green expansions. That's probably going to get the least amount of discussion, but to go back from those ovals that, Charles, you referred to, to what they are now, it's just so much more strategic.

And it's not just because we can get hole locations where we couldn't. Folks, this week we have hole locations -- hole locations -- where there was rough before. It's not just it's a little closer to the edge. There are actually hole locations where 14 years ago there was rough.

I know we were walking up, for instance, on the 12th green today, and that green must have been, I don't know, 60 percent the size that it is right now, and those left hole locations will get that. That literally was in rough certainly in 1995 and maybe in '04. I'm trying to remember.

So the changes have been great. It's made Shinnecock truer to one of the great architects of all time, but it's also made Shinnecock more enjoyable for

the members and certainly more strategic for this week for the world's best golfers.

THE MODERATOR: Nick, I'll follow that up. Charles and Mike, how has it been received with the membership? We've heard what has been done, both on a day-to-day basis for the members to play in and for what the players will face this year, but how has it been received by the members and by the players from what you've heard?

CHARLES STEVENSON: I think the members are thrilled with what's happened. I mean, obviously, they realize they are now playing a very difficult golf course, but I think they're very proud to be playing.

Golf is now being played by the professionals who will compete at a higher level than has ever been played; somewhat due to the equipment, somewhat due to the more athletic, gym-oriented training of the athletes, but the game is truly an unbelievable game.

And now, for this tournament to be played on the Flynn architecture, with its large greens and closely mown so the ball runs off and you've got different options on hitting shots, I mean, the amount of enjoyment because of the variety of problems the golfers will be invited to solve I think is going to be truly thrilling, and the members know that.

We know it's tough for us at the member level, but we're thrilled to have it here.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, for those players that have come in here before U.S. Open week, what kind of feedback have you gotten from them?

MIKE DAVIS: I think very positive. Although I'm hesitant to say -- sometimes we get positive at times, other times it opens, and then when they have to get the pencil in their hand and write down a score, sometimes things change.

But listen, one thing's true. Great players, just like recreational players, they love great golf courses, and this is a great golf course. And no disrespect, but they don't get to play golf courses this good on a week-to-week basis. This is really special for them, and it's special for us. So feedback has been tremendous.

THE MODERATOR: Nick, I think Mike mentioned a really important point. This isn't like any other week. This is a Major Championship. What kind of mindset did you have going into the U.S. Open compared to a regular tournament on the schedule each week?

NICK PRICE: Well, it definitely changes. And certainly toward the end of my career, I figured out how to play

on a U.S. Open a lot more comprehensively than I did in the early part of my career. It's hard to come off a regular TOUR event or wherever you may be where you're shooting 12, 14 under par, and you come off the U.S. Open, and you're 3 over par after five holes. It's a big change in your mental approach.

After a while, you realize it is the Open Championship, the U.S. Open Championship, and it's going to be one of the toughest tests you'll play all year, if not the toughest test.

Patience is such a huge factor here. This golf course is going to test you from the time you stand on the tee. It's not going to be just a second shot golf course or just off a tee golf course. It is going to be a test of your off-the-tee game. It's going to be a test of controlling the distances. You hit your iron shots, and it's going to be a test of how well you can putt and your short game is.

So I think that's what we're all talking about is how comprehensive a test this golf course is going to be. That's why it's so popular amongst the players. I don't think it favors one particular style of player. It doesn't matter whether you hit the ball low or high or whether you hit it with a draw or a fade.

It's going to test every part of your game, and I think that's why, with a little bit of wind conditions that may vary during the week, we get a little firmness in the fairways and the greens, it's going to be a great test of golf, and a very worthy champion will come out, I'm sure.

THE MODERATOR: Do we have questions out there for this panel up here?

**Q. I was wondering what you think the score will be.**

NICK PRICE: I don't know. I would hate to even think. The conditions can vary so, so rapidly out there. I honestly, I wouldn't --

**Q. Red or green?**

NICK PRICE: You know, it's hard not for these guys to shoot in the green these days. There's a lot of short irons out there. It's all going to be up to the conditions, I think.

To be honest, if we get benign conditions and the fairway stays soft and the greens -- not soft, but on the softer side, it's going to allow the guys to be a little more aggressive. I think it's working in the right direction. Forecast looks good.

**Q. We've been affected on the east end by southern pine beetles, which is obviously the area that's**

**warming. Does that have any effect on the agronomy and the choice of grasses and the agricultural practices you're using?**

CHARLES STEVENSON: Well, since we've been removing the pine trees, the beetles have been helpful to us. As to the grasses, we're now seeding into the fairways hybrid bentgrasses of different varieties.

We've over-seeded the fairways a number of times the last five years with a number of varieties in order that the seeds actually -- the plants fight it out to see which ones prefer which locations because there are microclimates out there. Our fairways have rolls so one side will be sunnier than the other side, and so forth. Moisture patterns are different.

So the global warming effect means moisture management, both in the winter -- winters can be cold. If there isn't snow, it desiccates the grasses and harms them. So we're putting large covers on our green complexes now that we never used to do.

We use technology somewhat for water management in the playing season. We're now having a drone service come and fly our course several times a week, and it's taking measurements of the transpiration of moisture so that we know if the grass is wet or about right or is dry, and that allows the superintendent to run the course closer to the edge without killing the grass.

Back in '04, one of the problems we had here is the course had been set up to be well irrigated, and the poa annua greens was used to getting a lot of water. And the fairways in those days had been over-seeded with rye grass, and the rough in those days was the same rye grass that had been over-seeded everywhere. Just let grow long.

The problem with rye grass is it's not a fescue grass. It doesn't tolerate drought. When you dry it out, it doesn't just turn brown and go dormant until the rain comes. It just dies.

So by the time the tournament started in '04, where we had the problems of greens that got out of control -- too firm, too dry -- putting water on them wasn't to get the grass to start growing again. It was already dead. It was just to slow the ball down, and it was one of those things where the setup of the course didn't match the grass plants that it was being played on the way that we wanted to set it up between the USGA and Shinnecock.

The decision to dry it out at the end was, in terms of our agronomy, in retrospect, a mistake. We should have kept watering it if we had grasses that needed water. We've learned that lesson.

This time, we've reseeded. The rye grass is basically gone. Our course is now very friendly to much less water. And I think the USGA has deserved, actually, some recognition by ecologists because they have made a big effort to have everybody, every golf course use less water, and I think that the social pressure on that will only increase.

We need to learn how to use less chemicals and less water and have a healthier game, and I think we can still maintain at these very high standards that you'll see out on the course today.

**Q. First of all, thank you for bringing the U.S. Open back to the northeast. Keeps me from going too far. I just wanted to say, before I asked my question, this is the first opportunity that I've had to be in a forum like this.**

**So I just wanted to thank the USGA for bringing Nick Price, these wonderful gentlemen, and Mike, obviously, and these wonderful gentlemen who have all this knowledge to fans like us. There's not enough people in here to really take advantage of what's going on.**

**So I just want to thank you guys for thinking outside of the box and bringing this to us who love golf course architecture and some of the things off the beaten path.**

**So, Mike, a question for you. Obviously, you've come to be known for the drivable par 4. It looks like the 13th hole is the hole that you're probably looking at. I saw a lot of guys hit two balls today, one with a driving iron and one with a driver.**

**So two questions on the same thing. Is that the hole that you're looking at, and what will be the decision making point that you'll use to determine whether or not you bring up the tee boxes from one day to the next?**

MIKE DAVIS: It's a very interesting question. If I'm very candid, I'm not sure we know the answer right now. There's three short par 4s here at Shinnecock Hills, and what's interesting -- so it's the 1st hole, the 13th hole, and the 15th hole.

And what's interesting about them is they all played from elevated teeing ground, and they're all dogleg rights, but they don't all go in the same direction.

So you specifically asked about 13. You know, if you get the traditional prevailing southwest wind, you're really into -- in the face there. That, to me, again, if you got the normal kind of winds here, really is not drivable because it's just, I think, to carry over the fescue that's

just short of the green, it's about a 330-yard carry, albeit downhill, but into the wind is probably a little bit too much. But if you got a reverse wind or at least a crosswind, maybe.

If you notice how that hole was set up -- and I'll talk about it a little bit on all three of those par 4s, because we weren't setting them up necessarily to be drivable.

But I will say, when we went through and did the fairway contours on that, we took the rough on 13 a little bit closer to that bunker that's short.

And almost if you look there, that's maybe the thickest rough on the entire course. To almost say, listen if you're going to do that -- and as we were walking around this morning, Nick picked this out. Listen, you've got about 25 yards past that really thick seed head fescue where you've got some fairway and then a bunker and then you hit the green, and there's probably 35 yards of depth in the green and then there's another, let's say, 25 yards over the green. That's a lot of area to be able to fly the ball and stay in something they can handle instead of being in high fescue rough.

But who knows -- and being serious, I don't know whether we move it up or not. So much of how you set this course up, not just the teeing grounds, but where you put hole locations, really does depend on what the wind's doing.

It was interesting. Oh, maybe a year or so ago, a member, the guy who won the U.S. Open here in 1986, Raymond Floyd, called me and said, you know, Mike, you need some rough around that 1st green because, if you don't, downwind, some of these guys will just take driver and just rip it down there.

It was a very thoughtful comment Raymond made, and I think he's right. So on that 1st hole, you definitely have the opportunity -- particularly the way the green sets. I mean, it's open kind of from the teeing ground.

If you want to take driver and you're downwind and gamble a little bit, I suppose you could do it. I think it's fair to say Flynn never designed the hole to be that. I don't think Flynn ever saw equipment being where it is and all the optimization and athleticism.

And then the last one is 15. And a little bit the same thing. I suppose that tends to play a little bit of a helping wind, left/right, and maybe there's some players that take driver.

You're not going to see a player, unless he's very lucky, get on the green because it sits up in the air. I don't think they'd be trying to drive it to do that. They'd probably try to get in one of the bunkers down short,

particularly with a back hole location, when we utilize those. It's a very interesting question you're asking.

**Q. There's a lot of guys out there who think you're going to be playing around with 13, just so you know.**

MIKE DAVIS: Thank you.

**Q. Charles, could you talk about John Jennings and the role he's played?**

CHARLES STEVENSON: He came from Chicago Golf, and he was chosen by our club because we wanted to have the firm, fast, and drier conditions that I've talked about, and he already knew how to do that.

We had interviewed him back in the early 2000s when he had not yet been a head superintendent anywhere. He was an assistant in Connecticut, and he still was good enough to get into an interview among a handful, a small handful of finalists for that job.

In those days, we selected Mark Michaud, who had been at Pebble Beach. So we had had our eye on Jennings for ten years before we hired him, and he is absolutely a superb technician in terms of his science, his agronomy and so forth, and his character is extraordinary. He's a real leader.

There's a door in his maintenance facility that says to people going out to work on the course, if you go through this door and you're not fully committed to what you're doing today, take off your jacket and head out the other door.

So he's just a wonderfully motivated guy who has real skills, and I've encouraged him to become America's old Tom Morris, where he's the -- as he matures, and he's volunteered at the last 16 Opens, where he's gone out and worked. And because of that and his charisma, he has 200 superintendents here. Those are the guys who are out there raking bunkers and maintaining greens. They're not just unskilled workers. These are head superintendents from other courses.

So he's absolutely a gem. He's fantastic. I couldn't say enough about him.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, did you want to add something there?

MIKE DAVIS: No, just I couldn't agree more. Well said.

**Q. I have a question back to the grass. I played golf on the west coast, south coast, you name it. I've played in Hawaii and all that. Every golf course has a very different texture of grass. I've noticed that the fairways out here are cut very, very tight.**

**I've seen a lot of greens that tight as the fairways are.**

**So I'm just curious, what is your primary seed that you're using? Is it Kentucky grass, or is it a Marion bluegrass and you mow it down to as far as it will go? Or you have different blends?**

CHARLES STEVENSON: These are hybrid bentgrasses we're seeding into the greens and fairways now. You could get a hold of me or the superintendent somehow if you want a list of them. It's really more than one kind. We're really seeding all the ones we think might make sense.

As I said, there are many microclimates out on our fairways, and we want the plants to figure out which ones go best in which location. So we over-seed over redundantly.

MIKE DAVIS: Let me make a comment too. On the height of cut, the fairways aren't actually as low as you might think. It's purposeful. We're cutting it at .0400, which means it's four-tenths of an inch.

We've played U.S. Opens on fairways cut at .25, or a quarter inch before. I think for us, the last several years, we've really come to realize that, at the end of it, this game is about enjoyment. It's about a challenge.

And I think that over the years what has happened with height of cut, whether that's putting greens or fairways or closely mown, probably has gotten to the point where it's not necessarily healthy for the game of golf, and we're losing some enjoyment.

By that, when I started at the USGA, the fairways were, by and large, cut at a half inch or slightly higher. Then we got down to a point where they were being cut down at a quarter of an inch. I realize that's only a quarter inch, but the difference, if you look at a golf ball sitting on a fairway cut at a half inch -- and I don't care what the grass is. It could be rye grass, it could be Bermuda, it could be bentgrass -- an average golfer can get the ball on the club and can get under it.

When you do it at a quarter inch, you have to basically trap the golf ball, and you're basically providing a playing surface that the average golfer simply is not good enough to play.

You can take that same philosophy -- so the point is we've actually started to raise fairway heights at U.S. Opens. And why do we do that? Well, it's not only better for the average, in this case, members, but I think if TOUR players are honest too, they don't mind a little more cushion.

And by that, you can actually dry the fairways out more so you get a more enjoyable surface to hit off of. It's drier, you get more roll, and it's actually healthier. You lose less water. You lose less nutrients. So overall it's good.

And I would just take that same theme to putting greens. There's a bit of a bell curve that's happened is that you look at, over the years, how fast greens have gotten to where they once were, it's hurt pace of play. It's more costly to maintain greens this way. And in some cases, it's compromised the architectural integrity of greens. So I think for us, a message is a little bit higher height isn't the worst thing both on greens and in fairways.

I realize this is U.S. Open week, and we are cutting greens, and they're going to be firm and fast. It's a special occasion, and this is the world's best players. But I think, by and large, our message is slow down the greens some. Raise the fairway heights, and the game will be more enjoyable for everyone.

**Q. Gentlemen, I may be one of the few who was here in 1986. I wasn't here in 1886, but I was in 1986, and I remember the first morning, it was a day of British weather really. And the wry Frank Hannigan delivered a typical Hannigan quote by sitting up on the dais, as you all are now, and saying, "Welcome to the first staging of the British Open in America."**

**I'm just wondering maybe you think this -- am I taking a slightly naive view in thinking that this course more resembles what perhaps might generally be described as a British Open course than perhaps any other course on your rotor?**

MIKE DAVIS: John, I'll take that. I think that actually we'd agree with that observation. One of the things that you think about the UK, the British Open, if you will, it is always played on links courses, have always been played on links courses, and seemingly will always be.

But here in the U.S., we play on all kinds of different courses, some tree-lined inland courses. We have courses, when you think about Pebble Beach, you wouldn't necessarily call that a true links. It's not really on sandy soil. While it is up against the ocean, it doesn't necessarily meet the definition of that.

So for us, it is truly going to this country's best golf courses, and this one really does have a linky feel about it. It's sand based, by and large. You can bounce balls into the greens. Wind is very much a factor here. So I think you're exactly right.

And next year we'll be at Pebble Beach. And the year after that, we go to Winged Foot. Much different golf course with more elevated greens, much more movement in those tilling grass greens, flash bunkers, thick bluegrass rough.

So it's in some ways to each his own, and there's different courses for different horses. But I think we would agree with you on your assessment of Shinnecock Hills.

THE MODERATOR: Nick, I'd be interested in your take as well, having played in many British Opens and having won one, the comparison of Shinnecock to some of the courses you do play over in the UK.

NICK PRICE: I think the one thing that's noticeable is how quickly a course will dry out from the morning to the afternoon. So if you have a 7:00 tee time and you may actually take a pitch mark on the green or leave a pitch mark on the green.

Roll around 4:00, suddenly, the ball is releasing a lot more. It works both ways because you go in with a shorter club if they get a little more run on the club.

And that's what generally happens on a sandy subsoil, where if you have the right conditions, it will dry out really quickly. With a little bit of wind -- we get the wind here. There's not a lot of golf courses we play in June in America where you can have the wind that you have here. So that adds to it.

The exposure of the golf course, there's nothing -- there's not very many other places in America that are like Shinnecock, and I think that's what the players really enjoy.

Honestly, it's just a refreshing change from the ball just landing and maybe not releasing. You really have to be on your toes, as I say, from the 1st tee right away through to 18. So not too many let up holes here.

WAYNE MORRISON: Can I make a little comment? Just to say about the designer of the golf course, William Flynn, never went to the UK, never saw a links style golf course.

People that he knew that were members of his clubs in Philadelphia had been -- quite a number of them had been to UK courses, but it's kind of interesting to see the range of designs that Flynn came up with, having never traveled overseas.

MIKE DAVIS: It is.

**Q. Wayne, if I've got my history right, this is a course built on top of an old Charles Blair**

**MacDonald course.**

WAYNE MORRISON: True.

**Q. I think it would have taken a lot of architectural courage to do back in the late 1920s, one of the few I know of. Could you give us some background to that, why Flynn decided to rebuild, essentially eliminate, I think, most of the MacDonald holes and rebuild a new golf course?**

WAYNE MORRISON: I think it starts with a bit of design philosophy difference, pretty stark difference between Flynn and MacDonald.

Again, Flynn never went to the UK, didn't have the sort of affinity or predisposition to take some of the best ideas from the old world and bring them to the new world.

Flynn was an American, thought about American golf in a different direction, and he was probably more in tune with using the land as he found it and trying to create and just route based on the features he found rather than looking at a site, like MacDonald would, where here's I want to put a redan, here's where I want to put a road haul.

And those sort of ground features dictated the routing he would eventually come up with. Whereas Flynn had freedom of thought, so to speak.

And what might have gone through Flynn's mind as he redid a golf course that was one of the great, you know, most important and influential members of the USGA and in early architecture. I think he was so -- by the time he started Shinnecock, he was so confident in his own skills, he had so many really good golf courses, he spent a lot of time on site.

Didn't develop a lot of golf courses, and I think he's a quick learner. I think he saw the site, saw the new land that had to be acquired because there was a possible rerouting of a road, and I think he didn't have the same kind of considerations that maybe we look back on fondly of architects today. We revere architects today a lot more than was ever the case back then.

He redesigned Ross courses. He redesigned Tillinghast courses. In the case of Tillinghast, four years after Tillinghast designed the course. I just don't think -- I think he was brought in to do something, modernize the golf course, and create a championship course that was meeting the needs of the day.

And they changed quite a bit with balls and implements, with golfers, and I think he was -- I don't know what the club told him to do, but I think, if they asked him to design a modern golf course that will

stand the test of time for 100 years going forward, I think he answered the bell pretty well.

CHARLES STEVENSON: Can I give a little color on that?

WAYNE MORRISON: Please do. Correct me where needed.

CHARLES STEVENSON: What's interesting to me is that when Charles Blair MacDonald went and built National around the time of World War I, he did a very American thing. He created a landscape the way he imagined it could be. As Wayne said, he decided let's put a redan there. He moved a lot of dirt. He built in what I call a Disney style, where you just create the nature you want.

Flynn actually had more affinity, even though he never went to Europe, but he had an affinity with sort of Scottish seaside golf course architects, who simply prepared the existing landscape for golfing play. They didn't move a lot of dirt. They didn't build a Disney style thing.

It's not that one is good and the other's bad. They're just totally different styles. Augusta National is a great golf course. Well, that was a tree farm. They created that not -- you know, it was a tree farm. That's why every hole is named after a different tree species.

And Shadow Creek out in Las Vegas is the ultra on the Disney style golf course where you build waterfalls and everything.

You know, that's a move a lot of dirt end of the spectrum, and Shinnecock is one of the finest examples of don't move dirt, just install a golf course.

**Q. On this topic, the 7th hole is a remnant of the MacDonald Raynor course. I'm curious of what you all think of where the tee is today and if that is the location that they selected to attack that par 3 green from.**

WAYNE MORRISON: The green was rebuilt and raised by Flynn. So even though it's on the site of MacDonald's original redan, it's a different green, and it plays a lot differently. A typical Flynn with a redan would have an elevated green that didn't really allow a run-up shot.

Actually, Flynn's tee -- and Charles knows this really well -- was originally planned to be seven paces to the left of the MacDonald tee, and we teed up the ball there a number of times before. You'll see out there there's a small tee. Hopefully, it will get bigger at some point. But even from just seven paces to the left, that angle of attack is a much better angle, given the slope

of the green and the green speeds we see today.

But I guess with green speeds at 6 and 7 in the '30s and lower green speeds, I guess, when maintenance practices were deferred because of wars and things like that, it didn't make as much of a difference.

But we saw that at today's green speeds and the certain kinds of winds, the tee that they're using today, the MacDonald tee -- and there's only one other real feature of MacDonald's course that's left over, and that's the right tee on 3.

But it's just -- there is an ideal angle to approach that green with many different kinds of winds, and it's a few places to the left.

**Q. A couple of comments on some of the answers. Bob, I think you asked, did you not, you asked me a month or so ago why the MacDonald Raynor course only lasted ten years here, and was there something wrong with MacDonald as far as the membership was concerned.**

**Charles, I think it had more to do, didn't it, with practical changes around here, like Route 27 going in, eminent domain. And the fact is that this course, as it evolved in size, a lot of -- like 150 acres was owned by Lucien King, one of the presidents. So it just got sort of consolidated.**

**Isn't that the reason that they had to basically do a new course? I mean, the primary reason, because the ownership changed around here and you lost some of the area for courses, like on the other side.**

CHARLES STEVENSON: Well, the early courses were built to the south of the club house, which is why, when you come in now to our parking lot, you enter the club through its back door. You enter into the men's locker room. It's kind of strange until you realize, when they built the clubhouse, the courses were towards the south, towards the ocean.

And now the course is on the bay side, the north side of the clubhouse. I think it had to be the course we wanted. Flynn was hired to build a more modern golf course, and it was obviously put it on the north side because the highway was going to cut through on the south side.

**Q. Yes, and all that land out that way was bought also in the late '20s by Lucien King, where 14, 12 as well.**

**And I just had one other comment, Mike. You said in an earlier answer that you weren't too sure what Flynn felt about distance, something like that. Did you know -- Wayne, you can tell me if I'm right**

**about this -- in the late '20s, he wrote an article in the USGA bulletin. Everybody was always arguing about the balls going too far since the Haskell. He said, if the USGA doesn't do something about the distance the ball is going -- this was in 1928.**

WAYNE MORRISON: '27.

**Q. I'm going to have to build 8,000-yard courses. Right?**

WAYNE MORRISON: Absolutely. Except it was '27, not '28.

**Q. Sitting here in 2018, can you anticipate what Shinnecock is going to look like in 2026? Do you think it will be basically the same course we're seeing today, or are there already changes that you think may be necessary or desirable when we come back in eight years?**

MIKE DAVIS: I would say this. In terms of the 2026 U.S. Open, I suppose that this week will be a very good barometer to say that were there any things that the way the course played, that you'd say maybe we -- maybe there's some opportunities to just expand on some of this wonderful architecture.

I mean, as an example, somebody mentioned, maybe Wayne, there are some wonderful options out here. There's alternative fairways. And I think about, for instance, the 8th hole, where there's one back teeing ground there, but it kind of assumes that there's going to be wind in your face. If you have no wind in your face, it doesn't quite do the job that it needs to do architecturally. There's some, when you think about the 5th hole with that alternate fairway to the right, in other words, you can't carry it far enough to the left fairway, you play to the right.

This week, I suspect, unless we get a true opposite wind, no one is going to play to that right fairway because it's a 260-yard carry, but it's 260 downwind.

The 6th hole is another interesting one. The tee was put back there, and it's a 245-, 250-yard carry, but that one is into the wind. If you get a 2 1/2 club wind, those guys are going to have to think from that back tee, do I need to play it to the left?

There's some of those things that you would say, in some ways, teeing grounds don't really compromise the architectural integrity of a golf course. In fact, they probably enhance it, given what's happened over the past 100 years with equipment. But beyond that, Charles, you might have a better idea in terms of the golf course whether there's any things. But listen, we couldn't be happier with what it is right now, and I guess we'll see.

CHARLES STEVENSON: I think from the point of view of the club and the club members, we pretty much got the Flynn restoration accomplished. So there might be some tweaks. Mike and his team will learn from this tournament that's coming up. But in terms of the basic layout, we're very happy with where it is. I don't think it will change much.

WAYNE MORRISON: Can I say one more thing about Flynn? I'm sorry to refocus on him. But like Mike said, he is one of the great architects of all time, because he's very subtle in his design. Sometimes it gets overlooked or not appreciated as much.

But something to bear in mind about the design here is there are only two par 5s, just like Pine Valley, just like Merion, which were Flynn's classrooms. So that has some effect on how you approach the scoring.

But it's also interesting, and it relates to Pine Valley and Merion as well, is the mixture of ground option holes and aerial demand holes.

And I think, depending on the wind, depending on where they are on the leaderboard, I think it's going to be really interesting to see how they play the golf course and what kinds of shots they'd take.

I'd love to talk to Nick at some point and find out how you would approach the golf course differently, behind five or six strokes going into the final day or leading going into the day because there's so much strategy out there.

Fortunately, Charles bringing the course back and Mike setting up the golf course, I think we're going to see how that strategy gets manifested. And the smarter, better golfer that plays the best is going to win, but he'd better be smart too.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much. Thank you to the USGA members, on behalf of the USGA Foundation, for what do for our organization, you allow us to do. Finally, let's have a round of applause for Charles, Wayne, Mike, and Nick.