My Day with Byron Nelson

In my opinion, the best thing about being in the golf business is the frequent occasion to meet and get to know extraordinary people who you can learn from - lessons not just about golf, or the golf business, but about life. I have been fortunate to develop good friendships with many of these people - I have come to know and learn from - that have been of tremendous value to me over the years.

In today's materialistic world, some people might not consider Byron Nelson "extraordinary." He did not live in a mansion or own a jet. He did not seek fame, nor did he ever demand attention or respect for the fame he did come across. I would never even say he would reject the notion of being considered extraordinary. He was a humble, simple, good man. While he was able to experience and achieve a good many interesting things, his life was characterized by giving all he could and taking only what he needed.

My visit with Mr. Nelson was arranged for the "intended" purpose of discussing Preston Trail, a course designed by Ralph Plummer in 1964-65, and a club we are working with to prepare a Master Plan. While I eventually learned all I could have hoped to, and more, about the design of Preston Trail, I realized early on in my visit that I would learn a great deal more — I think the gentleman who arranged the visit knew this and it is one of the greatest gifts I have ever received.

Because of Mr. Nelson's health, we met at his ranch house in Round Rock, Texas, just outside Fort Worth. His home is simple, smaller than you would think, and while he had a good many memories from his life in golf, it was not the "house" I would have expected. He had talked of his love for the last 60 years of his life - longer after he could have afforded to build such a mansion.

As we talked about golf and the design of Preston Trail, the discussion, upon his direction, led to why he "retired" from golf. He played the game with such a passion that it wore on him and in his career his principles grew. He became more and more interested in building enough money to build a life after golf for him and his wife. He reached his goal in 1964 and then let go of his passion for competitive golf.

Mr. Nelson's memory of events has been considered unique. During our visit, he recalled shots for the final round of the Masters that he won over 70 years earlier. He recalled subtle details for subtle design traits at Preston Trail: a course he had helped design close to 40 years earlier. He recited shot values at Ridgewood Country Club in New Jersey, a course he had not played in over 30 years. Some consider this a product of his great memory, but in my opinion it is the product of having lived his life with passion. He told me that he now does anything he could not fully commit to, give his all to, and to which he thought he could make a valuable contribution. He became fully immersed. When I asked how often he was on-site during the construction of Preston Trail, he said six days a week, most every week for about two years. He said he had been hired to do a job, so he did, becoming totally immersed in the building of the course. He was paid $8,000 for this.

While I could write a book exposing everything I took from a few hours with this man, the tone of this discussion and what I learned is that the most important things in life are above all else, leave this earth having been a good person - fair and giving - to all around you, and having done everything with unwavering passion. He did.

NEW TDA OFFICE BUILDING

As many of you probably have found out through our website or our "change of address" postcards, the Tripp Davis and Associates Main Office has moved from Boyd St. to 405 East Comanche in Norman, Oklahoma. Our new building was designed by a local's - Lincoln-Mercer, Inc. - that through the years has been transformed into a Harley-Davidson showroom, an upscale hardware future store, and now our office. It is an incredible space for working with lots of natural light, high ceilings and large open spaces.

PERSONNEL

Michael Khasha, a veteran to golf architecture for 15 years, has relocated to West Lafayette, Indiana and has started an independent business called Golf Design Support Services. Through Golf Design Support Services he will be able to provide golf course consultation with state-of-the-art GPS staking and as-builts. TDA is currently using Michael as an AutoCAD consultant and we will utilize his GPS capabilities on future projects.

TDA Project Updates

O'Brien Park - In early October, a TDA designed practice facility at O'Brien Park in Tulsa, Oklahoma opened to the public. It was an immeasurable project providing the residents of Tulsa with such a range of holes and an extensive driving range and putting/chipping area. Although there are just three new greens within this project, there are various tests that can be utilized changing the angle and distance for players so they may actually play 4 holes or more, having a different experience each time. The opening began with a gathering around the clubhouse and a ribbon cutting ceremony. From there the festivities moved to the driving range area under where a test, many people integral to the project spoke about their role, how proud they were of the practice facility, and what it would bring to the surrounding community. Following lunch, guests were invited to play the new holes and utilize the driving range. Immediately after the grand opening, the facility was high-use by the public, especially junior and senior golfers and continues to be.

Recreation Centers of Sun City - Tripp Davis and Associates has been retained by the Recreation Centers of Sun City for two projects. The first is a feasibility evaluation and includes construction documents for the Lakes West Golf Course. The second is to provide Master Plan services for the recreation of the South Course to accommodate a community center and new golf facilities. We have enjoyed our working relationship with John Snyder, Director of Golf Operations and look forward to these upcoming projects.

Lakeview Golf Course - Continuing our longstanding relationship with the Artemis Regional Park and Lakeview Golf Course, we will be rebuilding the 16th green this spring.

Whippoorwill Club - This past fall, TDA continued restoration work at Whippoorwill Club in Amory, North Mississippi. With the help of golf course builder Sam DiPasquale and his staff, we were able to remove tons and tons of clay, rock and other debris from the site and smooth the greens."