

U.S. Open Championship 2017

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Dana Fry

Ron Whitten

Mike Davis

Michael Hurdzan

Press Conference

ADAM BARR: Welcome to this year's golf course architecture forum, featuring the three designers of this golf course, and the USGA's executive director, CEO, Mike Davis. By way of introduction, I think everybody here, USGA members and media alike, will admit of the argument that a golf course is like a work of art. And the sculptor Michelangelo said in the block of marble is the work of art waiting to be exposed. I don't think a golf course is a whole lot different. Both a glacier and a lot of hard work and imagination brought to life the golf course that you see out there. Mike Davis will tell us a lot about how it's going to be presented this week in its shining moment, the U.S. Open.

I'd like to introduce the gentlemen that we have here to discuss this with us today. Starting at the far left, golf course architecture expert and prolific writer on the subject, Ron Whitten, golf course architect, Dana Fry, golf course architect, and incidentally a member of the USGA Museum Committee, Dr. Michael Hurdzan, and as I said, Mike Davis our executive director and CEO.

I'd like to begin with the three architects, gentlemen, chime in as you see fit. Tell us about that experience of walking on to the land for the first time and imagining what this magnificent property, all 650-some acres, was going to give you?

MICHAEL HURDZAN: Well, I'll start. And Adam, there was a lot of tree cover on it, because this had previously been pasture land with the cows out there and there were little bitty trees and bigger trees, so you kind of had to clear away some of the brush and the trees in order to see its full potential.

But I think just as the people that are here today have walked out and seen it and just said, yes, this was meant to be a golf course, I think that's what most everybody's reaction was. I know that's what ours was. The trick then was trying to sort out which of those 18 holes, or as it turned out, 19 holes, were the best 19 holes to keep.



ADAM BARR: Dana, was it one of those things where you looked at the land and said I can't wait to get at this?

DANA FRY: Yeah, you could tell it was a unique piece of property, and the sheer magnitude and scale of it, and the abruptness of the contours and the space in between them, I know Ron always used the analogy that it was like the Sand Hills because there were golf holes going in all directions. You could have routed this golf course a thousand different ways, probably, and had lots of great golf holes. It was just a unique piece of property, and you knew it was something special.

The comment I still remember the most is what David Fay told me the first time he came here, because that's when I really knew that something really special was going to happen. For those of you that don't know, David Fay was the previous executive director of the USGA where Mike is now. And he said, he called it one of the greatest tournament venue sites he had ever seen. There was no golf. It was just a field and trees, and he just knew. You knew because you walked for five or six hours at that time and you just knew something that the land was magical and had great opportunity.

Q. Ron was what was your imagination telling you in the early stages of seeing the property?

RON WHITTEN: Every golf architect dreams of having the perfect piece of property that they could lay out a course lightly on the land and not have to move any earth. And Mike Hurdzan had been preaching to build a million dollar course forever, and when they invited me in to join and bid on this project and we saw the land, I remember telling Dana that this could be our Sand Hills. This could be the most natural golf course we will ever build.

Luckily we all three agreed that what we were going to try to do is let Mother Nature dictate the routing, dictate the philosophy, the strategies, everything. And it took a lot of -- gosh, I don't know -- a dozen or more different routings. We mowed things out, we walked and analyzed and rewalked and came up with new ideas and different avenues. But the overriding concern was not to move any more earth than absolutely necessary to make this golf course flow.

DANA FRY: But Ron did have some fears because he did say a comment which I did not find out for a few years later, and he said his concern with me being there was I was going to Fazio it. And by that, Fazio, for those of you that don't know Tom Fazio, he's got a reputation for building wonderful golf courses, but he moves a lot of dirt and creates landscapes, and Ron was a little concerned that I might try to do something like that.

RON WHITTEN: Early on (laughing).

ADAM BARR: Mike Davis, there was a great deal of creativity involved which means there was a cutting room floor. The final product that you got to see developed, how did it start rotating in your mind the possibilities for testing the best in the world?

MIKE DAVIS: Well, because of an email that Ron Whitten had sent sometime in 2003 to me of really disclosing saying there is this piece of property in Wisconsin that not only could make a great golf course but could one day be a U.S. Open course. I thought it was a terrific note that he sent, but I said I'd love to come see the property at sometime I'm in the area.

So this was, I guess, early in the week of the 2004 PGA Championship up at Whistling Straits and I had some meetings, so I stopped in for a visit. They had actually done the routing at that point, at least pretty close to what the current routing is now. And they had mown out what that routing is and put stakes where the tees would be, a stake where the center line, the drives, and a stake for the putting green and so we walked it. I could see from that time right then and there before it was ever a golf course that, number one, it could be a fantastic golf course, and number two, to really what Dana said, it's a big piece of property, lots of room between holes, lots of wonderful vistas for watching tournament play. And then enough room operationally to be able to stage an event this big.

So, Adam, the answer to your question, you could see it before it was ever a golf course.

ADAM BARR: Fascinating. Was the wind that is so prevalent in this area a factor in all your minds as you put this together, as you planned how it was going to look for a U.S. Open?

RON WHITTEN: It was so much of a factor that I made Dana and Mike throwaway the planned irrigation, and Mike and Dana and I actually flagged every irrigation head on this golf course, adjusting it for what we thought would be the prevailing winds because we didn't want wind drifting into the rough. And I remember we had tape measures and we were walking

up and pulling up and down hills and sideways. That's how prevalent. That's how important we thought the wind was going to be as a factor in terms of where we wanted the mown areas and where we didn't want water to drift over and make a snarly rough.

ADAM BARR: Mike, the fescue has been the subject of some discussion already. It's height, its difference from the kind of rough these players ordinarily see on the PGA TOUR week in, week out. Nonetheless, we have some wide fairways here. So what is the framing to the player's eye from the tee? How is that different from what they see every week? How is it different from what we've seen recently at Oakmont and Chambers Bay?

MIKE DAVIS: Well, let me start out with first of all this is a beautiful rolling piece of property. So it's not like many U.S. Open courses we go to. And I say that, because if you go through -- I've gone through this a fair number of times in my mind that if you take the 18 holes, 14 of the 18 holes have some element of blindness to them. That's just because there is enough roll to the property. And that, I think, really adds to this test, adds to the mystique of this golf course.

But because of the roll of the land, because of the wind that Ron was just talking about, this was designed to be a wider golf course. So by U.S. Open standards, I would say by and large it's probably about 50% wider than most U.S. Opens we go to. Some of the holes it would be two-and-a-half times wider a fairway. You take the 10 fairway, for example, you could fit three fairways at Winged Foot into that fairway.

But that said, it needs to be that way architecturally. It works that way. Esthetically it's pleasing. So we go from fairway out to mown rough and then into the native rough. So we believe, by and large, that that works.

But as we've gotten here in the last week, I will tell you, we've taken a fair amount of the seed-head native fescue down, just because we felt like what's happened this spring is because it's been a fairly wet spring here in Wisconsin, some of that rough, that fescue that you see is a little bit thicker than maybe we would have anticipated on a normal year. So we've adjusted it where it fits.

The other thing you should know is that what Ron said is really important. That ideally you want it thin and wispy, and most places here at Erin Hills it is that. But as it gets closer to where it's irrigated, sometimes on a windy day the mist does go, so you see it a little thicker.

Plus there are different types of fescue. There are chewings, there are reds that tend to be a little thicker,

versus the hard and cheap varieties of fine fescue. So it's by and large, we feel, that that hitting area for the holes is wide enough and it's going to be a good test. But if you hit it wayward, it's penal, no doubt.

ADAM BARR: Mike Hurdzan, let's talk about that penalty. If you're not hitting in one of these areas that happen to get wet, we've heard some players comment about already, if you're in the wispy rough, what are we talking about? A stroke-and-a-half, a distance penalty, what should it end up doing to a wayward drive?

MICHAEL HURDZAN: I think it's an intimidation factor to begin with. Because you don't want to hit it into some of those areas. As Mike just said, most of the rough is thin and wispy. There might be 5% or 8% of that out there that's a little bit thick. But it makes you choose your line carefully off of the tee. Because if you're just hitting it in the middle of the fairway, you're never even going to see that.

But if you try to start to cut the doglegs, try to shave the distance down, now it becomes a strategic factor as well. So I think that it's a natural part of the golf course. If that was gorse instead of fine fescue, we'd all say, well, it's just gorse, you know. But because it's grass, somehow we feel it's an unfair penalty, and I don't think we should.

ADAM BARR: There always seems to be a par-3. At Oakmont it's No. 8, here it's No. 9 which the caddies here call the shortest par-5 in golf. What is it about, Dana, from your point of view about No. 9 standing on the tee that creates the most visual dissidence in the heads of these players?

DANA FRY: Well, I think the wind is the biggest factor because it's a long, narrow green. The front part has a false front, and the rest of the green basically drains away from you falling a little left to right.

I've said from day one, it's my favorite hole. I think in time it's going to become one of the iconic short holes in golf. I really believe that, and I've felt that from day one. I think a lot of it is the wind. When you hit that shot, if you have a wind blowing from east to west, left to right, if you hit a ball and it does not have a right-to-left spin on it, there is a good chance the ball is not staying on the green, because these greens get firm and they get hard, and that left-to-right wind doesn't do it.

You have the opposite when the wind is coming from the opposite direction. They really have to work wedges into the green. The target areas, although it's very linear, the target areas are very small to get it to where you want it to be. If you miss it left, and you have again a left-to-right and an east-to-west wind, the

ball's not going to stop on the green.

You can get in some unbelievable situations on that hole. I think it's going to be one of the most exciting holes, if not the most exciting hole for the fans to watch this week.

MIKE DAVIS: If it's too exciting we'll be back here in the media center, right in this room (laughing).

MICHAEL HURDZAN: One of the other things about that, that is lots of things happening in and around that green. It isn't like you can focus on one bunker or one target area or where you want. There are so many things you really have to kind of block out a lot of that and really focus on what you want to do. It is a very busy green complex, and there are lots of things to look at, and a lot of things can get in your head.

DANA FRY: I also got to add the hardest shot on the golf course is the second shot on 9 when you miss the green. Watch this week.

MICHAEL HURDZAN: There are a lot of guys practicing it.

DANA FRY: Well, they better be.

ADAM BARR: Ron, speaking of second shots on par-4s, and shots on the green on par-5s, what are some of your favorites, both for glory and disaster and everything in between?

RON WHITTEN: Well, good question. I would point out the 4th green, which originally was a punch-bowl green, and Bob Lang the original owner never did like that. He thought it was too easy a hole and so he wanted a green -- we had a little drainage problem with the punch-bowl green, and I remember Mike saying we can solve it for \$500 bucks or we can build you a new green for \$50,000. Bob said, let's build a new green. And he wanted it up on the ridge with the wetlands beyond, and he wanted it to be a terrifying shot and that's what they now have.

It's probably the most intimidating shot on this golf course from any fairway. Because it is a narrow green, it's a horizon green, and you know there is death behind it, and if you hit short and don't quite get it there, it's going to roll back down into one of those nasty bunkers.

I take pride in all these bunkers that we've done out here. The bunkering is a big reason why No. 9 is what it is, because there are spots in those bunkers where you aren't going to be able to advance the shot to the flag, and that was by design. If you think of the 7th or 9th hole as our 7th at Pebble Beach, we lack the

ocean, so we provided another type of hazard, and that was our erosion bunkers. I'm surprised more players haven't complained about the erosion bunkers more than the rough.

ADAM BARR: It's only Monday.

RON WHITTEN: Yeah.

ADAM BARR: Mike Davis, as you think about, I know you've talked already in the press about what the wind does with set-up plans, but talk about that a little bit. What you plan in the morning could change if the wind direction changes. Also in terms of opportunities based on what Mike and Dana were saying earlier about winds going side-to-side where you could put hole locations?

MIKE DAVIS: This is, to begin with, a very difficult course to set up. There is enough movement to the land that if you get a forecasted wind and the forecast ends up being wrong or it changes, rarely do you see the winds here change 180° in a day, but should it do that, that is almost assuredly going to lead to a set-up problem. Because you've got holes such as the first tee shot where you've got to clear a hazard, you've got the tee shot at 8, where you go up a big hill, the tee shot at 12 where you go up a big hill. If you set it up for a certain wind or even a 90° turn on it, it's tough. So we'll have to err on the side of being rather conservative.

But right now most of the forecasts we're looking at is wind coming out of the west, southwest, maybe a little bit Northwest for one day or one afternoon actually on Thursday. So if those are, in fact, correct, and they're not overly high winds -- and right now we're not looking for big winds this U.S. Open. Just a couple days ago on Saturday we had gusts over 30 miles an hour, had we had that in one of the rounds, good chance we would have been suspended. It was blowing so hard, balls were blowing on greens.

But right now, most of the time we're seeing winds between 5 and 15 miles an hour with maybe a gust up to 20. That's reasonable in terms of setting up the golf course. But I think that what the three gentlemen to my left did was really design a course very thoughtfully for the wind.

What's interesting about this, if you look at it kind of on an aerial, this property almost forms a triangle. It's surrounded on many sides by wetland. What's interesting is 14 of the holes basically run east-west or west-east, so there aren't many. I think it's the 1st, 9th, 10th, and 11th holes that run south-north or south-north. So in some ways it will be interesting to see where those winds come from, because either you're

going to have a bunch of holes straight downwind or straight into the wind or you're going to see crosswinds, which, I think for players, it will be very interesting.

ADAM BARR: I've heard some players, some of the most in-shape athletes in the game say, wow, this is a walk. So in designing this and setting up for it, we talk about the ultimate test of golf involving a physical test over four days. How much was the roll and hilliness and tough walk of this property a part of putting together a championship test?

MICHAEL HURDZAN: Well, I'll start. Our original intent was to be a modestly-priced public golf course, and there was probably going to be golf carts that would be allowed to be used. With the fescue grasses and it was young and it opened a little bit early, and you could see noticeable decline of the grasses in the fairway from cart traffic. When Mr. Ziegler bought the golf course he made the very tough decision that it was going to be a walking-only golf course. No trollies, no golf cars. So part of the walks are there because we found the very best golf course. We hadn't anticipated it would be a walking-only golf course, but it still works very, very well.

I'm not a young guy, and I can walk the golf course and carry my bag and play it and feel very, very comfortable. The guys that have qualified for this open are a lot younger, and I think they can handle it.

RON WHITTEN: Adam, I've walked this course a thousand times starting at age 50, and I'm still alive. So I think they'll manage (laughing).

DANA FRY: The other thing it did is it also, in most cases on quite a few holes you go from the green, you walk up a hill to the next tee. Which I also think comes into play because the hardest tee shots are the tee shots when you get these elevated holes, and you have these dramatic winds.

I went around with players for five days. I walked 36 every day, 45 one day, and it was giving them fits. One of the -- 7, when you're on the 7th hole on the tee with no wind it's not that hard a tee shot for them. You give them a 20, 25-mile-an-hour crosswind and they're that elevated, it's a really hard tee shot for them. It's really hard. And you get that effect on quite a few holes.

ADAM BARR: I want to get to questions in a moment. But one more question before we wrap up, Mike, you said many times in setting up championship courses the landing of the ball is not the end of the shot. How will smart players use the contours here?

MIKE DAVIS: Well, yeah, Adam, what you're getting at is I think whether a golfer thinks about it consciously or

it just kind of happens, there is a special part of the game when a course does get bouncy, because it allows a golfer of all abilities to bounce balls into greens. You get a little bit more roll or distance on your tee shots.

But I think for a really good player, the golf courses really come alive. They become strategic when they get bouncy, because you have to think about when the ball hits, what's it going to do? How much is it going to bounce? Where's it going to roll to? How much is it going to follow the contour of the land?

So, if you give these fellows that are such good players a 8-yard shot without wind to a soft area, they can sit there. I mean, you go out to the practice range and they can hit one shot after another on that. All of a sudden, if it's a downwind to a firm shot, that 178-yard shot may end up being a 159-yard shot to land it a little bit left and have it bounce a couple times and feed to the right. It just becomes more strategic. And by the way maybe you fly it more and stop it quicker or hit a lower trajectory and bounce it in. I think when we talk about getting firm, fast golf course, that's really what we mean is the ability to anticipate what your ball's going to do when it lands. Also the ability to control your spin, the ability to control your trajectory, the ability to control left-right, right-left, that's all part of the championship test. It just comes alive when you get this firm, fast conditions.

ADAM BARR: And our architect trio, if/when it rains, are we still going to see opportunities for changing the height of the ball and using the bounce that Mike just mentioned?

MICHAEL HURDZAN: Yeah, I think so, and it will be just different lines that they will have to take. They may not get as much bounce, they may not get as much roll, but there is going to be plenty of bounce and roll out there. Now when the ball lands this afternoon you can see a little puff of dust and the ball would go 12, 15, 18 feet in the air. It may not do that so much.

But there are a lot of different lines where you're anticipating the run out of the ball, and it doesn't happen, all of a sudden, that's the wrong choice of clubs. Where you might have hit a utility club and a draw, you might be forced to hit a driver in the wet and take a different line.

RON WHITTEN: I think the other thing we might see -- first of all, this course drains very well. The surface drains well, and it's glacial underneath. But because we didn't move a lot of earth in the beginning, it's drained ever since we first got on this property it's drained. What I think we'll see with the fescue fairways perhaps, if there is a little bit of rain, you might see the

balls hanging up on slopes that otherwise would roll down.

So the best players in the world are going to be playing some awkward lies, downhill, sidehill lies and that sort of thing. That's the big impact the I think the rain would have, more than shortening the course.

DANA FRY: I think if you get rain it's going to help the longer hitters because it's a long golf course, and I think if it gets softer, I think it gives them a bigger advantage. That's my opinion. And I know some of the guys I was out with who are some pretty big-named players wouldn't mind that happening.

ADAM BARR: Ron, I want to wrap up with you before we get to questions from our audience. This is a new chapter for the U.S. Open in the midwest. Surely we've been in the midwest before, Chicago, St. Louis, other places, but the first time in Wisconsin. First time, really, the golf course became a U.S. Open course in this manner and it's still in its relative youth. What does having the U.S. Open on this kind of golf course in this region for the future of the game?

RON WHITTEN: For me, I'm going to puff up our collective chests here. I think what impact I'd like to have Erin Hills have after this U.S. Open is really in terms of its bunkers. I think we try to make a statement, the bunkers are supposed to be hazards. And there are too many bunkers that we spend as much money building bunkers as we do greens, and there ought to be uniform sand, and they have to be flat on the bottom and everything has to roll down to a certain spot.

Our bunkers, we contoured the floors of the bunkers, so you've got awkward shots within the bunkers. You have shots that you can't advance forward, you've got to play outside ways. Is that fair? You know, golf is not a fair game. You're not supposed to be in the bunkers.

So I hope, if anything, that Erin Hills stands for is it stands for the proposition that bunkers ought to be getting back to being hazards.

MICHAEL HURDZAN: Let me add one more thing to that, Adam. It isn't just the game itself, but there is something that the USGA has invested heavily in, and that is the research on turf grasses and sustainability, and this golf course was really designed in mind to use the least amount of water, fertilizer, pesticide and energy sources necessary to maintain it.

So I think that not only what this means to the game as far as growth, but what it means to the game as far as how we maintain golf courses and how it really supports the goal of sustainability.

ADAM BARR: Gentlemen, thank you. What I'd like to do in the time we have remaining is we'd like questions from our USGA members who we're very proud to have here, or the media who have joined us.

Q. You mentioned sustainability, could you talk a little bit about the role that the superintendent Zach Reineking has played and his crew in the evolution of the golf course? Because it's a very different golf course than when it opened? It's not just the redesign features, it's also the presentation of it?

DANA FRY: I'd like to start with that. Zach has become a very close friend, and I know I've told you personally in my 34 years in the industry he's a person I look up to the most in the golf industry in any facet. Because he went through a tough situation here dealing with a golf course that was under construction multiple times, a lot of financial issues. One of the stories, when I think about him the most, I think here's a guy that at times paid for fuel, chemicals, fertilizer with his own credit card. There was a time when it wasn't even certain he would still be here as a superintendent.

And to see the golf course and to hear -- I was with Rory McIlroy and Justin Rose and all they did is repeatedly talk about the great conditions here. And if you knew where we were in 2006 and where we are today to hear that, I've never been more proud of an individual in my life.

MICHAEL HURDZAN: Let me add that Zach is a product of his generation and a product of Wisconsin. In fact, he went to school in Wisconsin. He's a very young man for the kind of position he has. He's very open minded. He brought new sciences into -- because there are an awful lot of people who said fescue fairways aren't going to work, and Zach is making them work.

So he's innovated along with managing a very large piece of property. Because it isn't just the 150 acres of golf course, there is another 150 acres of space in between the golf holes that have to be managed as well. So I think that what he has done for the sustainability of keeping the fescues, trying and believing that they will work and bringing innovative techniques into it, like lots of top dressing, is paying off.

So I think he's advancing the state of sustainability and Erin Hills is living proof of that.

Q. We've heard a lot this week from the players in terms of who has inspired them and helped them in their professional careers. Who inspired you from an architecture standpoint? Can you talk about how your association involvement has assisted

you in the development of this course?

DANA FRY: The person that inspired me the most was a gentleman by the name that nobody in this room knows except maybe my family that's here, is a gentleman by the name of Andy Banfield. He was Tom Fazio's right-hand man and started with him in 1974. I met him in 1983 in a bar in Tucson, Arizona. Started a part-time -- he offered me a part-time job and it became my career.

The next one, and equally so, would be the man to my right, Mike Hurdzan. He became like a second father. I told this repeatedly to people 20 or 30 years, it was an honor to work with him, call him a friend, a mentor. To do something like this with Mike and also with Ron who is a great friend, it means more than you can put into words.

MICHAEL HURDZAN: We get really emotional about this kind of stuff.

DANA FRY: He didn't used to. He used to be the tough one. He was a green beret, but I've got him down where I can get him emotional now.

MICHAEL HURDZAN: There was a gentleman that owned a golf course where I started as a shag boy and became a caddie and a green keeper and worked as a superintendent. His name was Jack Kidwell, and Jack was a product of the depression. His family bought the golf course on land contract in the middle of the depression. They were share croppers, basically, knew almost nothing about golf. And they turned that little nine-hole family golf course into a community, a place of pride, and it got a lot of people involved in the game. And he, Jack Kidwell taught me all of the basics of the golf course and the industry.

I used to go out as a 13-year-old and throw the woods and the fields, and I would see those become a golf course, and it was the most inspiring thing for me.

I said, "Mr. Kidwell, this is what I want to do for the rest of my life." He said, "Mike, you do the things I tell you," and it's worked out. And Mr. Kidwell was a business partner until Parkinson's took him.

So that aspect of it is the fundamentals I got from Mr. Kidwell. But I realize there is a difference between being creative and being artistic, and Dana is a very artistic kind of guy, I think I'm a creative kind of guy. And that's why our collaboration, I believe, works so well is the fact we inspired each other in a little different ways.

DANA FRY: We're a living odd couple, by the way.

MICHAEL HURDZAN: Yeah (laughing).

RON WHITTEN: By the way, I've got my kids in the back here and they're going to go oh, my God, do I have to listen to this story again? But just to show you what a small world this is, I went to college at the University of Nebraska, worked on the maintenance crew and got an offer to become an assistant superintendent, but instead I wanted to go to law school. So I moved Topeka, Kansas and went to law school there, but I continued to study golf architecture which was my hobby because I dreamed one day about designing golf courses.

I wrote a guy named Jack Kidwell who, at the time in 1975, was an historian of the American golf architect, and he sent me some material, and also referred my name to another golf architect named Geoff Cornish in New England who was working on a similar book like I was working on. The two of us got together and pooled our resources and published a book. The first and still only history on golf architecture called "The golf Course," which came out in '81. In the meantime, I had met Mike Hurdzan, and later when I wrote for a very brief period of time for the Golf Course Management magazine, I did a feature on Mike Hurdzan and Jack Kidwell.

So we struck up a friendship and talked about even back then doing a golf course, because I was a populist and Mike was even then beating the drums about a million dollar golf course.

When I finally got the opportunity when I turned 50, Mike offered, and I said, Hey, if Dana doesn't have any problem with that, I'd love to join you guys and we'll bid on this. Dana didn't have a problem.

I had no idea. This could have been Hoboken, New Jersey. Instead it was Erin, Wisconsin. So I'm the luckiest guy in the world to have thrown in with these guys on this project. I will say I've always said Dana's creative and Mike keeps him on a budget. I thought I was going to be the kind of in-between guy, but it turns out I'm even more radically right brained than Dana fry, if that's possible, because I came up with some real bone-headed ideas at times.

Q. Guys, once the tournament starts, where will you be seen out watching golf, and where would you recommend out here on Erin Hills people sit and hang out for the day and is a good spot to watch golf?

MICHAEL HURDZAN: I'll start that discussion. But I want to see how guys play No. 2, whether they're going to take the line over the hill or lay up in front of the bunker and try to blow it over the bunker. Then I want to see how they play those second shots into that green. So I think for me that's going to be fairly

intriguing.

Certainly No. 15 and No. 14 are going to be interesting holes as well. But I'm going to try to get around to as many of the holes as I can and see how fairly Mike has set the golf course up and how guys are playing it. But No. 2 is going to be a place I'd probably spend a lot of time.

DANA FRY: I think you already know the answer for me, it's No. 9. From day one, I didn't really dislike the Dell hole. It wasn't my favorite, but the problem I had with it is I honestly thought we were losing the best hole on the property. Again, I think it's going to become what people remember about Erin Hills the most.

Along with 18, because obviously 18, the one thing that hasn't really been discussed today and you don't hear talked about much, but the par-5s here are really good. The tee shots are demanding, but the second shots are really demanding. If you miss the fairway on 18, you have a serious problem ahead because you're not going to be able to advance the next shot far enough. Even if you're in the shorter rough, to where you're going to be out there 230, 240, 250 yards, and that is a really difficult shot on that hole. So the back drop, obviously with Holy Hill in the ground, and the TV cameras are going to love that this week.

RON WHITTEN: I haven't been out to see where the ropes are yet. But on the hillside behind the No. 7 gree, if you see at the top there, you can see action on 5 and you can see it coming down 7. And thanks to the trees being removed, you can look at 17 and you can look all the way down 18 with binoculars, you can watch it all.

We stood today behind 11 green and watched 10 and 11. You can walk right up the hill ask watch them tee off on 9. You can't see the result, but you can certainly hear it when they hit it close. That's what we like. There are so many vantage points that you can just plop your little chair down and watch the parade go by and see a lot of different holes and hopefully a lot of different shots.

Q. You mentioned at the very beginning that when you looked at the piece of property you had a few different designs that you were looking at. Was there one particular hole that sort of stands out that you had to sacrifice for developing this gorgeous course that you wish you could have incorporated into the design but just couldn't make it work?

MICHAEL HURDZAN: Wow, that's a really good question.

RON WHITTEN: I remember one. The 11th hole that exists now, we had running in the other direction. There was a quarry right where the forward 11 tee is. It was just an old quarry that you saw just like at Merion. We had perched a green up there on our design and we were going to play that in that direction, and I thought that was going to be one of the cooler shots. An elevated shot over this rock quarry to a table-top green, and I kind of miss that because I think it would have been similar to the 16th at Merion.

When we turned it around, within a week, that quarry mysteriously got filled in. The owner had never liked that quarry, and he was all too anxious to get rid of it.

MICHAEL HURDZAN: I think the other one that comes to mind is No. 10 when it was a par-5. We had an upper fairway on the second shot that would have been at the same elevation of the green, so you would have been looking in at the green at the same elevation or maybe even a little above the green. Then the left fairway was lower because that was the natural land form.

So, really, the left fairway was very narrow. It was about maybe one-third as wide as the -- I'm sorry, the right fairway was about one-third as wide as the left fairway, so you had to make a decision. Do you want to play it up to the right, narrow right fairway and have a good look into the green, or did you want to leave it out there? We end up getting rid of that fairway and got rid of the par-5. So I think that would have been a fun hole to have in there. We'd have had to tweak it a little bit to make it work, but it seemed like it had a lot of potential.

DANA FRY: The opposite question to that would be is there any hole that's on every single routing that was ever done, and it was the 12th hole. It was on every routing, it never changed. The other holes got changed dozens of times, different routings, but that never changed. A lot of us call it the heart of Erin Hills because that is literally on grade. That entire golf hole is on grade naturally the way God left it.

RON WHITTEN: That was going to be our opening hole for a long time. For a long time we were going to have the clubhouse out where the 9th tees are, which would have been a travesty for that hole. But we wisely convinced the owner to move the clubhouse away from the golf course.

Q. Ron, as a student of architecture and a student of architecture throughout most of your life, what would Cornish, what would Donald Ross, what would MacKenzie, what would some of these guys that use features that are there before you do the

routing, what would they say about what you three have done? Not to speak for them, but what do you think they would say about a modern golf course in this shape?

RON WHITTEN: I think Donald Ross would have probably approved our routing because we followed the dictates of the land, and that's what Ross tried to do. I think Ross would have bunkered it differently than we did. Because we did a lot of really awkward, random bunkering because nature is awkward and random, and Donald Ross had more artistic things where every upsweep would have a bunker that faced the golfer and would be tailored in a certain way. Jeff Cornish would have said, Ron, you have this course way too hard, because he was a man of the people. He believed in building for the masses.

Yet there are architects who have told me to my face that they thought we didn't bunker enough greens close enough. That there are too many greens that are too easy. So I think we struck the right balance. This is a public golf course, and we're trying to get public golfers around it. But you still want that occasional 9th hole where there is one terrifying shot every three or four holes.

MICHAEL HURDZAN: I think that MacKenzie would have loved the bunkers. All that raggy-edged kind of stuff, if you look back at those early MacKenzie pictures, that really kind of fits right in.

And as far as the Ross side of it, I think he would like it. I'll go back to the sustainability. Donald Ross was a greens keeper first and foremost, a golf professional and designer after. He would have liked what we did to the land and how we used the soils and the natural vegetation.

RON WHITTEN: And Tom Fazio would ask how many hundreds of millions did we spend building the course.

ADAM BARR: Gentlemen, I want to thank you for your insights today, and your generosity with your time and knowledge. I want to thank all of you for coming to enjoy and learn a little bit about the challenge that's going to face the best players in the world this week. Enjoy the 117th U.S. Open, and thank you all for coming.