

# THE USGA: The First Hundred Years, The Next Hundred Years

*The USGA after a century: What we've accomplished and our plans for the future.*

by DAVID B. FAY

AT OUR 1996 Annual Meeting, your GCSAA president, Bruce Williams, and your CEO, Steven Mona, spoke before our executive committee, and their comments were very well received. Of course, Steve is an alum of the USGA staff, and it was especially nice to hear from Bruce, given that his dad, Bob, won the Green Section Award this year.

I hope it is clear how much we value our close relationship with the GCSAA. We look forward to a continuing partnership as we address issues and initiate research that will have enormous impact on the game and its future.

We are very grateful for the ongoing support the GCSAA has provided to the USGA. This support can be seen in many ways from your financial assistance, to the promotion of our Turf Advisory Service, and to the opportunity you've given USGA representatives to appear on your ESPN show, "Par For The Course."

Recently, I was in Chile and during a lull, I made my way to the health club. There were a few televisions on and the sound system was blasting Latin music. Halfway through my so-called workout, someone switched a TV to ESPN and who do I see but Duke Fry, host of the GCSAA show. So, you'll be happy to know that your organization is getting air time in South America.

As to the role of the superintendent, it would be impossible for me to overstate the respect the USGA has for your profession. After all, you are the guardians, the nurturers of the playing fields. And never were your talents put more to the test than in 1995, which, as Bob Williams has said, was the worst grass-growing season he



David B. Fay

could recall in his 60-plus years as a superintendent.

My respect for your profession is borne from firsthand experience of the four summers I spent as a member of The Tuxedo (New York) Club grounds crew. I can only say that I managed to keep my scalping to a minimum with the rotaries, and I only had one instance where I failed to note a hydraulic oil spill before it had done a number on the green. Sadly, I probably excelled in only one area — hiding out in the woods on hot, humid afternoons in August when I was supposed to be syringing greens. But I certainly developed a strong appreciation for the nature of your work.

In 1995, we celebrated our first 100 years of service by throwing ourselves a year-long birthday bash. Some of our goals were to reach a large audience and promote our game through a wide assortment of activities and programs. And, since it was a birthday party, we wanted to have some fun. On balance, I think we did a pretty good job. Among the highlights was an elegant party at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in December 1994, which was a far cry from the small working dinner at the Calumet Club on December 22, 1894, where representatives from five golf clubs formed the USGA.

At the Museum dinner, we announced the establishment of the Ike Grainger Award for volunteers who have served the USGA for 25 years or longer. Seventy individuals received the award in 1995. This program will be ongoing because it's important to recognize the backbone of the USGA — the volunteer.

Last July and August, reunions of past USGA national champions were held at the Women's Open, Women's Amateur, and Amateur. All three were terrific — full of memories, fish stories, and laughs. The unanimous sentiment was that this type of gathering should take place more frequently than once a century.

In developing our centennial celebration, it was important to get our member clubs involved. To this end, a centennial kit was created that included medals, flags, and suggested events and was given, free of charge, to our clubs. About 200,000 golfers at nearly 3,000 clubs participated in USGA centennial events that ran the gamut from three-day member-guest tournaments to putting contests.



We produced a full-length film entitled *Golf, The Greatest Game*, and a coffee-table type book of the same name. We also produced 12 films honoring the heroes of the game — the likes of Jones, Hogan, Palmer, Zaharias, and Lopez. These films and the book are valuable historic resources and should have an extended shelflife — which is another way of saying that we have plenty of each left for sale.

When you celebrate a special birthday, it's expected that you'll do some out-of-character things — and we did. In conjunction with *GOLF* we held the modestly titled Auction of the Century in New York City during U.S. Open week. Such items as Arnold Palmer's wristwatch and a round of golf with Bill Murray fetched a total of nearly \$500,000 for such non-

golf related charities as disease research, hospitals, and aid to the disadvantaged.

We conducted a six-month-long nationwide search for a Centennial golf family, which drew quite a bit of media attention. The winning four-generation family, the Hornbecks from Logan, Iowa, ranged in age from 90 to 13. And contrary to the rumor circulating in the U.S. Open press tent, the four Hornbecks do not make up 25% of the inhabitants of Logan, Iowa.

We gave away thousands of packets of USGA red, white, and blue flower seeds, which I understand bloomed nicely just about everywhere except my yard.

Given that the only three things we did in 1895 were to conduct the Amateur, Open, and Women's Amateur

(and by the way, note that women's competitions have been part of our charter right from the start), it was fitting that we would introduce a new competition, the State Team tournament, in 1995. Over 40 states sent both a men's and women's team to Orlando in late October. Both events were so successful that we plan to continue with this event on an biennial basis, in the odd-numbered years.

Lastly, in conjunction with *Golf Digest* magazine, we buried a time capsule containing an assortment of items representing the game of golf, circa 1995, on the Golf House grounds in October. This capsule will be re-opened in 2095, so if nothing else, I guess that commits the USGA to stay at its Far Hills location for at least another 100 years.

Naturally, our first 100 years saw dramatic growth and change. I joined the USGA staff in 1978, and in my 17 years with the Association, the differences are extraordinary. Some numbers bear this out:

In 1978, we had one Regional Affairs manager criss-crossing the country like Johnny Appleseed. Today, we have a total of eight regional managers (five men and three women) operating from outside our Far Hills headquarters.

In 1978, we had six agronomists. Today, we have 15 agronomists. We also have Green Section heads of research, education, and communications.

In 1978, we had 18 committees comprised of approximately 350 volunteers. Today, we have 38 committees consisting of 1,200 volunteers, all of whom donate their services and pay their own expenses.

In 1978, we had 30,000 individual members, then known as USGA Associates. Today, we have in excess of 630,000 and we are hopeful we'll reach the one-million mark by the end of the century.

In 1978, we had less than 5,000 member clubs, most of which were private. Today, we have about 9,000 member clubs, the majority of which are public in orientation.

In 1978, we treated handicapping much the same as we did the Rules of Golf. That is, we developed the system but left it up to clubs and golf associations to administer it. Today, as a result of an appeal from golf associations in the early 1980s for the USGA to compute handicaps, our GHIN handicapping computation service is the largest in the country, serving about 1.6 million golfers.

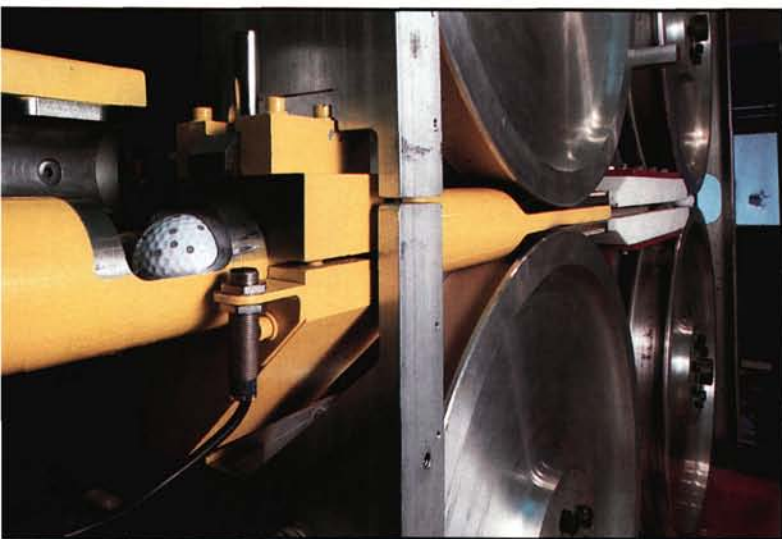
*The burial of a time capsule at Golf House marked the end of the USGA's year-long Centennial celebration.*







*(Above) The USGA has supported the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses since its inception in 1990.*



*(Left) One of the many testing devices at the USGA's Research and Test Center.*

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In 1978, our Implements and Ball test center was a tool shed that could barely accommodate a John Deere riding lawnmower. Today our test center is a state-of-the-art, 14,000-square-foot building complete with two mechanical robots, two golf-ball launching machines, high-tech aerodynamic and biomechanical laboratories, and several other testing machines.

In 1978, we had 14,000 entrants in 10 national championships. Today, we accept over 31,000 entrants in our 13 championships.

In 1978, our museum and library was housed in part of the first floor of Golf House. Today, the museum uses up all of Golf House. And we are taking the museum on the road through a series of traveling exhibits. Also, and I

find this especially exciting, we plan to have on our Internet web site (which of course didn't exist in 1978) a virtual reality room dedicated to our museum. So we really will be taking our museum to the golfers on the Information Superhighway.

In 1978, we had a total staff of 45, the majority of whom worked out of the top two floors of Golf House. Today our staff numbers around 200, spread out over three buildings in New Jersey and 19 sites around the country.

But, as the saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

In 1978, the U.S. Open, including broadcast rights, accounted for the lion's share of our net revenue. Today, this remains the case.

That's hardly the same as saying the Open hasn't grown. Indeed, it has exploded in growth. One example would be the phenomenon called corporate tents. In 1978, there were no corporate tents at the Open; in 1996, we expect to have more than 40.

In fact, the Senior Open — which didn't even exist in 1978 — is just about at the same level as the Open was 17 years ago.

So, in addition to adding staff — always a suspicious act — what have we been doing with our time and our money?

It's pretty straightforward, really. As revenues have increased we have, as a service organization, put these funds back into the game through a variety of projects that complement our core responsibilities and programs.

As you in this audience know, we've spent well over \$10 million in the past few years on assorted turfgrass and environmental research programs. There's no need for me to elaborate on these programs because I know that through our Green Section staff and publications, you are more versed in this area than I am. Two points I want to emphasize. One — this effort is ongoing and will likely expand in terms of commitment of time and resources. Second, as we — and here I mean all of us in golf — continue to communicate our findings, we will have to focus on the 215 million Americans who don't play golf. Let's face it, convincing golfers that their game is environmentally friendly is not the tough sell.

We need to focus our efforts on the non-golfers — and soon — before a few advocates full of wrong information and misleading conclusions get the upper hand.

Other programs that have received USGA funding include junior golf programs with a special emphasis on programs for the disadvantaged; caddie programs; a golf administrator program (PJBoatwright Interns); scholarship programs for agronomic and journalism students; and assorted programs for the physically challenged, including funding for Special Olympics golf.

And, as many of you know, the USGA has been the primary supporter of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, which is now in place in more than 1,900 courses.

What's remarkable is that not a single one of these special programs I've just mentioned even existed back in 1978.

One might be forgiven in thinking that the emphasis has shifted within



the USGA over the past 17 years. It hasn't.

Remember, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Our core responsibilities are the same today as they were in 1978 — or 1928 or even 1895 for that matter. Conducting the game's national championships, writing and interpreting the game's playing rules, equipment rules, amateur status rules, and handicapping rules. And even though our Green Section was not formally established until 1920, our involvement and concern with playing conditions has been part of our mission statement right from the start in 1895.

Which gets us back — in a round-about way — to the stated title of this rambling: the first 100 years — the next 100 years.

Perhaps some of you are familiar with the author Jack Finney, who's written a few wonderful novels dealing with time travel. Let's run with this and go back to the year 1895, the USGA's first full year of operation. It's doubtful if even someone like Jules Verne — who was very much alive at the time — could have envisioned what the planet would look like in 1996, what with all of the mind-boggling technological advances and, sadly, a fair share of unimaginable horrors that we've experienced in the 20th century.

However, even if a visionary like Jules Verne might have trouble fitting in to 1996 America, I doubt that our 1895 U.S. Amateur champion, Charles Blair Macdonald, would have problems. Indeed, he would not only easily recognize his sport, but he would excel at it — which is not the same as saying he'd approve of tree-lined, lush layouts.

Sure, the clubs have improved — they're easier to hit. And today's golf ball lasts longer and flies longer than the gutta percha of 1895. The courses are longer and, thanks to the superintendent, are far better maintained. And the number of American golfers has gone from a handful to about 25 million.

But in a fundamental sense, the game has not changed. The object is the same, the Rules are essentially the same, and the experiences of the game — the fun, the challenge, and the passion — remain basically unchanged.

Now, what about the next 100 years? Will those folks who unearth our time capsule in Far Hills in the year 2095 have a clue as to its contents? Will

they think the clubs and balls are rudimentary — the way we view 1895 equipment? Will they think our rules silly? Will a golf course look the same? Will there be golf courses? Will there be golfers?

It's sort of a free pass to answer these questions. Not because I'm Carnac Jr. but because I know I won't be around — and none of you will be either — to refute any of my long-term forecasts.

Actually, I believe that golf in the year 2095 will be closer to the 1995 game than is the 1995 version to 1895. In other words, as comfortable as Charles Blair Macdonald would be with today's game, I think our 1995 Amateur champion, Tiger Woods, would be even more comfortable with Golf - 2095.

Will clubs and balls experience the same type of change we've seen since 1895? I doubt it. After all, the golf ball has reached the speed limit — it cannot legally go any farther. And as far as clubs are concerned, there's only so much one can do with a clubhead and shaft before running up against the laws of physics. Much of the alleged improvement in clubs is more a matter of marketing than engineering anyway — and there's nothing wrong with this. I'm like most golfers — always in

search of the magic bat. And sometimes I find something that works. But I hate it when I rave about some club or ball and someone asks if this new stuff is resulting in my shooting lower scores than, say, 10 years ago. That's hitting below the belt.

I doubt if the playing Rules will undergo substantial changes in the next 100 years. There's a natural desire to simplify the Rules, but this is tough to do, given the wide range of goofy things that can happen on 100 or more acres. Refinements to the Rules will continue, such as the new local rule that enables the committee to deal with environmentally sensitive areas.

I imagine championships will still be played in 2095. If today's entitlement attitude persists, there will be a demand for golf to become an age-category sport with championships for 30- and 40- and 50-year olds. This probably won't happen — thankfully — unless events are played on virtual reality courses since we're already finding it difficult to place all our qualifying rounds on high-quality courses. Golf can't grow unless there are enough facilities to satisfy demand. The location of new courses in the next century will be further and further away from population centers such that "afford-

*Using a Stimpmeter to measure green speed at a USGA championship.*







*The USGA Green Section has helped ensure sound maintenance programs that benefit all living things.*

CHUCK GAST

able" golf will in some ways resemble snow-skiing, where you have to travel a considerable distance to get to the mountains. It's likely that the game's fastest growth in the next century will be in other parts of the world — not the U.S. I believe we will see construction of more nine-hole courses. Why? First, I think there will be real limitations as to available land. And, I suspect that the amount of leisure time people will have will be pushed such that a two-hour sport will be the rule and that a four- to five-hour activity will be the exception. Personally, I don't subscribe to the notion that nine holes is half a loaf, anyway.

Here's a good one: Will golf be played other than on the planet Earth? Or let's roll the *Twilight Zone* music — is it already being played somewhere 100 million light-years away? Recently, astronaut Alan Shepard came to Golf House to commemorate the 25th anniversary of his golf shots on the moon and to be reunited with his Moon Club, which he gave to the USGA. Recalling how he had to hit the shot — one handed in a bulky space suit — and recalling the result of the shot — a 200-yard-long chilly dip — I don't think golf on the moon has much appeal. By the way, the Shepard visit was an enormous success. Among other things, he met and addressed nearly 400 sixth-grade students and asked for recruits for a manned flight to Mars. There were plenty of volunteers.

One thing I trust will survive the next 100 years in one form or another is the USGA Handicap System. Golf is fortunate in having the best handicap system of any sport — which is not the same as saying that it can be foolproof, or should I say cheat-proof. I imagine there will be sandbaggers in 2095.

I believe the most significant changes in the game in the next century will be in the areas that directly affect you folks — the superintendents.

The environmental issues will become more acute, not less. Maintenance practices may be more advanced in 2095 than they are today. On the other hand, courses could look more like they did at the turn of the century. After all, conditioning is dependent on that precious commodity called water — something that is already in scarce supply in parts of the country. And the maintenance of our courses depends heavily on equipment that is run on non-renewable sources of energy. I believe most of us can recall the oil embargo and long lines at the



gas station in the 1970s. Sometime in the 21st century, it may not be an embargo but rather a shortage that we will need to face.

Since I'm dealing with course maintenance, allow me my soapbox to speak of some conditioning issues that are more here and now. I personally believe the U.S. Open and other majors have done a disservice to American golf in the sense that we prepare — or should I say, ask the superintendent to prepare — the course for a one-week event in a manner that is either impossible or obscenely expensive to maintain for an extended period of time. Unfortunately, the golf fan sits at home watching events like the Open and wants the same conditions at his course, with little regard to the consequences, both financial and agronomic. You superintendents are a very talented group, but even for the best of you, there are limits. If we aren't going to change the manner in which we set up an Open course, we at least have an obligation to explain to the golf public the difference between course conditions for a national championship and everyday golf.

I also happen to believe that we've gone too far with respect to green speeds. Speeds of 11 feet put a terrible strain on the plant. Spikemarks have always been an issue but never, ever was it the issue that it's become today. Never were greens scalped so low and rolled so frequently in pursuit of speed. Equally important, I believe that green speeds have reached the point where, for the best players in the world, super-fast greens require less skill. Let's face it, nerves for this group are not a problem. And, as putting guru Dave Pelz can confirm, the more hit you have to put into a stroke, the more likely it is that the putt will go off line. Just to be absolutely clear, I'm speaking of speed, not firmness. Firm greens are essential for championship golf — but I'd like to throttle back Stimpmeter readings to 9 or 10 feet, irrespective of grass type.

And speaking of grasses, it might surprise you to hear me suggest that you proceed cautiously before experimenting with new strains of grass that only have a few years of test results. While I'm not saying that turfgrass introductions have to be as conservative as new drug introductions (typically a 10-year process), I think we should all be a bit more guarded before committing to a product that doesn't have a proven track record. And I say this knowing

full well that we've been, and will continue to be, a major player in encouraging and funding new strains of grasses that require less water, less maintenance, and are less susceptible to weather extremes.

Non-metal spikes are an issue to many people. A couple of observations: Alternatives to metal spikes are a long way from acceptance by players on the professional tours. Perhaps the best approach is to work with the NCAA golf committee to mandate non-metal spikes in college events. Also, just because non-metal spikes are not accepted by the Tours should not dissuade clubs from insisting on a non-metal spike policy. The damage caused by metal spikes may be more of a concern to the clubhouse manager than the superintendent. Think of the damage to floors and carpet. The legal-liability arguments I've heard against non-metal spikes are specious. Strapping on shoes of any kind doesn't mean you can gallop indiscriminately around the course and clubhouse without risk.

I hope the owners, course designers and architects, and course builders resist the urge to have a potpourri of turfgrasses on a golf course. For a short while, this practice seemed to be in vogue. And I hope we resist the urge to defy nature by using turfgrasses that basically have to be put on costly life support. As my predecessor Frank Hannigan once said, "If God intended

to have pure bentgrass greens in the South, she would have made the climate a bit cooler."

One of the items we included in our time capsule was a copy of a talk that John Updike delivered at our Centennial dinner in New York in December 1994. Allow me to read his final paragraph:

"We have come a long way in American golf, but has it been a journey without a price? Amid the million-dollar tournaments and the five-million-dollar clubhouses, might we be losing the unassuming simplicity of the game itself? This out-of-doors simplicity, surely, lies at the heart of golfing bliss . . . All it takes for a golfer to attain his happiness is a fence rail to throw his coat on, and a target somewhere over the rise."

If those who read Updike's comments in 2095 feel, as I do and I hope you do too, that his sentiments are right on the mark, then it's a good bet that golf survived quite nicely in the 21st century. So, let's hope that our golf brethren, in 2095, are not wanting for fence rails and targets, and will not have lost sight of the unassuming, out-of-doors simplicity that goes to the heart of why golf is the greatest game of all.

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DAVID B. FAY joined the USGA in 1978 and has served as the USGA's Executive Director since July 1989.

*David Fay echoes the sentiments of author John Updike: "All it takes for a golfer to attain his happiness is a fence rail to throw his coat on, and a target somewhere over the rise."*



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