

He Said, She Said

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A lot of fuss is made by golf courses about being on this list or that list of best courses. And there is no shortage of such lists from no less than a dozen golf publications, trade magazines, and special issues of your favorite periodicals. *Golf Digest* and *Golf Magazine* are the two most-recognized purveyors of such lists, but others seem to pop up each year or so. Making one of the national lists can be a huge windfall for a course. Copper Mill in Zachary, Louisiana for example was named the "Best New Affordable Public Course in America" by *Golf Digest* in January of 2005 and the influx of golfers grew by leaps and bounds.

So what do you do if your course doesn't make one of the lists and you need some buzz surrounding your facility? You simply create your own buzz. In Washington, D.C. they call it "spin" and it is simply the way one portrays the facts in his or her favor—sometimes regardless of the whole truth. More often than not, in golf it's nothing more than a course owner or developer being honestly excited about their new project and the enthusiasm cannot help but overflow into press releases and stories in the local paper. But some are obviously more shrewd attempts to stir up interest in their courses by predicting great things for the course.

I've seen this lately with the opening of some public courses that have proclaimed themselves to be "one of the best courses in the state" when it opens. In Mississippi for example, that would entail dethroning Old Waverly in West Point—a course that has held the #1 spot in the state since opening in 1988. That's nearly two decades! As optimistic as these folks may be, breaking into the top five overall list (including public and private courses) in a given state is difficult at best and the ones on top are there for a number of reasons. There are a number of factors such as resistance to scoring, memorability, etc. that go into rating the design of the course, but more than just the golf course itself is the atmosphere and service of the facility that factor into the top courses.

And there are also those who equate spending more money with higher ratings, though this is not necessarily the case. Again, returning to Copper Mill for our example, the course was built for about \$3.5 million. Why this may seem a significant amount to most people, in the realm of golf course construction it's not that much for a new course. It is also about one-half (or less) than most of the other courses on the list—courses that Copper Mill beat—spent for construction. Copper Mill is also the exception to the rule when it later made *Golf Digest's* list of top overall courses in each state by debuting at #2 in the state of Louisiana.

That brings me back to the spin factor. Most golf course architects do not spin a facility they are designing and leave that type of thing up to the owners and marketers. We may say in a press release that the particular piece of property is great or that the potential exists for a tremendous course when it's complete, but out of professional courtesy and respect to other clients (both past and current), an architect should not jump into the spin fest. I saw a course a couple of years ago that was under construction, and in a story in a business publication the owner said that the architect (a well-known architect whom I respect and will not mention by name here) told him the course would debut as one of the top courses in the country! Knowing the architect, I can only imagine that in passing he mentioned that the course (which I have played and is a very nice course) should be one of the top courses in that state or perhaps one of the top new courses for that year and he was simply misquoted. It's a nice course, but it's no Pine Valley.

Then there is an entirely different category of spinners: politicians who have managed to build a course in their city or district and feel compelled to promote the course. Not to slight the politicians (if I were in their shoes I would be doing the same thing) because it must be difficult to shut off the politician side of one's self when discussing a project that is dependant on play to generate revenue for the course. When you are on a soapbox, take full advantage of it. The problem arises when said people make statements so outrageous that their enthusiasm is mistaken for being out of their gourd. In all honestly, most people (at least those not in the golf industry) probably couldn't care less or even notice what is being said. They just know there's a new course in town and they want to try it out. From that point forward, market forces take over and golfers will select the course that best fits their needs and price range with the best conditions and customer service.

But I can't help but laugh to myself when they say their course will be one of the best in the country—right there with Pine Valley, Pebble Beach, and Augusta National. All of the spin in the world can't help a course that lacks in design, conditioning or aesthetics, but don't expect that to stop them any time soon.

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