

Observations from Oakmont

By: Nathan Grace Date: June 28, 2007

I have always wanted to attend the U.S. Open in person, follow the players, immerse myself in the history and aura that is the U.S. Open and come away with a better understanding of why it may be the toughest test of golf on the face of the planet. A first-hand experience like no other in golf and, after all, it's not that hard to get from Jackson, Mississippi to Pittsburgh with the help of the likes of Expedia and Travelocity.com. However, three children and a full-time job make it hard to slip off to Oakmont for a week. So I did the next best thing: I set up a "simulcast" of the U.S. Open on television and Google Earth—panning in and out, rotating the view, and getting an up close bird's eye view of the holes when and where I wanted to without having to wait for NBC's slick graphics. Interestingly, the satellite image Google Earth is currently using was shot during a renovation of the famous "church pew" bunkers—plainly evidenced by their lack of sand and sod in the photo. But I digress....

In the few intense hours of intense observation from the recliner of my living room ("She Who Must Be Obeyed" and the kids usually give me Father's Day afternoon to watch the Open anyway), I made the following observations from (or rather "of") the goings-on at Oakmont, which you may not have noticed....or even cared about. Herewith:

1. Rory Sabbatinni. Or the lack thereof. He got in his sound bite, calling Oakmont "Oakmonster," but for the most part we were spared his Napoleonesque insecurities and keen sense of comedic timing—or at least calling out Tiger again. Am I the only one who thinks Rory should be thanking Tiger for what Rory has? I'm sure Nike pays Rory a good bit more than room and board for wearing their apparel and playing their equipment. And even though he has won once this year and played well leading up to the Open, there would be no Nike Golf if not for Tiger Woods and Rory could be have just as easily be on the Top-Flite staff—no offense to Top Flite.

2. Phil Mickelson. He stopped short of all but blaming the maintenance industry for the injury to his wrist when he said that today's liquid fertilizers and equipment make the rough very thick and upright, leading to more chance for injury. It's golf, not a contact sport. Keep it in the fairway and the rough is not a factor—just ask Angel Cabrera. Then again, Phil's comments surely fell on deaf ears since I don't think there's any love loss for Phil from the superintendents of the world, especially since he's now a Callaway staff member and a lot of guys are still upset about Odyssey Golf's (a subsidiary of Callaway) portrayal of superintendents as scary, brooding characters "out to get golfers" with impossible pin placements at your home course. What goes around....

3. Tiger and Furyk. I thought it was odd they were laughing at the awards ceremony, but why be so tight-lipped about it? I personally don't care, but some in the media were beside themselves. One would assume that the media thought they were laughing at Cabrera for having to use a translator during the ceremony, but I don't think it was that juvenile. I think it was more the nervous energy of having come up short of a playoff after being soundly beaten about the head and shoulders by Oakmont and being able to do nothing more than laugh it off.

4. Tiger and Furyk, Part 2. Did you notice the irony in the fact that two of the slimmest guys on Tour (not to mention that Woods looks like a NFL linebacker) were beaten by a chronic chain-smoking ex-caddie? For all of the attention that has been given to the trend in physical fitness on Tour the past few years, El Pato's win must have had Tim Herron laughing all the way to the In-and-Out Burger. And for the 45 minutes Cabrerra spent waiting on the others to finish, he wasn't allowed to smoke in the clubhouse. He was pacing the floor like an expectant first time father in the waiting room.

5. Speaking of first time fathers, congratulations to Tiger Woods and family on the birth of baby Sam Alexis. Many wondered what Tiger would do if his wife went into labor during the Open. Instead, Elin waited until early Monday morning after the Open—talk about timing. Oddly, some online odds makers are already making lines on when Baby Woods will turn pro and join the LPGA Tour.