



# GARY GALYEAN'S GOLF LETTER®

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Dear Subscriber:

## **Le Touquet Rénové** Pas-de-Calais, France

**L**e Touquet [say: *two-kay*] is welcome anchorage from disparately confused and ignorant times. A 1931 Harry S. Colt design, La Mer at Le Touquet is one of the few linksland courses on mainland Europe. It is ranked thirteenth in France; seventh in northeastern France. It is sometimes described as the best linksland course in Europe because it winds between coastal dunes, there is strategic bunkering, scruffy grasses, and long views of the English Channel from elevated tees.

Located 45 miles south southwest, down la Manche, from Calais, it is a short trip via ferry from Dover or Chunnel from Folkstone then not quite an hour's drive down the French coast. La Mer course has recently undergone a restoration of four of its original holes (13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>) that were abandoned due to damage caused during the Second World War.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, two Englishmen bought and syndicated much of the land in this area with the goal of establishing a relaxed, convenient and stylish golf and gambling retreat easily accessed from southern England.

During much of the First World War, many wounded British soldiers were treated in Le Touquet at the Duchess of Westminster's Hospital. The Communal Cemetery there contains more than 100 British war graves.

Following the war, some of the so-called smart set were drawn to the French village including Noël Coward, H.G. Wells and P.G. Wodehouse. Mr. Wodehouse moved to Le Touquet in 1934 after settling income tax issues with both

the United States and Great Britain. He wrote prolifically in Le Touquet for six years prior to the German invasion and occupation. "I play nothing but golf," Mr. Wodehouse wrote to a friend. "Greatest game on earth. You must take it up. It beats everything else."

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, the British blew up Le Touquet's golf clubhouse, which they had built, because it was on a hill and would have become a command position for the Boche. "A real shame," those who knew it have said, "because it was a beautiful place to have a clubhouse." The Germans launched V-2 rockets at London from a mobile launchpad in La Mer's 12/13<sup>th</sup> fairway. "If you

look towards the sea you can still see the rampart that the rockets went up." While several British and European cities were targeted with the V-2, 1,358 exploded in London alone leaving an estimated 2,754 killed and 6,523 wounded.

As the German army moved toward Le Touquet, Mr. and Mrs. Wodehouse decided to evacuate, make their way to neutral Portugal, and from there to America. Two miles from home their car broke down and they were forced to return to Le Touquet. The following day, May 22, 1940, the German army occupied the town. Two months later the Germans interned all enemy males aged less than 60 years.

Mr. Wodehouse, 58 at the time, was moved from prison to prison, under harsh circumstances, during the following year. In June of 1941, he was released to Berlin's Hotel Aldon (at his own expense) and was tricked by the Germans into making five broadcasts. He titled them *How to be an Internee Without Previous Training*. Like most of his writing, the broadcasts were filled with funny

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observations, only this time about his ordeal as a prisoner of war. They were not found to be funny by his British audience, and he was ostracized as an enemy collaborator. Hurt and disillusioned, the Wodehouses moved to Long Island, New York, after the end of the war, never to return to England or Le Touquet again. All was eventually forgiven, and he was knighted in 1975. [See P.G. WODEHOUSE - A LIFE IN LETTERS edited by Sophie Ratcliffe, 2013.]

The 2017 restoration of the La Mer holes that were abandoned during and after the war was accomplished by Patrice Boissonnas and Frank Pont using aerial photographs taken during the 1930s.

Mr. Colt is considered by the cognoscenti to be among the three best golf course architects to have ever practiced that discipline. Another eccentric English architect who would certainly fall in the first tier, Tom Simpson, described Le Touquet's par-5 15<sup>th</sup> as one of the best he had ever seen. Mr. Simpson designed some of the most highly regarded European courses including Morfontaine, Fontainebleau and Royal Antwerp; he is also given credit for perfecting Pebble Beach's 18<sup>th</sup> hole.

We must add that a subscriber who is accomplished in both golf and tennis writes, "Tennis [at Le Touquet] is wonderful."

### **Augusta National Buys Augusta C.C.'s 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Holes Changes to *Azalea* Now Possible**

Augusta National G.C. has purchased neighboring Augusta C.C.'s 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> holes, according to an item in THE AUGUSTA CHRONICLE, Aug. 7, reported by Scott Michaux.

The significance of the land purchase to Augusta National is that it offers the option of lengthening, or otherwise altering, the Club's par-5 13<sup>th</sup> hole, which is currently 510 yards in length. The addition of the new property is estimated to make it possible to extend the hole by 50 or 60 yards. *Azalea*, as the 13<sup>th</sup> is named, was previously lengthened three times for a total of 32 yards. Regardless, it remains one of the shorter par-5s in major championship golf.

The land sale encompasses property on both sides of Rae's Creek and completes, as the newspaper story states, "the last piece of [Augusta National's] border ..." Augusta Country Club has confirmed the sale.

In addition to being lengthened in the past, the 13<sup>th</sup> was strategically altered by an ice storm three years ago. Some of the taller pines that guard the left side of the hole were damaged or destroyed, making it possible for

the world's best and most audacious players to cut the corner. Years ago, Sam Snead and Fuzzy Zoeller were playing a practice round. On the 13<sup>th</sup> tee, Mr. Zoeller teed his ball and appeared to be playing straight away to the corner of the fairway. Mr. Snead commented that in his heyday he and his friends did not hesitate to drive over the trees at the corner in order to gain an advantage. Mr. Zoeller took the challenge and struck his drive on a line over the corner where it caught the top of one of the pines. Confused, Mr. Zoeller looked at Mr. Snead in dismay. Mr. Snead chortled, "In our day those trees weren't as tall as they are now."

Augusta National Chairman Billy Payne states repeatedly that the Club constantly evaluates what changes may be needed in the future to maintain the course's challenge in light of higher levels of player and equipment performance.

[NOTE: With regard to this same issue, it has been speculated that The R&A set Royal Birkdale in its traditional Open fashion last July realizing that scoring might be low and, thereby, intentionally provoking the question of length obsoleting the game's finest championship courses. When Branden Grace shot his recording-breaking 62 in this year's third round:

- The longest club he used to approach any of the par 4s was a-7 iron;
- He used a 9-iron or less in approaching ten greens;
- He played the 470-yard 18<sup>th</sup> with a drive and a wedge (165 yards) that finished over the green.

Addressing this important issue is especially poignant for The R&A as they anticipate the Open's return to St. Andrews for the championship's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021. If accurate, we applaud The R&A's leadership.]

With the sale of its 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> holes, Augusta C.C. will obviously have to build two replacement holes and their design is already underway. Augusta National will, according to reports, cover the cost of constructing the new holes.

It is historically ironic that Augusta C.C., a Donald Ross design, adjoins Augusta National, an Alister Mackenzie design. It was presumed through the late 1920s, by the principals and others, that then-famous Bobby Jones would select fellow southern resident Mr. Ross to design Augusta National. However, during the 1929 U.S. Amateur [Pebble Beach] Mr. Jones, the defending champion and the medalist, was eliminated in the first round of match play by Johnny Goodman. With time on his hands, Mr. Jones played Pasatiempo and saw the newly emerging Cypress Point. His mind was changed, and Mr. Mackenzie was ultimately chosen for the work

at Augusta National rather than Mr. Ross. The story is told that Mr. Ross was quite unhappy about the decision. Augusta C.C. has undergone changes since it was first formed, as the Bon Air G.C. in 1899, and it is now listed as a Donald Ross design.

### **Augusta Chairman, Billy Payne, to Retire Fred Ridley, Competition Chair, to Succeed**

Billy Payne, 69, has announced his retirement as chairman of Augusta National and the Masters Tournament. The strength of his leadership, verbal dexterity, and accomplishments since entering the office in May 2006 have been notable.

Finding his successor was always going to be difficult.

Fred Ridley, 65, has been chosen as the seventh Chairman of the Club and Tournament and will assume his responsibilities next month.

Mr. Ridley's background in the game and at Augusta were, of course, important factors in his selection. He was the 1975 U.S. Amateur champion, and as such, played in the 1976 Masters Tournament. He will be the only club chairman to have ever played in the tournament. He is also the last U.S. Amateur champion to have *not* turned professional. He was president of the U.S.G.A. during 2004 and 2005.

Since 2007, Mr. Ridley has served as chairman of the Competition Committees for the Masters. During the 2013 Masters, he was embroiled in the awkward mishandling of Tiger Woods' Rules penalties during Friday's second round, which led to a rather overarching position by the Club. You may remember:

Mr. Woods' third stroke to the 15<sup>th</sup> green struck the flagstick and was deflected at an angle into the water hazard that guards the front of that green.

Rocked by his misfortune, Mr. Woods lost his Rules focus, dropped a ball six feet behind the spot from which his third stroke was played, and then played his fifth (sic) to the green. All of this was video taped and could be easily reviewed.

In selecting to play again from the original point of his third stroke, Mr. Woods was required to play *as nearly as possible* to that point. When he played from six feet behind that original point he breached Rule 26. However,

Mr. Woods still had four holes to play, which gave the Committee plenty of time to review the video and rule correctly ... but they did not.

Mr. Woods was neither interviewed nor penalized by the Committee before he returned his scorecard. Under Rule 6, the penalty for returning a score for any hole lower than actually taken is disqualification. However, the Masters Competition Committee, in an excruciating, written statement from Mr. Ridley, as chairman, stated that "the penalty of disqualification was waived by the Committee under Rule 33 as the Committee had previously reviewed the in-

formation and made its determination prior to the finish of the player's round".

We re-hash all of this to remind you of Mr. Ridley's history in these matters. It can only be surmised that his experience in the center of the 2013 Rules debacle

will serve him well, as incoming chairman, in making certain that something like it does not happen again.

### **Questions from the 2017 P.G.A. Championship Was Quail Hollow a Doltish Bore?**

- Why would a major championship ever be played on a course that was renovated just 15 months earlier?
- Was it anticipated that greens stimping at 14 [unconfirmed], four inch rough, greens that pitched off each side and the backs, multiple water hazards, and 7,440 yards would produce a compelling, rather than boring, championship?
- Did the exaggerated difficulty of Quail Hollow eliminate the art of shotmaking, as suggested by golf writer Alexi Miceli?
- Is Quail Hollow acceptable as an annual tour stop but unacceptable as a major venue, as suggested by THE FRIED EGG golf blog?
- Was the sobriquet for Quail Hollow's three closing holes - "The Green Mile" - seriously supposed to be an emulation of Augusta National's "Amen Corner"? Is it one of golf's worst nicknames (because it is really just  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile) as suggested by golf writer Gary Van Sickle? Or, is it one of the worst because it suggests a walk to execution rather than an *amen* of thanks at having made it through a difficult test?



One factor that will overrule most of the observations and acrimony from the press who were unimpressed by Quail Hollow was the success in the sale of hospitality tents. This factor alone will probably tip the scales for a return engagement. In the years that separate 2017 from that return, perhaps Quail Hollow will have time to polish and better define how it presents itself for major championship golf.

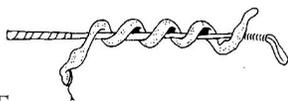
### **Shinnecock Reconsidered Post-U.S. Open and Thomas and Fowler's Easiest 65s**

As suggested in our June issue, as disastrous as the Erin Hills U.S. Open setup was, the greater calamity will come in 2018 if a similar wider fairway setup is applied to Shinnecock Hills. We wrote:

*While easing of the U.S. Open test at Erin Hills resulting in the setting of many new records, it will be next year at Shinnecock Hills where records will be shamelessly broken. [Mike] Davis, who controls the U.S. Open setup, has already added 500 yards, which will mean nothing to the distance-enhanced professional field that can reach 675-yards holes with two 3-woods. More degrading to the U.S. Open test is that Mr. Davis is already widening Shinnecock's fairways.*

With regard to the fairway widening, there are two items to report:

- a. Post-Erin Hills, Mr. Davis visited Shinnecock and reversed his earlier decision to widen the fairways.
- b. Justin Thomas and Rickie Fowler played a damp Shinnecock a few weeks ago and scored "the easiest 65s



For W.C.T.:

*Jeeve's bracer does not contain dynamite as is generally supposed. It consists of lime juice, a lump of sugar and one teaspoonful of Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo. This, it will be remembered, is the amount of the Buck-U-Up given to elephants in India to enable them to face tigers on tiger hunts with the necessary nonchalance.*

P.G. Wodehouse

In a letter to Godfrey Smith, editor of the  
SUNDAY TIMES magazine.

ever", according to Mr. Thomas. "But you can see where they are going to narrow the fairways down." In a GOLF DIGEST story, Mr. Thomas said he talked with Mr. Davis warning him not to make the setup too brutal.

It must be added, as one of our readers wrote after Erin Hills, that the traditional U.S. Open setup was always intended to make fear a factor. At Erin Hills the level of fear was not palpable, not a factor. Will Mr. Davis return to the traditional U.S. Open setup in 2018, or will he kow-tow to the directions of the players?

### **Streamsong BLACK to Open Sept. 29 Wide Scale, Undulating and Long**

Streamsong Resort in central Florida [see THE GOLF LETTER, NOV. 2014] will open its much-touted Black Course on Sept. 29. Designed by Gil Hanse, it is a course of wide scale - located on a 250-acre parcel within the Mosaic Company's vast, depleted phosphate mine 90 miles from Orlando Airport - estimated at 7,566 yards in length and 73 strokes for par.

Five par 5s - including one at 640 yards - balanced by four pars 3s account for both the extraordinary length and par. Early photographs are attractive and it will undoubtedly appeal to those who find the resort's Red and Blue Courses compelling. This is not cozy or scaled golf. The Black Course will be (or can be) a strong test. The shaping and bunkering are accomplished and the Celebration Bermuda playing surfaces and MiniVerde Ultradwarf Bermuda putting surfaces will offer the finest for this climate.

The opening of the third course makes Streamsong an obvious contender should they seek a U.S.G.A. championship that requires two courses.

Yours vly truly,

Gary A. Galyean  
Editor & Publisher

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