

Golf Historical Society



Tiger Pines

by J.I.B. Jones

In mid-June, I took the Surfliner down the coast from Los Angeles to Torrey Pines, for the 108th US Open, having had the honor of helping with the research for an article in the official 2008 US Open Program. The USGA Museum's Pete Georgiady wrote a piece on public golf on the west coast, that led with my story of Babe Ruth signing his Yankee contract while playing golf at Griffith Park's original Municipal #1 Sand course. As you might expect, the most memorable Rancho Park moment, as chosen by the editors, was Arnold Palmer's 12 at the 1961 LA Open. Nevertheless, I'm pleased to have my name in print as the Rancho Park Golf Club historian. Thanks to everybody in the club for being a part of it, and to Rec & Park's Golf Division for recommending me to Pete!

Beginning on Tuesday, I stayed in Rancho Santa Fe and was able to take the volunteer shuttle to Torrey all week, with no hassle. The USGA's organization was spectacular, and no matter what the armchair golf architects think about Torrey Pines' value as a course, Riviera could never host a US Open like this one! Well, I guess they could if they closed Brentwood, and maybe Bel-Air, and filled them with tents, and shuttled people by helicopter like they do at Grand Prix races!

Unfortunately, the USGA didn't have time to do any historical research on Torrey Pines. In fact, in their display of future US Open venues -- in the American Express tent -- they wrongly credited Chandler Egan with changing the 18th at Pebble Beach into a par 5. We at Rancho, and Neal Hotelling (the official historian of Pebble Beach), know that it was Rancho's own W. Herbert Fowler who made the changes in 1921; the same year he finished the original Rancho-Ambassador course, and the Los Angeles Country Club's North and South courses.

As is my custom, I told everyone that I met, about Torrey's history, even though they were mostly interested in a certain golfer from Cypress, California...



Camp Callan - Torrey Pines South during WW II

For the record, Torrey Pines was given to San Diego in 1908 by Ellen Scripps, the most amazing philanthropist California has ever known. Miss Scripps, along with her sister Virginia, bought every acre of Torrey Pines to stop development, and then donated it to the City of San Diego to be protected and used as a public park. During World War II it became Camp Callan, the Coast Artillery Corps base, then a Sports Car Club of America race track, and then finally the Torrey Pines golf courses.



Billy Bell and his son Billy Jr.

William P. "Billy" Bell - who designed, co-designed or constructed the majority of the great California golden era golf courses before his untimely death from a heart attack in 1953, had the original vision for Torrey Pines. His equally prolific and brilliant son William F. Bell (Billy Jr.) made his father's vision a reality by completing the designs of both Torrey Pines courses.



Camp Callan Postcard - Torrey Pines South during WW II

Billy Jr. shaped the mostly flat landscape into the rolling land of the Torrey Pines we know today, by using the acres of asphalt roads, parade grounds, and even the foundations of the camp buildings, piling the rubble to shape the golf course. Truly a pair of genius' at work!

Torrey Pines' South Course opened in June 1957 with an exhibition that included 1934 Rancho professional and U.S. Open champion Ralph Guldahl.

In 1972 David Rainville and Billy Casper did a major remodeling job which included recontouring the greens. More recently, Rees Jones improved the course tenfold in preparation for the 2008 US Open. The local club golfers I met over the week were amazed at how beautiful Rees had made their course.

Maybe we can use Hillcrest for the extra tents and host the US Open in 2024 at Rancho!



Jones during U.S. Open practice at Torrey Pines

Back to the 108th US Open.

The rough during the practice rounds was all anybody needed to see to know that hitting fairways was going to be the name of the game in this Open. Unlike the Master's, getting up and down wasn't the hard part: being in the fairway was paramount. Even the short rough made hitting the green unlikely and a bogey likely. Many players seemed to be caught off guard by the fluffy sand traps and the slowness of the greens the first couple of days compared to expectations.



Sergio Garcia didn't get this one (or the next two shots), out of the second cut on hole 14 on Wednesday.

The USGA's scoring prediction was right on. They got what they wanted and the spectators and TV viewers were treated to some brilliant golf. Even the best drivers of the ball ended up in the rough and paid the price. How Tiger won while missing so many fairways says volumes about the quality of his short game. Even though we always go on about his awe-inspiring swing, he really is also as good as the best putter who has ever lived -- and his drive to win is unequalled.

There were many highlights of my week, including seeing former SCGA President Ed Holmes scouting the course for the TV announcers and meeting up with Ted Horton (CGCOA), Kevin Heaney (SCGA), Craig Kessler (PLGA) and USGA President Jim Vernon and his assistant Ashleigh on the North Course, away from the action, for a photo shoot celebrating Golf Week in California.

The most impressive feat of the event, without a doubt, were the thousands of volunteers who came from all over America and across the world to work for their clubs and charities, helping to raise millions for the community.

I was so lucky to have been a part of the 108th US Open, and I did it while wearing our Rancho Park logos in full view on the various shirts and visors I wore all week.

Next up for us in California; Pebble Beach 2010.

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