



# Stretched to the Limit

By Ron  
Whitten

How  
Olympia  
Fields  
remade  
itself for its  
first Open  
in 75 years

IT HAS TAKEN 75 YEARS FOR THE U.S. OPEN TO make it back to Olympia Fields, returning to the course where Bobby Jones once lost an Open playoff. It may be a symbolic step back in time for the U.S. Golf Association's national championship, but it'll be a bunch of real steps back for this year's players.

And that's just to reach the tee markers on Olympia Field's North Course. On nearly every hole after the first, players leaving a green must walk back a long distance to the next tee. From the 11th green, it's a moon-walk shuffle of 125 yards to the 12th tee. After the 13th green, it's a left turn around a fence corner and down a narrow alley of trees another 125 yards to the 14th tee, where players will turn around and drive it back up the alley.

New back tees were installed on the North Course in every nook and cranny—against parking lots, entry roads and boundary fences—to stretch the par-70 layout south of Chicago to a mighty 7,190 yards. These are the extremes a club must undertake these days to gain the distance necessary for a U.S. Open.

Backward hikes aside, this layout isn't a

**At 467 yards long and 25 yards wide, the 11th is typical of the elastic par 4s at Olympia Fields.**

Photographs by Stephen Szurlej

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The 460-yard 18th plays into the prevailing wind, meaning long iron approach shots for some in the field.

## Willie Park Jr. immodestly declared his 1922 design 'the equal of any I have ever seen.'

particularly strenuous walk, especially compared to the hilly seven-mile trek that was Bethpage Black in 2002. The North is spread over three plateaus, helping 40-somethings keep pace with kids half their age—provided they avoid the 3½-inch rough and keep it in fairways averaging just 25 yards wide. And provided they manage to hole some putts on the tilted, canted greens, the grandest feature of a course that is ranked 24th among Golf Digest's 100 Greatest.

The tricky putting surfaces, with lots of slopes and subtle pockets, will be mowed at the start of the week to run at 12 on the Stimpmeter. All but four of the greens are originals of golf architect Willie Park Jr., a two-time British Open champion who designed the course in 1922, then immodestly declared it "the equal of any golf course I have ever seen. I know of none that is superior, either in beauty or natural terrain."

When the club opened the course in July 1923 (calling it Course No. 4 back then), Olympia Fields Country Club became the largest golf complex in the world. With 72 holes over 674 acres, it featured nine holes more than Pinehurst at that time and 18 more than St. Andrews. Its size was undoubtedly the inspiration for the "people's country club," the four-course complex of Bethpage State Park, built by the state of New York in the mid-1930s.

### A city within a club

Olympia Fields epitomized the Roaring Twenties. It had 1,200 members, including 200 female players. Its \$1.3 million stucco clubhouse, with its landmark 80-foot-high clock tower, covered 5½ acres, had barber, beauty and tailor shops; a laundry; a nurse's station; a massage parlor and 79 separate living rooms. There was a bird-

and game-preservation area within the club's boundaries, as well as a volunteer fire department and the club's own post office and train station.

That station still exists, though on property long since sold. But the stop will allow club officials, fans and perhaps even some players to approach this year's Open just as it was done 75 years ago. They can board a commuter train in the Chicago Loop, ride southwest for about 40 minutes and exit virtually onto the grounds of Olympia Fields. Gridlock? Road rage? Not for this U.S. Open. Not as long as the railroad keeps running.

In its heyday, Olympia Fields was indeed Olympic, but size matters most in the pocketbook, and by 1944 the club was so deeply in debt that it sold land to the southeast containing two courses. That area is now a middle-class neighborhood

The logo for the 2003 U.S. Open, featuring the number '03' in blue, 'US' in red, and 'open' in red below it, all within a white rectangular border.

The only pond on the course will swallow some second shots on the 496-yard, par-4 ninth hole.

of ranch-style houses with redwood decks. A few reminders of Courses 1 and 3 remained for decades, but the last backyard bunker was filled by a homeowner a few years ago. Holes from Course 1, combined with a few from No. 2, form the present South Course. The club wisely preserved its No. 4 Course, which it re-named the North.

In 1922 Park's construction superin-

tendent on the North was a fellow named, believe it or not, Freddie Kruger, but the North Course was never anyone's nightmare. Instead, it was immediately embraced as a genuine championship test. It was the site of the 1925 PGA Championship, one of Walter Hagen's four titles in a row, and the 1928 U.S. Open, when Jones lost to Johnny Farrell by a shot in a 36-hole playoff. It was the

site of Jerry Barber's playoff win in the 1961 PGA, a Jack Nicklaus victory in the 1968 Western Open and the 1997 U.S. Senior Open. It was before that last event that the club hired Massachusetts golf architect Mark Mungeam to revamp the North Course. Starting in 1992, Mungeam re-established the dimensions of Park's old greens (which reclaimed vital hole locations), added tees and re-



built all the bunkers. When Olympia Fields held its own at the '97 Senior Open, with winner Graham Marsh finishing even par, the USGA awarded the club its main event, the U.S. Open, telling officials to add distance and "do something about those bunkers."

"We took that to mean the bunkers needed to be deeper and more penal," Mungeam said about his second revamping of the course, in 1999. "So that's what we did. The course is definitely more difficult and dramatic looking."

The North's fairway bunkers are now waist deep or deeper. Bunker faces are steeper, and facing mounds are higher, so visits to the sand may well be half-shot penalties. Greenside bunkers also were dug deeper, and bunker lips were reshaped and flared. Typical are those on the 13th. The top edges of the surrounding bunkers rise above the surface of the green, an old-fashioned look that masks the fact that No. 15 is an entirely new golf hole created by Mungeam in 1995.

In 1999 Mungeam added more back trees, rebuilt two greens and removed a few trees, including a controversial willow right of the eighth fairway that blocked the view of the creek in the right rough. Butterfield Creek is now clearly in play off the tee, but it's more a hindrance to spectators than a hazard to golfers. It girdles the far rough of several holes, but at every spot where it crosses a fairway, it's always well short of a green and thus in play only for those who scuff one out of deep rough. (The only pond on the course is short and right of the ninth green.) Still, the creek creates so many gallery bottlenecks on the course's closing nine that the USGA chose to reverse the nines for the Open. . . . Well, almost. The first and 10th will remain the same, but the rest of the nines will be flipped, so the second becomes the 11th for the Open, the 11th will be the second, and so on (see the accompanying *Veteran's Guide*).

"I'll take the credit or blame for this routing," says Mike Davis, championship director for the U.S. Open. "Pure and sim-

## Olympia Fields was expanded by 350 yards for the Open.



The back tee on the 576-yard first offers curbside convenience.

### WILDCARD

#### Tiger and his chasers

Tiger Woods failed to finish in the top 15 in his first four U.S. Opens (twice as an amateur), but after his 15-stroke victory at Pebble Beach in 2000 and a three-stroke victory last year at Bethpage, he'll come to Olympia Fields as the prohibitive favorite. Here's Woods' eight-year Open record:

1995	WD (74, hand injury)
1996	T82 (76-69-77-72—294)
1997	T19 (74-67-73-72—286)
1998	T18 (74-72-71-73—290)
1999	T3 (68-71-72-70—261)
2000	1 (65-69-71-67—272)
2001	T12 (74-71-69-69—283)
2002	1 (67-68-70-72—277)

#### Closest challengers

Woods' nearest competition should come from the usual suspects: two-time Open winner Ernie Els, Sergio Garcia, Phil Mickelson, Retief Goosen, Padraig Harrington, Daves Love III, Colin Montgomerie, Vijay Singh and David Tom.

#### Also exempt

Robert Allenby, Stuart Appleby, Ricky Barnes, Rich Beem, Thomas Bjorn, Tom Byrum, Angel Cabrera, Michael Campbell, K.J. Choi, Darren Clarke, John Cook, Chris DiMarco, David Duval, Bob Estes, Nick Faldo, Nicolas Faeh, Brad Faxon, Fred Funk, Jim Furyk, Jay Haas, Dudley Hart, Scott Hoch, Charles Howell II, Trevor Immelman, Toshi Izawa, Lee Janzen, Steve Jones, Jimmy Kelly, Bernhard Langer, Paul Lawrie.

Stephen Looney, Justin Leonard, Peter Lonard, Steve Lowery, Scott McCarron, Jeff Maggert, Shigeo Maruyama, Len Martucci, Billy Mayfair, Rocco Mediate, Jose Maria Olazabal, Peter O'Malley, Mark O'Meara, Craig Parry, Corey Pavin, Kenny Perry, Don Pooley, Nick Price, Chris Riley, Loren Roberts, John Rollins, Eduardo Romero, Justin Rose, Adam Scott, Jeff Sluman, Toru Taniguchi, Scott Verplank and Mike Weir.

NOTE: In addition, exemptions will be awarded to the top 10 money-leaders (not otherwise exempt) on the PGA Tour through May 24; multiple PGA Tour winners through June 1; the top two money-leaders on the PGA European Tour through May 24; and the top 50 on the World Ranking through May 26. Local qualifiers advance to sectional qualifying at 12 sites June 2-3 to determine the remainder of the field.



The giant potato chip of a green on the 164-yard fourth definitely has ridges.

ple, it deals with the logistics of handling spectators.”

**A big finish**

The routing turns the ninth hole into the 18th, because it has plenty of room for bleachers around its green, and the normal 18th, ringed by ancient trees, does not. The Open’s 18th is a 460-yard par 4, with its landing area narrowed drastically by bunkers and its green complicated by a distinct dip in the center.

The rearrangement causes a certain imbalance for the championship. The first hole is a par 5, and so is the sixth, the last par 5 on the course. (That’s not an Open record—Merion East’s only par 5s are its second and fourth.) The routing closes with two par 3s among the

last four holes, one of them the 247-yard 17th. Before that, players will face some big par 4s and some short but dangerous ones: the 397-yard 13th, with a blind tee shot, and the 414-yard 14th, with out-of-bounds along the left. Of course, because play will start on both the first and 10th tees during the first two rounds, half the field each day will be playing the course as it was originally designed, more or less.

The Open routing poses one particularly awkward walk between holes. Leaving the 10th, players must loop around the 18th tee, the second tee and first green before reaching the 11th tee 150 yards away. What’s more, the forward tee on No. 2 will be used as the back tee on 18, so at times players may be preparing

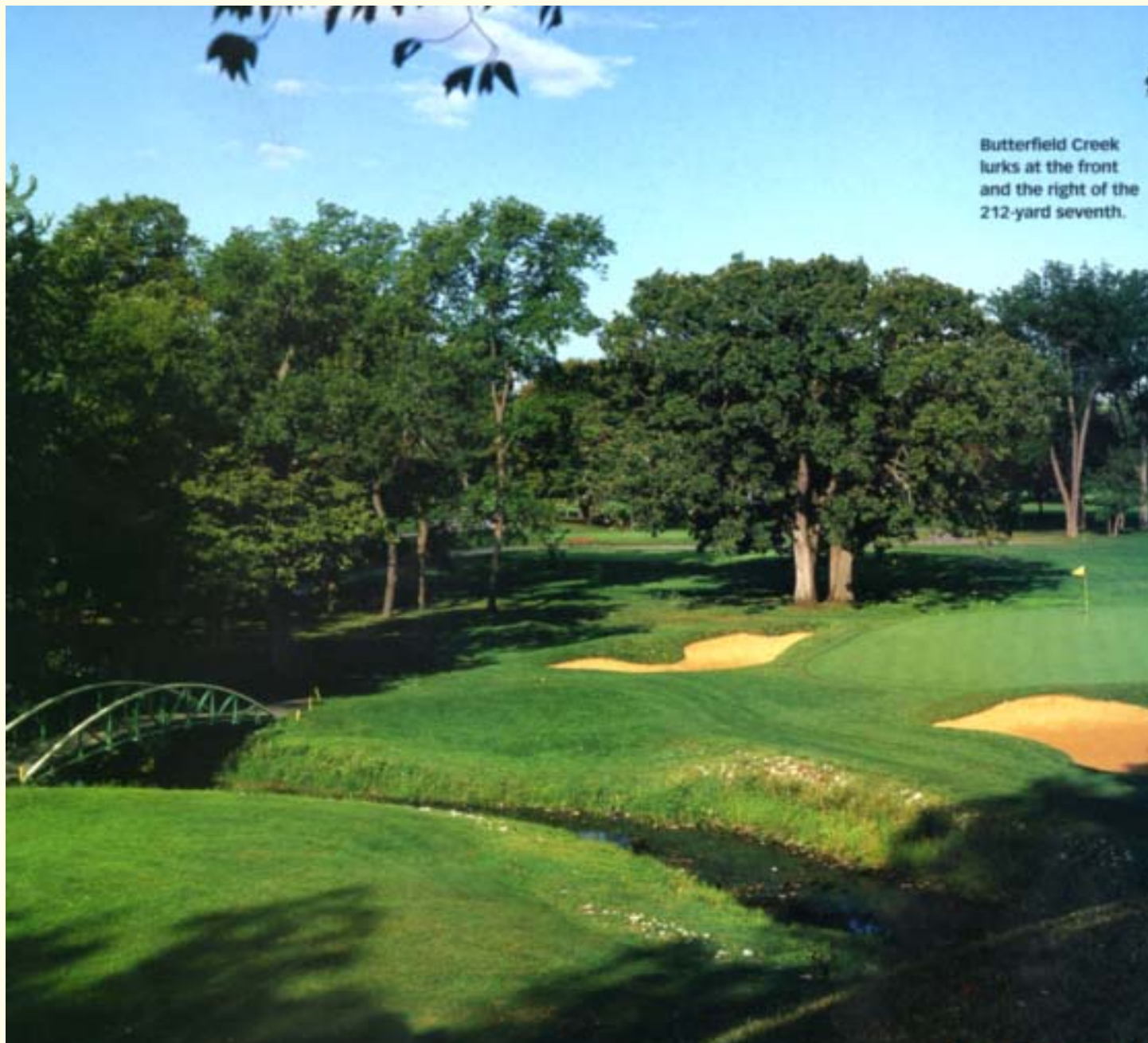
to hit in two different directions from the same tee complex while others are trying to get around it. It may take a traffic cop to sort it all out.

This will be the 13th Open to be contested in greater Chicago, the first since 1990 and just the fourth since 1949. Olympia Fields may not have been the obvious Windy City choice, given its relative obscurity compared to Medinah No. 3 and Cog Hill No. 4, but USGA officials seem to enjoy introducing players and fans to championship venues from the distant past. They did it with Shinnecock Hills in 1986, with Pinehurst No. 2 four years ago and with Bethpage Black last year. This year a lengthened and strengthened Olympia Fields North will fill the role of rediscovered classic quite nicely.



**OPEN THE FOLDOUT FOR THE U.S. OPEN VIEWERS’ GUIDE**

Butterfield Creek lurks at the front and the right of the 212-yard seventh.



## Making His Mark as an Architect

**N**OW AGE 41, MARK MUNGEAM WAS JUST FOUR YEARS out of Worcester (Mass.) Polytechnic Institute, working on construction in Pinehurst, N.C., when he met course designer Rees Jones. Mungeam told Jones he hoped to become a golf architect. Jones told Mungeam (pronounced Mun-jum) he first needed to change his name. Mungeam passed on

the advice, but 15 years later he has made a name for himself in much the way Jones did, as an "Open Doctor." Olympia Fields is the second Open on Mungeam's résumé. He also reworked The Broadmoor East in Colorado before the 1995 U.S. Women's Open. His original designs include Cyprian Keyes and LeBaron Hills in Massachusetts and Charleston Springs in New Jersey.



10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	In	Out	Total
4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	34	36	70
444	467	458	397	414	187	451	247	460	3,525	3,665	7,190

MUNGEAM: DAVID CARMACK