

Memory courses

Walker Cup at Quaker Ridge, PGA Championship at Winged Foot revive thoughts of famed designer A.W. Tillinghast

By Rick Remsnyder
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Golf course architect A.W. Tillinghast, whose glorious career included designing Winged Foot and Quaker Ridge, died broke and largely forgotten by the golf world in 1942.

With the Walker Cup at Quaker Ridge yesterday and today, and the PGA Championship at neighboring Winged Foot this coming week, Tillinghast's memory is revived as two of his most famous works are on display in nationally televised events.

Known as "Tillie the Terror" in his prime, Tillinghast enjoyed a successful career in golf course design until the Great Depression, when a series of ill-advised investments left him nearly a pauper. After a number of ventures failed, so did his health and he was soon forgotten.

Until Quaker Ridge opted to host the Walker Cup, it was known as one of the nation's best unknown courses. At the conclusion of the 1974 U.S. Open at Winged Foot, Jack Nicklaus was asked if he thought Winged Foot was the best golf course in the world. He replied: "It may be, but let me tell you, there is quite a golf course down the street."

Nicklaus was referring to Quaker Ridge, a golf course that former PGA Championship winner Paul Runyan called "the greatest golf course in the world."

Darrell Kestner, the 1996 PGA Club Professional national champion from Long Island's Deepdale Golf Club, will be competing in the upcoming PGA Championship. He thinks both Quaker Ridge and Winged Foot stack up with the best golf courses in the world.

"They're both classics and they're both beauties," Kestner said. "They're tough but fair, and there's not much more you could ask for than that."

Quaker Ridge began as a nine-hole golf course designed by John Duncan Dunn in 1915. A small group of members organized Quaker Ridge Golf Club in

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1916, purchased the land and hired Tillinghast to expand the existing golf course to 18 holes.

Tillinghast built 11 new holes and radically revised seven old ones. The new 18-hole course opened for play in 1918 and is now regarded as a Tillinghast original. It is considered "Tillie's hidden treasure" because it has remained relatively unknown, because it hosted no major events before this weekend's Walker Cup.

Ranked No. 23 by Golf Digest in its latest listing of the top 100 golf courses in America, Quaker Ridge has many of the same characteristics as Winged Foot. With nearly every hole lined by trees and the greens lightning fast and cleverly bunkered in the Tillinghast style, Quaker Ridge is a course that demands precise positioning on every shot.

The par-70 course, which measures about 6,800 yards, has one tough par-4 after another. The par-4s are long and require accurate approaches to the correct spots on the putting surfaces.

Greens at Quaker Ridge and Winged Foot usually have openings in the front to run the ball onto the green. Each green is well-bunkered to catch errant approaches.

Quaker Ridge pro Rick Vershure said it is impossible to select one memorable hole.



Countdown to the PGA

The PGA Championship will be held at Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck from Aug. 14 to 17. It is the first major PGA golf championship in Westchester County since the 1984 U.S. Open and the first PGA Championship here since 1923.

"There is not one signature hole at Quaker Ridge," he said. "There are 18 signature holes."

When Tillinghast was approached in 1921 by the founders of Winged Foot, they knew of his outstanding work at Quaker Ridge and at Baltusrol Golf Club in New Jersey. Tillinghast heard the founders say: "Give us a man-sized course."

He responded by giving Winged Foot two magnificent tests, the West Course and the East Course. The West is nearly 300 yards longer and considered a little more difficult than the East. The West has been the site for four U.S. Opens (1929, 1959, 1974 and 1984), the 1940 U.S. Amateur and the 1949 Walker Cup.

The West is ranked No. 6 in the nation by Golf Digest while the East is No. 36. The East has held two U.S. Women's Open Championships in 1957 and 1972 and the inaugural U.S. Senior Open in 1980. The West will measure 6,987 yards for the PGA Championship and play to a par of 70. The 190-yard par-3 10th is Winged Foot's signature hole, and Tillinghast considered it to be the finest par-3 he ever designed. The 448-yard par-4 18th is one of the finest finishing holes in golf.

Noted golf course architect Tom Fazio said Winged Foot's sloping greens and deep bunkers are among the best in the world.

"Greens such as Winged Foot's are not only artistic in their design, but in the form of construction they represent," he said. "Winged Foot's bunkers are descended from the links of Scotland."

The world's best amateurs and the world's best professionals are hoping for their best performances at Quaker Ridge and Winged Foot.

But no matter how they fare, it will be difficult to top the work already done there by A.W. Tillinghast more than three-quarters of a century ago.