DOAK'S DIARY

July
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2004

Yesterday I played golf at Crystal Downs with Ian Baker-Finch and with Fred Muller, the club professional. Everyone knows that Ian has retired from competitive golf, but in a casual round he still looks the part of an Open champion. On his first round at Crystal Downs he shot an effortless 71 that could have been much lower; I think he missed six or seven putts inside twenty feet along the way, because it was just a friendly game and he wasn't trying too hard. The most instructive part of the day for me was to see how a modern Tour pro would approach the great collection of short par-4's at Crystal Downs. The Downs has four imaginative and terrific par-4's of under 355 yards -- holes 5, 7, 15 and 17. On all four holes, the most generous landing area for tee shots is about 200-220 yards out, while the 260 mark is generally an awkward spot, encouraging the scratch player to lay back and match wits with his opponent from 100 yards in. Well, on three of those four holes, Ian just smacked a driver out there to try and get as close to the green as possible. He never thought about that awkwardness at the 260 mark; he was thinking about getting up by the green in one, which is a tremendous advantage over mere mortals. At the seventh he carried the cross-bunkers short of the green, but his ball stayed in the rough on the upslope; he might have come back into the bunker, but from where he was he pitched to about ten feet from the back hole location. At fifteen, Ian's drive was about fifty yards from the green in the left rough, and again he pitched to ten feet, this time holing for a three. At the famous seventeenth, his drive landed into the upslope about ten yards short of the green and stopped cold, and though he missed his putt for birdie the hole held no fear for him. Watching this performance made me think more than ever about the widening gap between the pros and the rest of us. I've always believed that short par-4 holes are the great equalizers for the handicap player -- along with par-3's, really the only holes where the handicap player can compete on a level playing field with the greats. But we are approaching the day that these holes become obsolete, if they can all be overpowered with a driver. Anything under 360 yards is a driver for Tour players, and anything above 400 yards is two woods for the senior golfer. Today's Tour pros are as different from us, as the average man is different from the average woman. Architects since C.B. Macdonald have begged the ruling bodies of the

game to control the improvement of golfing equipment, and particularly the golf ball, and I am not beyond hope that something will be done someday. In the meantime, I hope I am not too affected by watching a great player like Ian go about his business. Because golf isn't really about those guys; it's about you and me and the millions of others who hit the ball less consistently and go out there to enjoy the game.

June 16, 2004

This was a pretty big day. Spent the morning walking around the site at Sebonack GC with Jack Nicklaus; had a press conference and groundbreaking attended by more than 200 people, including many golf writers bused over from the U.S. Open; and after dinner, went over to Shinnecock to be interviewed on The Golf Channel as part of their Open preview coverage. After 22 years in the dirt on construction sites, the role of celebrity is pretty strange to me, but today was a kick. The walk-through at Sebonack in the morning was all business. Jack arrived about nine o'clock last night, but we really didn't start discussing the specifics of the golf course until this morning, walking through the current routing from 7:30 to 12:30 and discussing options hole by hole. It was a power walk-through if there ever was one. Jim Lipe and Kurt Bowman were there from Nicklaus Design, along with Jim Urbina and Sara Mess from my company; Michael Pascucci and the golf course superintendent Garret Bodington; Ron Whitten from GOLF DIGEST and my friend Masa Nishijima from JAPAN GOLF MAGAZINE who both wanted to observe the historic day; plus a TV crew from Michael's television station who are making a record of the golf course design process from start to finish. The toughest part of working with Jack may be in dealing with all of the well-intended suggestions from third parties who just want to follow us around. (As my own crew will tell you, sometimes I have to walk back away from them so I can think about what I'm seeing without distraction.) We must have discussed fifty possible changes to the routing, but by the end of the day we were back to a handful that made the most sense. We've decided to lengthen the short par-4 sixth hole by putting the green across a valley, and shorten the par-4 seventh a bit so that the water will come into play on both tee shot and approach. We're going to move the ninth fairway slightly to the right to make room for those other changes, and try to avoid playing the second shot along a crowned

fairway which Jack didn't like. We are considering shifting the eleventh green to the left to leave an alternate tee for the twelfth playing right on the edge of the bay; and we will push the sixteenth green back a bit to take advantage of a natural hollow which we had missed on the topo map. We spent the most time discussing the finishing hole, which was ironic because both Jack and I were happy with it; the only one who isn't comfortable with it is the guy who's paying our fees, Mr. Pascucci. The hole plays downwind along the bluff from a dramatic elevated tee, 495 yards as drawn. Michael felt this would be too difficult of a finishing hole for the average member, so we volunteered that it could easily be a par five; but then, Michael is concerned that it will be too EASY for a finisher. Michael would prefer that we get the hole up to about 550 yards, so that it's a three-shot hole for the members and very challenging for the pros to reach in two. But to do that means compromising the ideal location for the first green. We tabled the discussion for the time being, but it will be interesting to see how it resolves itself in the finished product. It was really the only golf hole which Michael had an adamant opinion about. The press conference was great fun, much more so than I had imagined it would be. Michael, Jack and I made short statements and then answered questions from the assembled media. But the capper was Michael's choice of keynote speakers, Rabbi Marc Gelman and Father Tom Fitzgerald ... Michael's TV station produces their "God Squad" show which is syndicated nationally. Rabbi Gelman started right in by addressing both Jack and me, saying that he knew some people were skeptical that two designers with different styles and different ways of doing business could work together, but that his experience with Father Tom proved that such collaborations could be a great success. He urged us to build a golf course where the players would marvel not at our great design work, but at the beautiful site which God had provided for all of us to enjoy. Of all the people in attendance, I never would have guessed that Rabbi Gelman would say the most important words about golf architecture on the day.