
100 YEARS OF THE CPGA



1936 PGA Championship at Pinehurst No. 2

MARCH 2023

National Spotlight On The Carolinas

by **Lee Pace**
Author & Historian

The early 1930s were difficult years in the United States as the Great Depression rolled on. No facet of life was spared — the golf business included. Leisure activities were quick to get the ax when the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter were on the line.

Herbert Warren Wind in his book *The Story of American Golf* cited a 65 percent drop in club membership across America in the first half of the decade. Donald Ross, who ran the golf operation at Pinehurst and would over his career design some 400 golf courses across the eastern half of the country, took a \$1,000 pay cut. Pinehurst caddies at the time received a dollar a day for toting bags *and* working on the golf maintenance crew.

So the timing of the PGA Championship coming to Pinehurst in 1936 was ideal to help jolt the Carolinas golf community out of its malaise and introduce the national golf community to the unique area of the two states — Sandhills, coast, mountains and urban areas in between.

Over the course of the next 80 years, the PGA would land in the Carolinas five times for its marquee PGA Championship (Pinehurst 1936, Tanglewood outside Winston-Salem 1974, the Ocean Course at Kiawah

2012 and 2021 and Quail Hollow in Charlotte 2017) and twice for the Ryder Cup Matches (Pinehurst 1951) and the Ocean Course (1991).

The PGA venturing to Pinehurst in 1936 was significant because it was the association's first championship venue south of the Mason-Dixon line. In its 20 years of competition, the PGA had been held mostly at Eastern clubs with an occasional trip to the Midwest or West Coast. Pinehurst management left no stone unturned in preparing for the event. Ross, who laid out No. 2 in 1907 and had been tweaking it constantly over nearly three decades, teamed with green superintendent Frank Maples to lay thousands of pounds of rye grass seed over the fairways of No. 2 to insure a green and lush turf in mid-November, when the championship was contested. Pinehurst management agreed to delay the season opening to members and guests until after the tournament, this when Pinehurst was essentially a wintertime resort.

The event also marked the unveiling of the recently revamped No. 2 course to the national golf spotlight. Ross in 1935 discarded two holes (the ninth and tenth, which were on ground now included in the No. 4 course) and added the current fourth and fifth. He also converted the greens from their original sand and clay structure to Bermuda grass.

Denny Shute won the title with a 3-and-2 victory over Jimmy Thompson in the championship match (this when the PGA was played at match play). He nailed a three-wood second shot on the par-five 16th to five feet for a conceded eagle and the victory. He collected a check for \$1,000 following the second of three career major championships.

And Pinehurst's star rose just a little higher in the golf stratosphere. After years of entertaining resort guests, noted amateurs and top professionals with its popular North and South tournaments, Pinehurst availed itself to the ever-expanding world of competitive golf with the 1936 PGA.

"I'm happy that the PGA picked Pinehurst," defending champion

Johnny Revolta said before the competition began. “For win, lose or draw at Pinehurst, there’s just something about the place that makes you feel grand because you’ve played there.

“I don’t see how a course could be any harder, but at the same time it’s the most pleasant course I’ve ever seen. You have to play No. 2 with your head as much as your hands.”

Perennial Pinehurst visitor Tommy Armour agreed.

“The man who doesn’t feel emotionally stirred when he golfs at Pinehurst beneath those clear blue skies and with the pine fragrance in his nostrils, is one who should be ruled out of golf for life,” Armour wrote in the championship program.

The PGA returned to Pinehurst 15 years later for the 1951 Ryder Cup, which was a relatively ho-hum affair with the American team, led by Ben Hogan and Sam Snead, dismantling the team from Great Britain and Ireland 9.5 to 2.5.

But when the Ryder Cup came back to the Carolinas four decades later, the GBI team had been expanded to include players from all of Europe — players like Seve Ballesteros and Jose Maria Olazabal of Spain and Bernhard Langer of Germany giving the European team significantly more firepower than the earlier teams restricted to the United Kingdom.

That 1991 event on the recently completed Ocean Course designed by Pete Dye was the infamous “War by the Shore.” The United



States won 14.5 to 13.5, with Langer missing a six-foot on the eighteenth hole in the final match that would have won his match and allowed Europe to retain the cup.

Kiawah Island and Ocean Course proved to be such an outstanding venue that the PGA returned for its championship in 2012 and 2021. Rory McIlroy won the first one, following his 2011 U.S. Open victory and cementing his spot as one of golf's top players, and Phil Mickelson delighted the galleries and a worldwide television audience in the latter by collecting his sixth major championship, significantly at the age of 51.

Tanglewood Park was conceived in the 1950s on land 10 miles west of Winston-Salem that had been in the Reynolds family for decades. Among the recreational amenities was a 1958 golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones. Local business and government interests thought the course worthy of a major championship and courted the PGA to bring its championship to Tanglewood. They succeeded in 1974, and Lee Trevino, one of golf's hottest stars at the time with two U.S. Opens and two British Opens, edged Jack Nicklaus by one stroke for the victory.

Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte was conceived in the late 1950s by the Harris family to provide a quality golf experience in the rapidly growing south Charlotte area, and the George Cobb-designed course was the venue for the PGA Tour's Kemper Open in the 1970s. Johnny Harris, son of club founder James Harris, took the reins to lead the club to bigger and better things, hiring Tom Fazio to reconstruct the course in the late 1990s and bringing the tour back to town with what is known today as the Wells Fargo Championship.

Harris also landed the 2017 PGA Championship and the 2022 Presidents Cup for Quail, with Justin Thomas collecting his first major title with the PGA Championship and the American team dispatching the International team 17.5 to 12.5 in the Presidents Cup. The Americans were captained by Davis Love III, who happened to have

been born in Charlotte 58 years earlier — a nice way to tie a bow around the Carolinas connection to major championship competition.



LEE PACE is a Chapel Hill-based golf writer who has written about the history, architecture and great golfers of the Carolinas over four decades. He has written more than a dozen club histories and in 2021 released along with UNC Press his book, "Good Walks--Rediscovering the Soul of Golf at 18 Top Carolinas Courses."



PGA

Carolinas Section

100 YEARS

★ 1923-2023 ★