

Local golf roundup: Poppy Hills closing for renovation

Nearly 25 years later, longtime Poppy Hills Golf Course superintendent Manny Sousa still can easily recall the first time he saw the layout that would become his office.

While he'd previously been at Lake Wildwood Golf Course in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, which has a beauty of its own, Sousa was now in the midst of the Del Monte Forest.

"I remember it was 1990, and the AT&T Pro-Am was going on at Cypress Point," Sousa said. "It was a dry year and the sun was shining. I thought I'd died and gone to heaven."

Come Monday, the Poppy Hills that Sousa remembers, and everyone else for that matter, will be gone as the course begins renovations.

"It's been a good course. But it never hurts to have something new," Sousa said.

In some ways, the original Poppy Hills will finally be free.

Ever since Poppy Hills replaced Cypress Point in the AT&T Pro-Am rotation in 1991, the critics never seemed to let up. There was bad drainage. The greens were bumpy. There were too many dogleg holes. And most importantly, it wasn't Cypress Point.

Tiger Woods was said to have not liked the course. But one is hard pressed to find any quote from Woods that confirms that. Woods did say during that 2001 AT&T Pro-Am that, "Out of the three courses, Poppy Hills has the best greens."

Of course, much of the criticism took place during AT&T Pro-Am week. The rest of the year, when the course either hosted Northern California Golf Association events or some of its other

60,000 rounds per year, nary a complaint was heard. And if there was one, the player usually blamed himself instead of the course.

"All the people who played here on a regular basis thought it was great," Sousa said.

Since the original Poppy Hill's AT&T Pro-Am debut, 13 of the course's 18 greens went

on to be renovated. An immense drainage system was also installed that covered every 15 feet on every fairway.

Still, the original Poppy Hills couldn't shake off the stigma that had developed, at least among the pros and some members of the media.

"Once something, good or bad, is in someone's mind it's hard to change that. It just sticks in their mind," Sousa said.

But that was then. On Monday, the course is moving on.

The renovation, by original architect Robert Trent Jones II, is scheduled to be completed in early 2014. It will include the sand capping of fairways to improve drainage, the construction of new greens and bunkers and the re-contouring of fairways to alleviate severe elevation changes.

To further address water consumption, the course will also abandon 14.5 acres of currently irrigated turf, letting the area return to its natural, native state.

On the front-nine, changes that stand out include a switch from the pond on the tough par-4 5th to a natural waste area and a straighter fairway on No. 8 from what has been a severe dog-leg right. The 9th hole will also see the re-introduction of a natural creek bed that had been buried.

Dramatic changes on the back nine include a completely new par-3 11th hole (to sit where the current 12th teeing area is) and a switch on No. 12 that will turn the hole from a severe dog-leg right par-5 into a straighter par-4. The 12th could become the new Poppy Hills' signature hole, as it offers views of Monterey Bay and the Santa Cruz Mountains.

On the scorecard, the new Poppy Hills will play at 7,063 yards with par dropping to 71. It's currently a par 72 playing at 6,873 yards.

While nostalgic, Sousa can't wait for it all to happen. "It's almost like a rebirth," he said. "It's a good thing."

Farewell, original Poppy Hills.

Otters Fifth: Playing in cold and winds up to 30 mph, the No .9 ranked CSUMB men's golf team finished fifth Tuesday at the St. Edward's Invitational at Grey Rock GC in Texas.

The Otters carded a final round 313 for a 54 hole total of 20-over 893, landing them 19 strokes behind winner No.2 ranked Nova Southeastern (874). No.1 ranked Barry took second at 888.

"This was a solid tournament for us," Otters head coach Jason Owen said. "We can definitely play better but it was a strong finish for us."

Junior Kolby Teare shot a team-low final round 77 to place ninth at 4-over 220. Senior Alex Sobstad tied for 15th after a 78.

Monterey Four-Ball: Locals Bill Moore and Casey Boyns shot 126 (64-62) to win last weekend's annual amateurgolf.com Monterey Four-Ball Championship at Pacific Grove GL. Moore and Boyns had to hold off a furious charge by runner-ups James Watt and Russel Humphrey (128), who carded a 61 on Sunday.

Jeff Britton and Jerry Ledzinski and the team of Kyle John and Drew Nelson tied for third at 130.

In the senior championship, Neil Duffy and Frank Pieper shot 129 (65-64) to win by three.

Aces: Wayne Hirsh aced the 146-yard 7th hole at Rancho Canada (East) using a 7-iron..San Jose's Dan Evans aced the 155-yard 3rd hole at Rancho Canada (East) using a hybrid ... Monterey's Chad Goff aced the 138-yard 15th at Black Horse GC using a 9-iron ... Sarah Grantano aced the 126-yard 12th at Del Monte GC using a 6-iron ... Danny Nelson aced the 209-yard 14th at Del Monte using a 4-iron.

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