



BY JOHN STEINBREDER

From its opening in 1962, the Hazeltine National Golf Club was designed to host major championships. The founders wanted to create a golf course that would challenge the best in the world and asked Robert Trent Jones Sr. to produce just such a layout on rolling farmland outside Minneapolis. They also sought to build a membership that supported their mission to stage tournaments of note as they also adhered to the rules of the game when they played and celebrated golf's rich traditions. It was to be a place that was all about golf.

Nearly 60 years later, it is safe to assert that those who established Hazeltine would be pleased with its place in the game today. In addition to hosting a pair of U.S. Opens – in 1970 and 1991 – it has been the site of two PGA Championships, two U.S. Women's Opens, a U.S. Senior Open, a U.S. Amateur and a U.S. Mid-Amateur. Hazeltine also was the venue for the 2016 Ryder Cup and is on tap to hold another U.S. Amateur (in 2024) and a second Ryder Cup four years after that.

More immediately, Hazeltine is where the 2019 KPMG Women's PGA Championship is taking place this week. And the club's tournament pedigree as well as the state of its highly rated golf course, which has undergone a number of upgrades through the years at the hands of its original architect, Trent Jones, and his son, Rees, make it a near-perfect place for that competition.



The scoreboard at the 1966 U.S. Women's Open

Former USGA president Totton P. Heffelfinger was the driving force behind the establishment of Hazeltine, and his relationship with the leaders of the governing body had a lot to do with the club being named the site of the 1966 Women's Open and then the U.S. Open four years later. All went well for that first championship, which Sandra Spuzich won by a stroke ahead of Carol Mann. But things could not have gone worse when the men showed up for their championship in 1970. Wind was but one issue, and it blew so hard the first day that the average score was 79. The length of the course was another matter; at 7,151 yards, Hazeltine was the second-longest in Open history at that time. It also was the youngest venue ever, a mere eight years old and not nearly mature enough, in the view of many.

Then, there was the matter of the design itself, which featured a number of sharp doglegs and several blind shots. Fairways were narrow, greens were small and half the holes had water hazards. Jack Nicklaus said that Hazeltine "lacked definition," and added: "The only target on the tee at 18 was the chimney on Tot Heffelfinger's house." Bob Rosburg complained that "Jones has so many doglegs on this course that he must have laid it out in a kennel," while noted amateur Bill Hyndman exclaimed: "I feel like I have just been in a fistfight."



Jack Nicklaus and Totton P. Heffelfinger in 1960

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Easily the most cutting comments came from Dave Hill. When asked what Hazeltine lacked, he replied: "Eighty acres of corn and a few cows. They ruined a good farm when they built this course." Neither Heffelfinger nor his colleagues at the USGA appreciated those last remarks, but members of the gallery were clearly amused, and they took to mooing at Hill whenever he walked by.



Tony Jacklin at the 1970 U.S. Open

As well-founded as the criticism may have been in the eyes of many, it had a way of overshadowing some very fine play by eventual winner Tony Jacklin, who became the first Englishman to capture a U.S. Open title in nearly 50 years – and who finished seven shots ahead of runner-up Hill. And Hill was surely not the only person who wondered whether it was purely coincidence when the \$15,000 check he received for coming in second place was not signed.

Not surprisingly, club leaders at Hazeltine asked Trent Jones to make modifications to the course, and he returned to the property after the 1970 Open to straighten out a number of the doglegs, specifically on Nos. 1, 9 and 18. In

addition, he transformed the 16th hole from a par-3 to a short par-4 along Lake Hazeltine and turned the 17th from a par-4 into a longish par-3.

Those changes were completed in time for the 1983 U.S. Senior Open, which Billy Casper captured in a playoff, and they were so well received that the USGA decided to bring the U.S. Open back to Hazeltine in 1991. To prepare for that national championship, the club asked Rees Jones to make further improvements to a layout that was still not yet 30 years old. That included the regrading of a number of fairways and changes to the locations of a number of bunkers and tees. Jones the Younger also sought to endow Hazeltine with the definition that Nicklaus said it lacked back in 1970, largely by raising several tees (so golfers could better see the fairways) and adding mounds and bunkers (to better frame the landing areas).

Golfers raved about the changes made for that championship, which Payne Stewart won in a playoff against Scott Simpson, and the club continued to use Jones after that to make further modifications. Bunkers were repositioned, and new sand added. All 18 greens were rebuilt to USGA specifications, to improve drainage and provide new pin positions, and all fairways reseeded.

"I think the course at Hazeltine has become a classic," says Jones.

Though he will not be involved in setup of the course for the KPMG Women's PGA Championship, Jones does have a sense of how Hazeltine will play. He expects it to measure about 6,800 yards, and to be much like Bethpage Black was for this year's PGA Championship, with rough surrounding the greens. "There won't be the sorts of chipping areas around the greens you saw at Country Club of Charleston (for the 2019 U.S. Women's Open)," he says. "And I think the pros will like that, because they will be closer to the target if they miss a green as opposed to their balls rolling away."



Rory Mclroy during the 2016 Ryder Cup at Hazeltine

The fairways, Jones adds, will likely range from 22 to 26 yards in width, with the first cut of rough moving out about 5 feet from each side of the fairway and running 1½ inches high, and from there getting 3 inches high, and possibly more.

"It will be a proper setup and a proper venue for yet another major championship," says Jones.

Just as Hazeltine was meant to be.