

Golf: Omaha Country Club changes to enhance USGA event

By [Stu Pospisil](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER



JAMES R. BURNETT/THE WORLD-HERALD

For the 2013 Senior Open, OCC's finishing holes will be played in a different order than normal. After the short par-4 13th, the tournament routing will go to the present par-5 16th, the par-4 17th, the par-3 15th and the short par-4 14th before returning to the present par-4 18th hole, pictured, that finishes in front of OCC's Tudor-style clubhouse.

Three years before the U.S. Senior Open golf tournament comes to Omaha, two logistical issues have been resolved at the Omaha Country Club.

Where to place the corporate hospitality village, and how to make the back nine better for the golfers.

For the 2013 Senior Open, OCC's finishing holes will be played in a different order than normal. After the short par-4 13th, the tournament routing will go to the present par-5 16th, the par-4 17th, the par-3 15th and the short par-4 14th before returning to the present par-4 18th hole that finishes in front of OCC's Tudor-style clubhouse.

It allows the corporate village to sit on the next-to-last hole rather than several holes earlier. At the same time, an official of the United States Golf Association said, the new routing should "really enhance the championship."

"It breaks up two short par-4 holes," said Jeff Hall, the USGA's managing director for rules and competitions. "It shifts one of those into the middle of a sandwich between a stout par-3 and a finishing hole with some drama. There could be some two-shot swings on the next-to-last hole."

The "new" 17th hole will play 325 yards, all uphill, at its longest. Given Hall's tendency at U.S. Opens to occasionally move the tees up on similar short holes to tempt players to go for the green, it's very possible that could happen one or more rounds in Omaha.

"We'll have fun with the setup," Hall said.

USGA Senior Open tournament director Tim Flaherty said spectators will benefit as well. It's highly possible that the shuttle drop-off and main spectator entrance will be on the club's undeveloped 30 acres west of the "new" 17th, with the merchandise tent included in the corporate area.

"We felt it flowed better for gallery movement and it made sense for the golf course," Flaherty said.

Corporate viewing areas don't have to be on a finishing hole and sometimes have been on the front nine at the USGA's three Open championships, Flaherty said, but "if you're in a situation where you can maximize the experience by putting the corporate area on 16, 17 or 18, obviously it's a much better spot. But we wouldn't have made the change if it created awkwardness."

The changes originated with the club's championship committee.

"We thought altering the routing for the championship would enhance the experience for the spectators, the players, and the corporate supporters," said Patrick Duffy, the committee chairman. "The USGA agreed and we decided to go forward with the new routing."

Golf architect Keith Foster, who was brought in to remodel and lengthen OCC in the mid-2000s, said he's not surprised that the back nine will be reordered. The changes were already under consideration while he was working in Omaha.

"It makes sense from the standpoint of the tournament," Foster said. "It orchestrates an outstanding finish."

Foster has some work left to do at OCC, acting on USGA recommendations. A new tee on the par-4 eighth will add 20 yards to the hole, making it 460 yards. A fairway bunker will be added to the par-5 sixth hole. Some holes will have their back tees widened to withstand a week's worth of use by the field of 156 golfers.

"The renovation addressed many needs," Hall said. "They did a nice job reviewing trees that could come out for better turf conditions, so there's very little to do in that regard. The course will stand on its own."

OCC will play at about 6,750 yards for the Senior Open. For a par-71 course with five par-3 holes, Hall said, it's not as short as the yardage suggests.

"If one of those par 3s is a par 4, it's a couple hundred more yards," he said. "It's a little deceptive when you look only at the numbers."

Outside the ropes, which is Flaherty's area, he said OCC has the existing infrastructure to handle the Senior Open. The tournament will utilize the tennis courts in some yet-to-be named fashion, and the club's parking lot is large enough to handle player parking.

The tournament will be three weeks earlier — July 8 to 14 — than the dates that were listed in 2008 when it was announced that the USGA had accepted OCC's invitation to host Nebraska's first USGA Open championship. Flaherty said the USGA and the Champions Tour worked together to eliminate the Senior and U.S. British Opens scheduled on consecutive weeks.

Bruno Event Team, based in Birmingham, Ala., will manage the tournament for OCC. Sean Sovacool of Bruno, who directed the 2004 and 2009 Senior Opens, and his staff will be on-site in Omaha beginning in July.

"We're very excited to come to Omaha," the USGA's Hall said. "It's a perfect blend of a great market and a course I honestly didn't know much about."

"Tim and I are equally confident we have all the key ingredients in Omaha."

Contact the writer:

444-1041, stu.pospisil@owh.com