

USGA Executive Director Mike Davis and the course setup committee walk down the sixth fairway during his setup of the Olympic Club for the 2012 U.S. Open as seen in San Francisco, Calif. on Sunday, April 29, 2012. Copyright USGA/John Mummert

## 'THAT'S MORE LIKE IT!' USGA and Olympic come up trumps

In the week after the grandstands and hoardings had been torn down around the Olympic Club, you can imagine USGA Executive Director, Mike Davis, and his henchman returning to their Far Hills, New Jersey headquarters and engaging in a collective 'high five' - for restoring 'normalcy' to the United States Open Championship.

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**S**ure, heavy rains before the tournament had much to do with Rory McIlroy setting a bunch of all time records at Congressional last year, but you can bet the USGA would not have wanted a repeat of

such free scoring conditions so soon after. Davis says the USGA make no bones about the fact that they want the Open to be the most difficult test of golf that the players face all year and with the San Francisco weather complying, it was unanimous

amongst the players that they got just that at a firm and fast Olympic.

'The Lake Course here at The Olympic Club played exactly the way that we believe a U.S. Open Championship course should play.' said Davis immediately

following Webb Simpson's victory. 'It delivered a tough yet fair test of golf to the very best players in the game, and truly examined virtually every part of their games.'

'This week was classic U.S. Open golf, and it clearly identified a national champion

who excelled in every challenge along the way.'

The USGA's setup of the golf course and the wonderful design at Olympic, which had been significantly 'tweaked', extended and thinned of trees since the 1998 Open, provided a championship whereby only 3 players (veterans Tiger Woods, Jim Furyk and David Toms) and then 2 (Furyk and McDowell) were 'barely' under par after two and then three rounds, with the eventual winner, Webb Simpson, lifting the trophy after posting a four round total of 1 over par.

The 36 hole cut this year was set at 8 over, the highest on the PGA Tour since the 2008 PGA Championship at Oakland Hills. Incidentally, the highest U.S.

Open cut since World War II (15 over) also came at The Olympic Club, in Jack Fleck's 1955 Open.

That young upstart Mclroy was certainly put

in his place after pulling the USGA's pants down last year too, saving his best work of the week for the opening pitch he threw at a San Francisco Giants' game before the championship. Rounds of 77 - 73 saw his championship defence cut short and a fourth missed cut since May. Pity for Mclroy that the Giants were on the road at Seattle over the weekend, though he might have slipped over to Oakland to catch the A's taking on the Padres.

He would have a few pals with time on their hands to join him in the bleachers too. World Number One Luke Donald, who played with Mclroy and fellow Brit Lee Westwood over the opening rounds, shot a disastrous '9 bogey, 9 par' round of 79 to open his campaign for his first Major Championship. A second round 72 was not good enough to give him a chance of teeing it up at the weekend and he will need to wait until the Open Championship in July to press his claims for an overdue first Major.

Mclroy and Donald were not alone as Olympic maintained her track record of chewing up and spitting out players of high profile, with Masters champion Bubba Watson, Dustin Johnson,

Louis Oosthuizen, Bill Haas and Geoff Ogilvy joined them in watching on from the sidelines, or in the bleachers, for the weekend.

Davis and the Championship Committee got the delicate balance of thick rough and closely mown approaches and collection areas around the greens just right, with slightly mishit or shots of incorrect distance control prone to rolling away from the green surfaces. Tiger Woods' approach to the par five 17<sup>th</sup> in round two was a fine example where his long iron approach looked to stop at the back of the green, only to fall over the back edge and cascade down a slope from where he was faced with an uphill pitch of some 30 yards between trees from a tight lie.

Ernie Els' quest for a third Open also came to grief in one of these collection areas over the back of the 16<sup>th</sup> in the final round.

The USGA should be roundly applauded for this setup. The choking collars of thick rough around every green that we'd grown accustomed to seeing year after year at all but those courses where runoff areas are a feature of the design like Pinehurst No 2 and Shinnecock Hills, had taken

short game skill out of the equation to a large extent. The thick rough was still very much in existence at Olympic, but in balance.

Davis and his colleagues however, are progressively redefining the way their courses are being presented and in doing so, they have reintroduced a 'cerebral' approach to the short game and eliminating a reliance on the mindless 'gauge' from thick rough as the only greenside shot required for this great Championship.

The course setup went a long way to helping the best short game and course management exponents to prosper, with Woods, Toms, Furyk and McDowell, contending from the first day to the final hole, in Furyk and McDowell's case. Woods faltered on the weekend but the list of inform players and marquee names that also filled the top 10 places behind champion Webb Simpson, including Padraig Harrington, Ernie Els, Jason Dufner and Retief Goosen, would have deeply satisfied Davis and Co.

'We are already looking forward to next year, when the tradition of golf's toughest test will continue in the 2013 U.S.

Open at Merion Golf Club.'

Davis concluded.

Amen to that.



The Eighth Hole of the The Olympic Club's Lake Course in San Francisco, Calif. as seen on Tuesday, April 12, 2011. Copyright USGA/John Mummert



USGA Executive Director Mike Davis uses a tape measure to determine the depth of the putting green of the seventh hole during his setup of the Olympic Club for the 2012 U.S. Open as seen in San Francisco, Calif. On Sunday, April 29, 2012.