2016 Course Openings Abundant
Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

While the golf season begins in earnest April 1, the unseasonably balmy temperatures in February have players in many parts of the state dusting off their sticks and getting out on our beautiful courses. While the grass may not be as green, temperatures in the 50’s have softened the ground and a general lack of moisture at many courses has even brought about the use of carts for some.

The optimist sees a nice long golf season ahead, the dream of golfers across the Big Sky. The pessimist cautions that this weather can’t maintain and April or May will put a damper on good golf weather.

While we don’t have Punxsutawney Phil giving us a report on the golf season in Montana, many national weather forecasts show above average temperatures slated for March-May.

A few things to consider... Respect each courses policies on winter rules. If temporary greens are set up, don’t hit to the real greens. Your local superintendent will thank you! They have your best interests in mind and respectful play in March will make for good conditions during the summer.

As always, repair your divots and enjoy the possibility that 2016 may be a nice long season in Montana. Helping maintain the courses in the spring will keep conditions well during the prime weather we usually opine for when snow is on the ground this time of the year.

Montana’s Official Golf Season: April 1 to October 31

Lastly, connect with the MSGA on Facebook and Twitter for news on course openings as they become available. We hope 2016 is a great year with great golf in store for you and your foursome!

Meet The New MSSGA Executive Director
Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

The Montana State Senior Golf Association (MSSGA) was founded in 1955, and last year commemorated 60 years of competition for golfers around the state ages 55 and above.

This year, the MSSGA leadership turns to a veteran of athletics, but one seeing a new role to add to his list of services to the state. Bill Sprinkle, of Helena, has taken over as the Executive Director, replacing golfing buddy Russ Cravens, who devoted several years of service to the organization.

MSGA: Where did you pick up the game of golf?

Sprinkle: I really learned the game in Minot, North Dakota. That’s where I first was exposed to going out and hitting balls. My mother was a good player and, before we moved to Great Falls, we were members of Minot Country Club. At about 10, I first started playing some. ...Continued on the next page
**MSGA:** Many golfers start much later in life, did you compete in high school?

**Sprinkle:** I loved athletics and I competed in many sports, but football and basketball were important to me and, really, I followed football into college and beyond as a coach. It wasn't until the early 90's that I started playing with any regularity and being an avid golfer.

**MSGA:** You've had experience in many athletic capacities over your career; tell us about some of those opportunities.

**Sprinkle:** After high school, I was recruited by the University of Washington and I played defensive back (both safety and cornerback) from 1964-69. I went from playing to a graduate assistant role and really found a love for coaching. I later moved into banking, following in my father’s footsteps, and enjoyed that. But coaching was really something I gravitated toward, and finally decided I had to have that as a focal point in my life. (Sprinkle coached at the following programs: University of Idaho, Montana Tech, Billings Central High School/head coach, C.M. Russell High School, and Helena High School/head coach.) After my coaching days, I spent almost twenty years with the Montana High School Association (87-05) in administration doing everything from events to administering rules, eligibility regulations, etc.

**MSGA:** Is it safe to say that you've got plenty of background for a role like this?

**Sprinkle:** I'm not sure if I'd say that, but athletics have always been enjoyable for me and my family. Golf has been important the last few years and I’ve met a lot of great people. Russ [Cravens] was very encouraging about passing on the torch, so to speak, and he taught me a lot of the specifics to keeping our organization going in a positive direction. He, and John Frankino before him, have done a great job. I’m just trying to carry on with the groundwork they’ve set.

**MSGA:** You’re not only involved with this role. What else outside of golf occupies your time in “retirement.”

**Sprinkle:** I serve as a replay official for the Big Sky Conference at the Montana State Football Games, so that's six weekends in the fall I look forward to. I don't have to be making the call; I am the communicator to help with the process, which I enjoy. Also, I have three children, and grandchildren that my wife Danette and I spend a lot of time with, so we’re busy enough.

**MSGA:** Do you participate in the State Seniors as a competitor?

**Sprinkle:** I have, but I probably won't. There is too much to do and we have a great tournament with enough players...they don't need me! I can provide some other assistance and I look forward to that.

**MSGA:** You do enjoy the competitive aspect as well as the social though?

**Sprinkle:** Absolutely. It's not the most important part of why I play, but last year I played in the State Amateur. We have great courses and tournaments are fun.

**MSGA:** What would you say to those who might be eligible to joining the MSSGA?

**Sprinkle:** We have an organization where you can meet a lot of great people. We have a fantastic tournament with 300+ players and like to do good things for the game as well, like support the MSGA and its junior golf programs, so if you’re interested please join us!

The State Seniors Golf Tournament has steadily grown in participation as the organization cultivates both competition and friendship. This year, the 2016 championship will be held in Bozeman. The tournament takes place August 2-4 with three area courses acting as co-hosts: **Bridger Creek Golf Course, Riverside Country Club**, and **Valley View Golf Club**. Last year, the MSSGA and its membership donated $3,160 to the MSGA in support of junior golf. Visit [www.mtseniorgolf.org](http://www.mtseniorgolf.org) for more information on the MSSGA.
In late 2012, the USGA announced a proposed rule change to prohibit the anchoring of strokes on the golf course. More specifically, putting was the area where this rule was really focused.

While working in Minnesota for the Minnesota Golf Association, I remember huddling around a colleague’s desk listening to a USGA Conference Call announcing the news of the anchoring. There would be diagrams available online, video demonstrations had been prepared, the USGA had definitely thought this through, I thought to myself, and discussions among coworkers and golfers ensued for the rest of the day.

Many questions came to mind. “How many golfers will this really affect? Will amateurs stop using belly putters or will this only practically apply to the tour players? Has anyone talked to Adam Scott? Is Bernhard Langer going to be okay?”

Everyone has opinions on putting. Is it art? Science? Mysticism? A blend of all three perhaps?

There is something very personal when it comes to not only putting, but also the putter itself. We refer to them as weapons. Heck, some of the most popular types are blades. Live by the sword, die by the sword.

While golfers utilizing belly putters and long or “broomstick” putters are by no means a majority, their popularity had been ever increasing up until the proposed and then adopted ban became news. Both players who utilized these anchoring methods to make their living putting for dough and those who were just spending dough hoping to win a weekend bet had been deliberating the merits of whether to go back to more conventional putting methods or to continue their practices up until the night of December 31, 2015.

Well, the time has come, and while I doubt that the waste management collectors will be seeing lots of broomstick putters rising atop garbage cans all of a sudden, it does bring about the question of whether you’ll be seeing anchoring at your local club this year. Remember, it’s not the equipment that is banned, it’s the anchoring. It’s not the length of the putter, it’s how it’s used.

We are just now having attempts at golf in Montana, but for many temperate climates and, of course, on tour, Jamie Wallace of the USGA mentioned two recent situations that have provided excellent, ...Continued on the next page
real-world illustrations of this Rule:

1) Zac Blair at the Sony Open
2) Bernhard Langer at the Champions Tour’s Chubb Classic.

“Rule 14-1b prohibits two actions during a stroke: 1) directly anchoring the club or a gripping hand against the body and 2) indirectly anchoring the club through the use of an anchor point created by holding a forearm in contact with any part of the body.” The main takeaway for the rule is intent. Intent of either directly anchoring or creating an anchor point. (Unintentionally brushing a hand or club against the body or clothing during a stroke does not constitute a breach of Rule 14-1b.)

At the Sony Open, video suggests that the grip end of Zac Blair’s club comes into contact with his torso at the end of the stroke. This was not a break of the rule as it was unintentional and inadvertent contact. This example also highlights the important point that Rule 14-1b applies to strokes made from anywhere on the course with any club, not simply a long or belly putter.

My 2012 concern for the dominant German, Langer, who along with Rocco Mediate are my first recollections of pros making putts with the broomstick -- won the Chubb Classic running away, assuaging my fears and capturing his first victory since the prohibition of the anchored stroke took effect.

Unlike Blair’s isolated incident in question (I would venture one of many to come this year), Langer’s situation is different in a couple regards. First, he still chooses his weapon to be of the broomstick variety. Langer, a premier ball striker for the past 30 years, overcame putting woes by modifying his method and moving to the long-putter and anchoring. It has not taken long to see that further modification is in play, many years later, as in 2015 he’s employing a stroke in which he moves his left hand, putter grip, and forearms away from his body, so that the stroke is free-flowing and not anchored. Proving that old habits die hard, Langer continues to anchor the putter during practice strokes, but not during his actual stroke (perfectly allowed under the rules).

So, while it’s early in the season, one of the most successful anchors of the Champions Tour (or is it anchorers?) has already found success in 2016. It cannot be understated that the USGA was thoughtful in giving time before adopting. Back in 2012, there was much dissent, some questioning whether the PGA Tour would adopt this policy, or if there would be a bifurcating of rules. Thankfully, for everyone’s sake, we have enough rules in golf and the Tour is abiding by the proverbial law of the land.

Will your local playing partners do the same? It’s probably too early to tell. We’d love to hear your stories. Just remember, as I tuned in late to watch the finale of The Northern Trust Open, an important adage was reinforced into my mind as perhaps the most popular anchorer (we’ll go with that for now), Adam Scott, demonstrated on hole 18 at Riviera.... Who needs putting? Just chip it in.

For more information, the USGA has a wealth of information and resources pertaining to Rule 14-1b.

Lady Cats golf team says “Thank You” to the MSGA for a $5,000 donation.
Photo courtesy of Joe Rossman
USGA ELECTS DIANA M. MURPHY AS 64TH PRESIDENT

Diana M. Murphy, of St. Simons Island, GA, was elected to serve a one-year term as the 64th president of the United States Golf Association, which, together with The R&A, governs the game worldwide. The election of officers and the 15-member USGA Executive Committee also took place during the USGA Annual Meeting.

As president, Murphy assumes the leadership of the more than 300 professional staff and nearly 1,200 volunteers who serve on more than 30 USGA committees.

“Although golf will always face challenges, the great golfers – such as Bob Jones, Ben Hogan, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and my dear friend, Louise Suggs – had one trait in common: they were optimistic about their games and the game,” said Murphy after her election. “It is a time for all of us, together, to be positive about golf and act accordingly.”

Murphy has been formally associated with the USGA since 1996, when she began a 12-year tenure on the USGA Membership Committee. She joined the Executive Committee in 2011, and has chaired several committees, including the Championship (2015), Commercial (2012-13), Compensation (2014-15), Finance (2012-14), and U.S. Senior Amateur Championship (2014) committees. She was elected treasurer in 2013 and vice president in 2014 and 2015.

Murphy, 59, is the managing director of Rocksolid Holdings, LLC, a private-equity firm focused on small business and real estate in the Southeast. She is also managing director of the Georgia Research Alliance Venture Fund, which supports the state’s public and private research universities. Her past appointments include managing director of Chartwell Capital Management Company, a private-equity firm in Jacksonville, FL, for 11 years, and senior vice president of The Baltimore Sun Company for 15 years.

An active community supporter, Murphy has served on the board of the Boys & Girls Club of Southeast Georgia since 2006, spearheading the establishment of the Elizabeth F. Correll Teen Center in 2008, among other activities. She is a member of the executive committee of the College of Coastal Georgia, and played an instrumental role in developing its master plan as it moved from a two-year to a four-year institution. She is the non-executive chairman of Landstar System Inc. and a board member of CTS Corporation, both public companies.

She is the second woman in the association’s 121-year history to serve as president, following Judy Bell (1996 and 1997).

USGA ANNOUNCES LOCAL QUALIFYING SITES FOR 2016 U.S. OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

The U.S. Open will be contested for a record ninth time at Oakmont Country Club (PA) on June 16-19. Local qualifying, conducted over 18 holes at 111 sites in 43 states, will take place between May 2-19.

“The skills and support provided by state and regional golf associations in conducting local qualifying is immeasurable, and we appreciate their continued commitment,” said Stuart Francis, USGA Championship Committee chairman. “Thousands of golfers from around the world, both professional and amateur, will take part in the two-tiered process of U.S. Open qualifying as they pursue an opportunity to compete for our national championship.”

The local qualifier for Montana will be held at Missoula Country Club, Tuesday, May 10. Those players who advance out of local qualifying will compete in sectional qualifying, which will be conducted over 36 holes at 10 U.S. sites on Monday, June 6. For the 12th consecutive year, Japan and England will host international sectional qualifying, both scheduled in late May.

To be eligible, a player must have a Handicap Index not exceeding 1.4, or be a professional. Online player registration for the 2016 U.S. Open will begin in the second week of March (https://champs.usga.org/index.html).