Jack Nicklaus Returns to Montana For 20th Anniversary of Old Works
George Geise, MSGA Board Member

In my book, the Golden Bear remains the gold standard for excellence. In golf. In golf course design. And especially in the challenging process of staying relevant in your golden years.

Nineteen years ago, then 57-year-old Jack Nicklaus officially became my biggest sports hero after I spent five unforgettable hours with the man widely considered the greatest golfer who ever lived. On July 30, 1997, I had the rare privilege of serving as Nicklaus’ caddy at an 18-hole exhibition at Old Works Golf Course in Anaconda. I was joined by about 2,500 totally awed fans as the Golden Bear officially dedicated the golf course his company had spent nearly two years building from scratch.

I had the rare good fortune of meeting Jack again recently at Old Works. It was his first time back in Anaconda in 19 years. And no, he didn’t recognize me from our previous meeting. Was I surprised? Not a bit. The guy’s probably had a thousand caddies over the past 60 years, most of them far more memorable than me. But it’s amazing how much Nicklaus does remember about his visits to our great state.

“I’ve chased a lot of elk around your mountains, and I’ve lost a few flies in your rivers,” said the 76-year-old legend, who loves to hunt and fish, and enjoys a variety of sporting pursuits. Nicklaus and his company have also built other Treasure State golf facilities, such as Eagle Bend in Bigfork and Moonlight Basin near Big Sky. But it’s clear that the man who has designed more than 300 courses worldwide in his long career has never forgotten the challenge of turning a former copper smelter in southwestern Montana into a first-class public golf facility.

“This was one of the most significant projects that I was ever involved with from the standpoint of all of the things it created out of a virtual wasteland, and it was a toxic wasteland,” Nicklaus recalled. Jack emphasized that he didn’t “choose” to transform the EPA Superfund site into a golf course. ARCO, the company that owned the property, was required by the federal government to reclaim the land after many years of unsafe mining practices had left toxic waste in and under the soil. Nicklaus thought something unique could be accomplished to benefit the greater good. “It was more of how do you clean it up, and protect the people and the environment from what was here,” he said.

Nicklaus said it likely would have cost ARCO at least $45 million for a “conventional” cleanup. Nicklaus and his company built Old Works for about $22 million. “And we could have done it for half that cost if it weren’t for all the regulations imposed by the EPA,” he added. Those restrictions included the construction of 14-foot-deep “baskets” under all 18 greens, to ensure that toxic materials wouldn’t rise to the top.

Jack toured the course in late September and seemed genuinely pleased how it had matured. “The golf course looks nice. They’ve done a nice job...Continued on the next page
taking care of it,” he said. “I was very, very, very pleasantly surprised.” He seemed particularly happy that his experiment using black slag – residue from the copper smelter – in sand traps and waste areas, had worked out well. “The materials tested out well (20 years ago), and I’m glad they work for you,” he said.

One reason Nicklaus was asked to attend the 20-year anniversary event at Old Works – an event promoted by the Troon golf management company – was to emphasize the value of the golf course to southwest Montana. The course has been losing money most years of its operation, and there have been rumors it could be closed.

“I think it (the golf course) brought jobs, it brought some tourism … it brought some things the community needed,” said Nicklaus. “Did it bring everything people wanted (such as motels and homes)? I’m sure it didn’t. But anytime you can leave something better than when you got there, that’s a pretty good thing to do in life.”

Geise is a retired Great Falls Tribune Sports Editor who writes a weekly column for the newspaper during the golf season. He also writes for the MSGA newsletter.

Libby’s Johnston Commits to Arizona State
Nick Dietzen, MSGA Communications Director

Earlier in 2016, Libby High School sophomore standout Ryggs Johnston claimed the state championship at the Class B level. He has qualified for myriad junior and amateur events around the nation, including the U.S. Amateur, and acquitted himself well. With a hefty travel schedule and also participating in basketball at the prep level, Johnston’s time commitments are vast. One thing he won’t have to spend a lot more time or energy on is where he’ll be going to school.

Johnston recently committed to Arizona State University in Tempe to play golf for the Sun Devils, beginning in 2019. His verbal commitment to ASU was announced on Twitter.

“Arizona State’s always been, since I was in about sixth grade, the school that I wanted to go to. My grandparents have a condo down there, about 20-30 minutes away from campus, so I’m pretty familiar with the area and it’s one of the best areas for golf in the country,” Johnston said.

The record-setting prep phenom has been on many an elite program’s watch list. Arizona State has produced numerous tour players – Phil Mickelson, Billy Mayfair, and Paul Casey, to name a few.

ASU’s new head coach, Matt Thurmond, moves to the desert from Pac-12 rival Washington where he coached for 15 years in Seattle. Following the resignation of Phil’s brother Tim Mickelson, the Sun Devils are turning to Thurmond to bring the program back to the top of the ultra competitive Pac-12, which boasts the defending national champion Oregon Ducks.

With a busy summer calendar that included events like the Western Amateur (Illinois) and Junior America’s Cup (Mexico), Johnston will turn his attention to academics and basketball knowing that he has one less important decision to make.
Prep golfers around the state concluded their 2016 seasons in the AA and A ranks recently.

**AA BOYS**

Billings West added another Boys AA Championships to their trophy case following a scorching second-round team score of 287, the only score under 300 of the 14 teams competing. West captured their fourth championship in a row and fifth in six years. The Golden Bears two-day total of 589 was 32 shots clear of second-place Bozeman (621). Great Falls High (624) edged out Missoula Sentinel (625) for third place.

Leading the way for Billings West was junior Joey Moore who put together a dominant performance at Billings’ Lake Hills with rounds of 68-66, 134 (-10). His eye-popping score broke the AA State Record formerly held by Larry Iverson of Glacier High in 2008. The all-class high school low score was set this year by Libby’s Ryggs Johnston who shot 131 at Pryor Creek Golf Club in Huntley. Moore, who finished runner up each of the past two seasons found the third time the charm winning by ten shots over Sentinel’s Sean Ramsbacher (144). Moore’s teammate Caleb Trost finished in third (146).

**AA GIRLS**

Domination could be considered an understatement as the Bozeman Hawks claimed the State AA Girls Title by a whopping 106 shots over their nearest competition, Helena High and Missoula Sentinel, who tied for second.

All five of Bozeman’s players finished in the top eight and four of the top five, including 2016 champion Meggie Delaney, were carrying Hawks bags during the competition at Lake Hills. Delaney fired rounds of 76-82, 158, to edge out three players at 161. Delaney led by three going into the final round and was able to maintain her lead over teammates Annika Danenhauer, Kameryn Bayse, and Helena High’s Weslee Nehl, who all tied for second. Hannah Rosanova finished in fifth at 162 and Laurel Ward’s 166 was good enough for eighth and rounded out the incredibly talented and deep team from Bozeman. Helena High and Sentinel came in with scores of 747, but were not able to put any kind of scare into the girls from Bozeman. The Hawks set the AA record with their 641, 16 shots better than the last title-winning team from Bozeman High, the 2011 team.

**A BOYS**

Hamilton Golf Course hosted the Class A State Championships and a little home course knowledge led the Hamilton Broncos to a 2016 State Title. Hamilton led by 17 shots after day one and would not relinquish their lead, eventually finishing with a 637 team total, 14 shots better than second place Polson (651). Laurel finished third at 656. Last year, Max Toenjes was runner up to Billings Central’s Liam Clancy, but Toenjes was able to edge out Clancy this year with rounds of 69-75, 144, besting Clancy’s 146 total by two (73-73). Carson McDaniel (Polson) and Paul O’Neil (Laurel) tied for third at 157. Hamilton was able to break through after finishing second last year to Billings Central.

**A GIRLS**

The Sidney Eagles used two top-five finishes and a top-15 to cruise to a 21-shot victory and the Class A title. Kaelyn Volk took a one-shot lead (82) into the final round, but a second round 89 put her in a tie for fifth at 171 with teammate Tierney Messmer (85-86) and Frenchtown’s Courtney Ockler (85-86). Volk and Messmer led the Eagles to a team total of 740 and bested perennial contender and defending champion Whitefish 761. Fergus finished third at 788 after two rounds at Hamilton Golf Course. Breilyn Riggin of Dawson County came from one shot back to claim the individual title thanks to rounds of 83-80, 163. Kinsey Irvin of Fergus finished second at 166 followed by Tricia Joyce (last year’s runner up) of Butte Central in third and Dani Flynn of Frenchtown came in fourth. Sidney finished second last year to Whitefish and was able to flip the script after a lengthy cross-state drive from Eastern Montana.
A hot start by Tom Werkmeister and a clutch closing birdie by Evan Bowser allowed Michigan to erase a four-stroke deficit and win the 12th USGA Men’s State Team Championship on the par-71, 7,044-yard West Course at the Country Club of Birmingham. The title is the first in the championship’s history for Michigan, which posted a final-round score of 5-under 137 to secure a three-stroke victory over Arizona and North Carolina with a 54-hole total of 4-under 422. Florida finished in fourth place at 2-over 428. Connecticut, the 36-hole leader, finished in a tie for fifth with Minnesota and Washington at 430.

Team Montana missed the cut after two days; the group of Craig Hurlbert (Hamilton), Jim Bob Coleman (Billings), and Mark Mance (Whitefish) tallied a total of 310 (+26). On day one, Hurlbert led the way with a 76 (+5) for Montana. His round included six bogeys and a birdie on the par-5 fourth hole. Hurlbert struck the ball well from tee to green, but struggled on the Bermuda greens with four three-putts.

“Overall, I hit the ball pretty well; putting let me down a bit. It’s difficult to get the ball close to the hole on this course -- it’s long, lots of mature trees, and nuances on the greens make for a really good, challenging round,” said Hurlbert.

Jim Bob Coleman, who represented Montana on the 2014 team, struggled out of the gate with an opening back-nine 43, but found success on his second nine, managing a one-over 36 for a first round 79. Mark Mance, the 2016 MSGA Mid-Amateur Champion, struggled on the greens and posted an 80.

On day two, Mance carded the low score for the Montanan’s with a 76 finishing with a back nine of even-par 36. Coleman shot 79, and Hurlbert had difficulties on the front nine, but closed on the back in 37 for an 82.

The Montanans played in groups of three with each paired with a member of the Kansas and Maryland teams. Each group was in the last five tee times of the day and battled windy conditions, high trafficked greens, as well as heat in the high eighties and characteristic high Alabama humidity.

Hurlbert said the trip was great and the event was top notch. With over 300 volunteers, a flag ceremony, and banquet with keynote speaker, broadcaster Verne Lundquist. “This is a fantastic event, it’s well run, we feel very welcomed and it was a great experience. The course is 120 years old, it’s hilly, a really good walk, and we were all discussing how you really cannot let up, there are no easy holes, they all have their own unique challenges,” Hurlbert remarked.

The West course features many long par-fours coupled with Bermuda rough creating a difficult proposition for drives missing the fairway. Add to the challenges of southern humidity, often times elevation changes for teams from different regions, and the result is numerous adjustments for the field of talented amateurs.

The United States Golf Association conducts the USGA Men’s State Team Championship on a biennial basis. It features teams of three players from all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Eighteen holes of stroke play are conducted over three days, with the two lowest scores of the three individuals counting as the team’s score for the round. Following Thursday’s second round, the field was cut to the low 21 teams and ties.
THE WARREN GOLF COURSE AT NOTRE DAME AWARDED
2019 U.S. SENIOR OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

The USGA today announced the Warren Golf Course on the campus of the University of Notre Dame, in Notre Dame, Indiana, as the host site for the 2019 U.S. Senior Open Championship. This will be the second USGA championship contested at the Warren Golf Course. The dates for the championship are June 27-30.

“The USGA is proud to partner with the University of Notre Dame, an institution whose national and international student body is reflective of the 156-player field in the U.S. Senior Open Championship,” said Stuart Francis, USGA Championship Committee chairman. “The U.S. Senior Open is senior golf’s most coveted championship and we know the Warren Course will examine the players’ skills as they compete for the Francis D. Ouimet Memorial Trophy.”

The Warren Golf Course at Notre Dame will be the first collegiate course to host a U.S. Senior Open Championship. It will also be the 16th USGA championship held on a campus layout.

Designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, the Warren Golf Course at Notre Dame opened for play on May 1, 2000. The public, links-style course is nestled among 250 acres of woodlands. The venue, located on the north edge of campus, is a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary.

“The selection of the Warren Golf Course at Notre Dame as site for the 2019 U.S. Senior Open is a significant endorsement of the quality and national standing of the golf course,” said University of Notre Dame Vice President and James E. Rohr Director of Athletics Jack Swarbrick. “We’re thrilled to have the opportunity for a USGA event of this magnitude to be played on our campus. This is a weeklong event that will provide substantial economic impact to the Michiana community.”

The U.S. Senior Open Championship was first played in 1980. The championship for golfers age 50 and older is open to any professional and any amateur with a Handicap Index not exceeding 3.4.

NORWOOD HILLS CC TO HOST 2018 U.S. WOMEN’S MID-AMATEUR CHAMPIONSHIP

Norwood Hills Country Club, in St. Louis, Missouri, has been selected by the USGA as the host site for the 2018 U.S. Women’s Mid-Amateur Championship. Scheduled for Sept. 22-27, the 2018 U.S. Women’s Mid-Amateur will be the second USGA championship contested at Norwood Hills.

“The USGA looks forward to returning to Norwood Hills for the 2018 U.S. Women’s Mid-Amateur and is thankful to the club for its enthusiasm and support of this championship,” said Stuart Francis, USGA Championship Committee chairman. “Norwood Hills has hosted several high-caliber golf events, and we are very pleased the 32nd U.S. Women’s Mid-Amateur champion will be crowned on such a worthy course.”

Founded as North Hills Country Club in the early 1920s, the club’s two courses – East and West – were designed by Wayne Stiles. The West Course, which hosted the 2001 Senior Amateur, will also be used for the Women’s Mid-Amateur. True to the 1920s style of course architecture, the West Course features undulating fairways and contoured greens.

“On behalf of the membership of Norwood Hills Country Club, we are honored to host the 2018 U.S. Women’s Mid-Amateur Championship,” said Dennis G. Hennessy, club president. “Having hosted many prestigious events, we are confident that the accomplished golfers vying for the Women’s Mid-Amateur title will enjoy our Wayne Stiles-designed course. We look forward to working with the USGA again in 2018.”

First played in 1987, the U.S. Women’s Mid-Amateur was created to provide a national championship for female amateurs age 25 and older who own a Handicap Index not exceeding 9.4. The championship features 132 players who compete in two rounds of stroke play, after which the field is cut to the low 64 scorers for match play. The winner is determined by an 18-hole final.