

MAJOR MEMORIES DRIVE MEDINAH MAKEOVER

GEOFF OGILVY RECALLS 2006 PGA
ROUND WITH TIGER AND PHIL
AS HE PLANS MEDINAH NO. 3
COURSE UPGRADE.

WORDS Paul Prendergast

Geoff Ogilvy (L), Tiger Woods (R) and caddie Steve Williams watch as Phil Mickelson hits off of the 18th tee, during the first round of the 2006 PGA Championship at Medinah Country Club.



The revelation late last year that the Australian design firm of Ogilvy, Cocking and Mead (OCM Golf) would be providing a master plan for the latest iteration of work at the Medinah Country Club No. 3 course may have raised eyebrows in some corners of the globe, if not the Medinah clubhouse itself.

So impressed were Medinah with the work completed by OCM at their lone foray into American course architecture at Shady Oaks in Texas (heralded in golf folklore as the home of Ben Hogan) that the nod was given to the Australians despite a pandemic prohibiting any of the design team visiting the site ahead of the bid deadline.

Of the three OCM partners, only 2006 US Open champion Geoff Ogilvy has to date set foot on the course that has played host to three US Opens, two PGA Championships, the memorable 2012 'Miracle at Medinah' Ryder Cup matches and with a Presidents Cup date looming in 2026.

Complementing the wonders of modern technology and the team's wherewithal have been the memories of No. 3 seared into Ogilvy's psyche from his participation in one of these significant events.

"We've got a pretty good idea of what we want to do, but there's still a lot of detailed work that has to be worked out on the ground," Ogilvy said.

"To get to this point in the process without having been there has been pretty educational for us, I guess. The boys are going to try to get over there soon to put all the missing pieces together to allow us to finalise and present the Master Plan.

"Normally, we would've been there a couple of times already, but the world being what it is it's been an exercise in piecing together my memories and knowledge of being there, connecting with Michael [Cocking] and Ashley's [Mead] pretty impressive ability to dig deep into the archives and get drone footage from people over there."

And of those 'memories', few are more crystal clear for Ogilvy from his 20-plus years as a professional than those he experienced at Medinah during the 2006 PGA Championship.

The PGA of America's penchant for creating a marquee grouping of the three major champions of that year saw Ogilvy, as US Open champion from two months earlier, teeing it up over the first two days with Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson at the height of their competitive rivalry.

"It's probably my most memorable pairing, those first two days with Tiger and Phil," Ogilvy said. "Tiger's number one in the world and Phil's number two; [between them] they'd won the Masters and Open Championship earlier in the year, so it was just as hyped as you could get.

"There was apparently nobody in the press centre the first hour we played: they were all inside the ropes. There must've

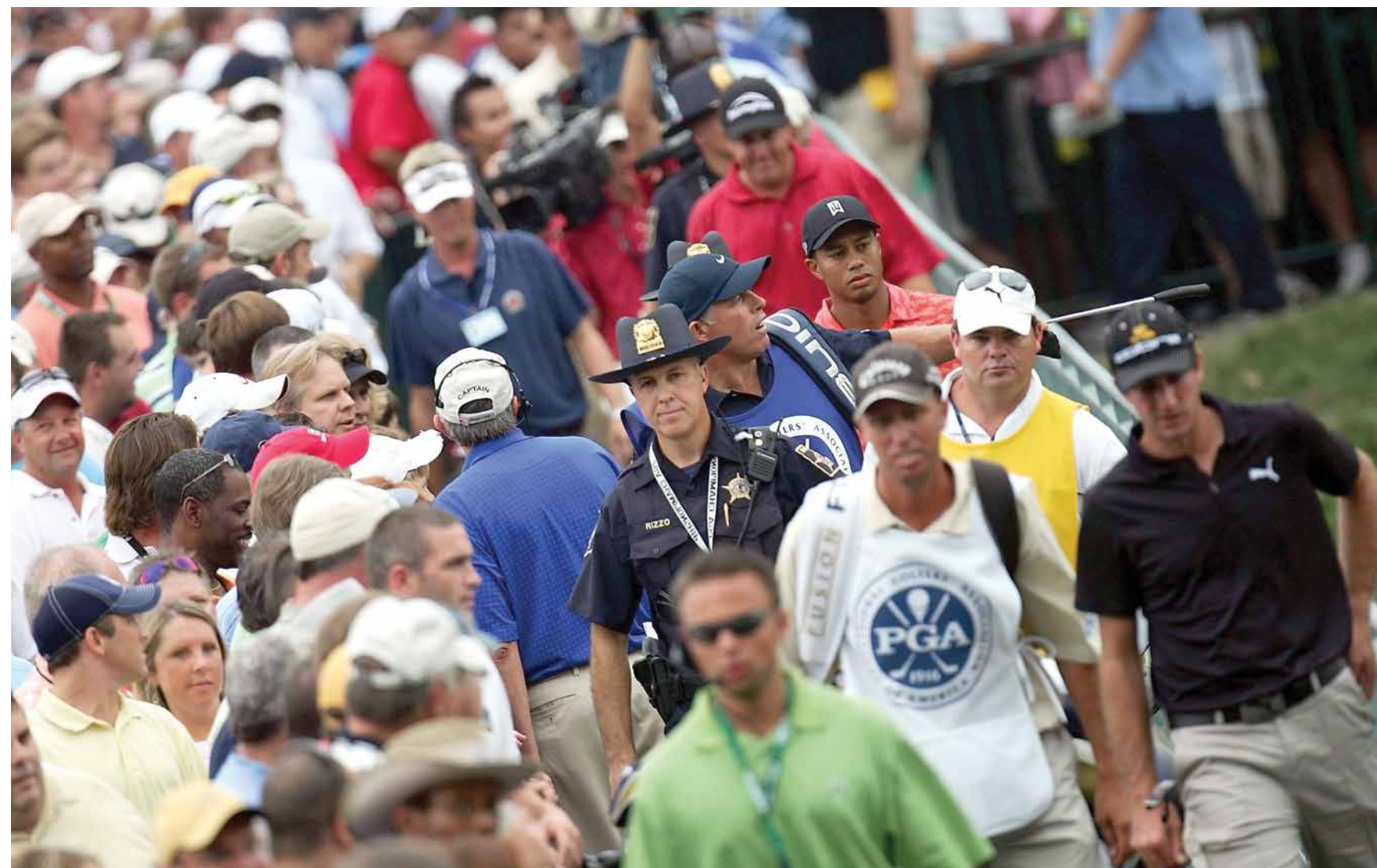
been 500 people inside the ropes following our group. It was madness.

"I remember coming off the course on Thursday and going in for lunch with the boys and someone said, 'This is a weird major, there's nobody here' and I'm saying, 'What do you mean?' because the crowds were seemingly all with our group.

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ABOVE: Phil Mickelson, Geoff Ogilvy and Tiger Woods. BELOW: The trio are escorted in between holes during the 2006 PGA Championship at Medinah Country Club.



“What that did for me was to create stronger memories of the course than normal. When you play as many tournaments as us, you go to a place once and you don’t even remember the course because it’s a one-off tournament, 24 tournaments into the year.

“But that one... you don’t forget majors in the first place and you’ve got a heightened awareness of your surrounds when you’re in that situation or in a last group in contention.

“So when the Medinah pictures and drone footage started coming in, it brought all the memories back. It was pretty handy for Michael and Ashley to be able to piece together the aerals and I’d fill in the blanks for them: ‘What’s that slope there?’ or ‘How high is that hill?’

“It’s one of my better memories from playing in majors. I played pretty well [finishing tied for 9th behind Woods] but just those first two days – I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Ogilvy reckoned you’d need to poll Medinah’s members to settle on the number of times No.3 has been redesigned over the years, but he suggested they’re clearly not averse to change and that they want the course to be “the best version it can be”.

“Medinah has a pretty rich history of big tournaments, comparable with almost anything in America,” he said, “pretty famous for Ryder Cups and US Opens; a big club with three courses, lots of members and always in the public eye. They want a course that works for big events and also for members, which adds some interesting dynamics for us, having to factor in things to cater for elite-level golf, longer tees, infrastructure needs and so forth.

“When we looked through all the course aerals going back generations, there have been multiple different routings and setups, so they obviously have an appetite



Geoff Ogilvy, Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson on the 17th green during the 2006 PGA Championship at Medinah Country Club.

for change there amongst the membership. It’s part of the culture of the club.”

Although final recommendations to the club are still a way off, consideration for the logistics involved in acting on the master plan has naturally been a primary consideration in their thinking. Not least among these issues are the contrasting seasons experienced in Chicago that will play a part not only in agronomical considerations but also construction timetables.

“Apart from the heat they get in summer, they get feet of snow in Chicago in winter, so it will certainly be a different proposition for us to get in all the work we can between the winter months,” Ogilvy said. “We worked at Royal Canberra in Australia, which gets pretty cold, but

nothing on the scale of what they experience in Chicago.”

Integrating the challenge of short grass as part of their design and presentation of green surrounds is clearly a part of OCM’s ‘DNA’ and integral to how they think golf should be played. Short grass surroundings that flow between greens and bunkering and undulations are an undoubted feature of their work and there can be no doubt capitalising on opportunities to introduce or expand on this at No. 3 will form part of the recommendations.

“Short grass can be a really effective way to make a course more challenging for the tour pro but friendlier for the member,” Cocking said in an earlier interview. “Short grass creates options, and tour pros aren’t necessarily accustomed to that when playing recovery shots around the greens.”

Ogilvy added: “If you can provide a great challenge to great players without ‘hack-out’ rough, I think you’ve done pretty well. And we’d love the members to be able to see the pros presented with basically the same course they play, not just the twisted, narrowed-in, longer-rough version.

“Members don’t often get to experience this and it’s a feature of courses like Royal Melbourne, Augusta National and Oakmont that, aside from changing the tees, the pros can play tournaments over the same course the members play every week.

“If we can leave behind that sort of situation, it would be ideal.” □