

When Four is More Than Five

By: Nathan Crace Date: May 19, 2007

I'm sick of it. I've had it up to here. Enough is enough is enough. Every year, someone wants to start talking about what should be golf's fifth major. Why? What is the logic behind having another major? Since when was four not enough? It used to be that the Memorial was the next best thing. Jack's event at Jack's place seemed to be a natural fit. After all, it was played in May when we have that unusual lapse in majors. To borrow from curmudgeon Andy Rooney, "Did you ever wonder why there's a two month gap between the Masters and the US Open and only a month between the other majors?" Maybe that's why people want to have another major. To fill the hole that exists in their TIVOs. Can we really not wait the extra month to get our fix? Is it just coincidence that the PGA Tour moved the Tournament Players Championship...er, the Players Championship...er, I mean The Players to May beginning this year? Yes, I know they renovated the course and built a gargantuan new clubhouse and they needed the extra month to get things ready, but it seems awfully convenient that the Tour's baby now sits firmly ensconced in that coveted May slot. Maybe that's just conspiracy theory nonsense. The Tour would never do anything simply to cement its foothold in the game.

So back to the question of the time lapse. When I was a young lad, I too wondered why there was such a lapse. The answer to me seems somewhat simplistic—maybe too much so. The Masters is when the Masters is because the club's founders wanted to show off the natural beauty of the dogwoods and azaleas. And I don't care how much money and power you have, the timing for that decision was pre-programmed into the genes of those plants by a much higher power than you will find in golf. And the US Open is in June because it is an "Open." It's open to anyone who qualifies and makes it through the grueling rounds of golf one has to win to get there via the qualifier's route—that takes time. And since a good number of America's golfers live in the Northeast and upper Midwest, they have to have time to thaw out and warm up their games and time to get all of those qualifiers worked in *before* the Open.

The Open Championship (we call it the British Open on this side of the pond) is when it is because it is when it is. It is the eldest of the four and, as such, gets to keep its spot and do whatever it wants with it. Besides, some of the courses on the northern side of the British Isles can still be pretty cold in the spring. The PGA Championship is in August because, well the best explanation I can come up with is that it used to be the championship for PGA members—not just the Tour guys—and your club pro is too busy working during the season to work on his game. So it gives those guys the summer to knock off the rust and try to qualify.

Neither The Players nor the Memorial are of major status. Sure, they are great tournaments with plenty of their own history and many memorable finishes, but the grand slam is a grand slam for a reason: there are four of them. Just like there are four wheels on a car, four legs on a horse, and four wedges in Phil Mickelson's bag. Any more would be out of balance. And if you add more, then the four gentlemen besides Tiger who have career Grand Slams would no longer have them—and two of them have already passed on.

So next year, usually in late April or early May, when you hear someone start talking about which tournament should be the fifth major, slap them—with this dose of reality: Let's at least wait until someone wins all four in one calendar year. Then we can talk about it...maybe. And with all due respect to Zach Johnson, I don't think we will be having that discussion the evening of this August 12th.

Nathan Crace is a golf course architect and member of the Golf Writers Assoc. of America whose freelance "Lipouts" column is based, at times, on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed or wish to read past columns from his archives, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know. Copyright 2007.