Preparing for the 111th Trans-Mississippi Championship

An Interview with Corky Nelson

Q&A with Southern Hills Country Club’s Head Golf Professional

Looking Back: Hyndman Sider

The Trans-Miss Transcript
Serving Golf for More than 100 Years
FIRM AND FAST ARE TWO OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WORDS IN CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF.

Golf courses in the summer are meant to be firm, which makes the fairways and greens play fast. It’s those extreme conditions that help identify the best golfer in the field during a given week. Firm and fast conditions create the highest amount of scrutiny on a competitor’s ability to control his golf ball … and his nerves.

Rest assured Southern Hills Country Club once again will provide the ultimate test for the 111th playing of the Trans-Mississippi Championship presented by TaylorMade-Adidas from July 7-10. The historic Perry Maxwell track that has hosted seven professional majors and nearly every USGA amateur championship will play to 7,104 yards as a par 70.

It will be firm.
And it will be fast.

“We like to shine for championships,” Southern Hills superintendent Kris Davis said. “That’s what this club is about; that’s what our history is. We would like to have a true test of golf and have the best player stand at the end of the day. We’re not going to trick it up. We don’t need to.”

Davis and his staff employ an “aggressive” aeration program in the spring so that Southern Hills’ Bermuda grass fairways, rough and tees and its bentgrass greens can peak in the summer months. Davis said Southern Hills tends to be at its best condition-wise in July, which is perfect timing for the Trans-Miss. The Bermuda is thick and lush in the rough (cut to 2 inches for the championship) and tight and firm in the fairways (cut to 3/8th of an inch).

The fairways will be more generous than the narrow mowing patterns Davis used at the 2007 PGA Championship and 2009 U.S. Amateur.

The greens will be quick. Davis didn’t say exactly how fast they’ll run, but he said they would be speedier than the 11½ to 12 on the Stimpmeter that members

“I think you could take every tree off of this golf course and it would still play very difficult.”
see on a typical weekend. Pushed-up and on the medium size, it is the greens at Southern Hills that serve as par’s final line of defense.

“I think you could take every tree off of this golf course and it would still play very difficult,” Davis said. “The green complexes designed by Perry Maxwell 78 years ago are the strength and teeth of this golf course.”

Defending champion Bryson DeChambeau, a sophomore at SMU, will be among the 144 of the best amateurs in the world vying for the title. DeChambeau’s final round 69 secured the 2013 Trans-Miss victory. He shot 14-under 266 for the 72-hole championship at Meadow Club in Fairfax, Calif. A native of Clovis, Calif., DeChambeau finished second in the California State Amateur a few weeks prior to last year’s Trans-Miss. He joined Kelly Kraft as the second SMU golfer to win the tournament. Kraft, now on the Web.com Tour, won the Trans-Miss and U.S. Amateur in 2011.

“I don’t know what to say. It’s been a long time coming, but this one feels so sweet,” said DeChambeau after tapping in for par on the 72nd hole last year. He backed up the victory with a solid start to his sophomore year at SMU, posting top-five finishes in each of the Mustangs’ four fall events.

His spoils haven’t gone unnoticed. DeChambeau recently was selected to the U.S. Palmer Cup team for the annual team match play event to be played June 26-28 at Walton Heath Golf Club in Surrey, England. He’s also one of 10 semifinalists for the 2014 Ben Hogan Award, given each year to the top college golfer.

DeChambeau will attempt to become the first back-to-back winner since Allen Miller won the Trans-Miss in 1969, ’70 and ’71. Jack Nicklaus won the prestigious event in 1958 and ’59, highlighting an impressive past champions list that includes Ben Crenshaw (1972), Gary Koch (1973), Bob Tway (1978) and Mark Brooks (1979).

Whoever emerges as the 2014 champion, Southern Hills head professional Dave Bryan believes he will have succeeded for his mental strength as much as his physical tools. Bryan in 2001 told reporters that a then-25 year old Tiger Woods was not mature or patient enough to win at Southern Hills. When the PGA Championship came to Tulsa in 2007, Bryan said beforehand that Woods had grown into a much smarter golfer and was indeed ready to win at Southern Hills.

In both cases, Bryan was proved correct. Woods tied for 12th at the 2001 U.S. Open, ending his streak of four consecutive major championship victories. He won his 13th major at the 2007 PGA Championship.

“The key to scoring at Southern Hills is playing an intelligent brand of golf,” said Bryan, who has been the Southern Hills head pro for 25 years. “You have to miss the shot in the right place. It will be very important to play from the fairway and accept your fate if you don’t.”

Built in 1936, Southern Hills has a distinct history of producing quality champions. From Babe Zaharias at the 1946 U.S. Women’s Amateur and Tommy Bolt at the 1958 U.S. Open to Nick Price’s 1994 PGA Championship and Retief Goosen’s 2001 U.S. Open, only the best and often most patient player in the field will stand alone after 72 holes at the classic Maxwell course.

“Southern Hills is a shot maker’s course,” Trans-Miss Director of Operations Dave Prinz said. “You have to think your away around and be precise tee to green. That time of year, it will play firm and fast so length won’t be much of an issue. The winner will most likely be someone with local knowledge and a hot putter.”
As the head professional at Southern Hills Country Club, Dave Bryan has had a front row seat to some of the more notable moments in golf history during the past 25 years.

His course was the site of Nick Price’s ascension to the No. 1 position in the World Golf Rankings after Price went wire-to-wire to win the 1994 PGA Championship. The longtime pro also saw Retief Goosen put an end to Tiger Woods’ streak of four straight major championships – Bryan told the media before the championship that Tiger wasn’t ready to win at Southern Hills – when Goosen won the 2001 U.S. Open in an 18-hole playoff.

In 2007, Bryan went back on the record before that year’s final major and said a more mature Woods had learned to think his way around the sublime Perry Maxwell shot-maker’s course and was ready to win. Bryan was right. Woods plodded around Southern Hills and won his fourth PGA Championship and 13th major that week.

Bryan started at Southern Hills, which has hosted seven professional majors and nearly every USGA national championship, in 1989. At the end of this year, Bryan is set to retire. Before he does, however, Southern Hills will host the Trans-Mississippi Championship from July 7-10. We caught up with Bryan for a short visit in April. He reflected on his time at Southern Hills and gave his thoughts on the upcoming Trans-Miss.

You’ve seen a lot of history made during your time at Southern Hills. What are your favorite memories?
DB: There are too many to list. One of my favorite major championship memories was in 2001, when I was interviewed a lot about Tiger’s chances to win the U.S. Open here. I accurately said that I didn’t think Tiger was ready to win the U.S. Open at Southern Hills. I didn’t think he had the patience it required. I sort of got lucky that he didn’t win it that year.

In 2007, when we hosted the PGA Championship, I got the same questions about Tiger. A lot had changed then and that time, I said ‘He’s got it.’ I said he had a great chance to win because he’s now patient and plays to the doglegs and doesn’t take as many risks. And he won it. He played very intelligently, so that was great to see.

How would you describe the Southern Hills aura?
DB: I think it is one of the top-10 facilities in the U.S. right here in Tulsa, Okla. I have been many places and Southern Hills ranks right up there with the best – starting with the drive to the clubhouse. We have hosted seven major championships and virtually every USGA Championship over the years.

The club is known worldwide and it’s fun to see the reaction from guests who are here for the first time. We provide exceptional service in a style that makes people comfortable with their experience, and anxious to return.

Who among your list of champions is your favorite?
DB: Without question, Nick Price.

What’s the difference between hosting a professional major and an amateur championship?
DB: Besides the magnitude of the event, it’s the attitude of the players and the appreciation of the opportunity to play a great venue that stands out.

Would you like to see the club host another U.S. Open or more U.S. Amateurs?
DB: I think we pride ourselves in hosting both. I know we will host many more amateur events, and the majors don’t come to the Midwest very often.

How does the Trans-Miss fit in with the other great amateur tournaments that have been played at Southern Hills?
DB: Well, it’s amateur golf and it fits right in with our mantra. We embrace it. We look at the Trans-Miss as another in the great line of great championships we’ve hosted. We’re excited about it, and I think the members will get behind it and we look forward to a great event.

What can the players in the Trans-Miss Championship expect to find in terms of how the course will play?
DB: The golf course should play firm and fast. It’s not long by today’s standards, but the greens and surrounds are world class. The players will have to have a great short game and patience.

Thank you for your time and best of luck with the Trans-Miss. We know it’ll be great.
DB: Thanks.
IN ITS 110-YEAR HISTORY, the Trans-Mississippi Championship has taken elite amateur fields to some of the best golf courses in America. Certain names echo louder among those premier facilities, such as Spyglass Hill, Prairie Dunes, Cherry Hills and Oak Tree National.

Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa is another that instantly calls to mind golf course supremacy. The grand 1936 Perry Maxwell design has produced champions by household names like Tiger Woods, Raymond Floyd, Nick Price and Hubert Green. The club has hosted three U.S. Opens (1958, 1977, 2001) and was the first to host four PGA Championships (1970, 1982, 1994, 2007).

The classic shot-makers course also has hosted a number of amateur championships, including the 1965 and 2009 U.S. Amateurs and the first-ever U.S. Women’s Mid-Amateur in 1987.

Southern Hills last hosted the Trans-Miss in 1968, when William Hyndman III battled then-young amateurs Tom Watson, Tom Kite, Johnny Miller and searing temperatures that the Tulsa World called “furnace heat.”

Ultimately, Hyndman beat Ed Hopkins 2-and-1 in the 36-hole final. Amid the energy-zapping weather, the 52-year-old from Pennsylvania played 102 holes over the final three days of the 1968 Trans-Miss. Yet even with the trophy in hand, the drama wasn’t finished.

Forty minutes after Hyndman left the club to catch his flight, the pro shop phone rang. It was the police. They found Hyndman slumped over the steering wheel of his rental car pulled off the road on Interstate 44. A Southern Hills member raced to St. Francis Hospital, where Hyndman was diagnosed with heat exhaustion, which caused his heart to fibrillate. He bounced back quickly and ultimately was fine, but they kept him at the hospital for two days to make sure.

Hyndman, who passed away in 2001, was a two-time U.S. Senior Amateur champion (1973, ’83). He played on five Walker Cup teams (1957, ’59, ’61, ’69, ’71) and was the runner-up in the 1955 U.S. Amateur. Hyndman had the same fate in three British Amateurs, finishing second in 1959, ’69 and ’70. In an early round match at the ’59 British Amateur, Hyndman defeated a cocky, young golfer named Jack Nicklaus.

The Golf Association of Philadelphia’s Player of the Year Award is named after Hyndman.

Hyndman’s grandson, Bill Hyndman V, wasn’t alive for the ’59 British Amateur or ’68 Trans-Miss, but he has heard the stories.

“After the match at the 1959 British Amateur, Jack’s father said to my grandfather it was the best thing that ever happened to Jack,” Bill Hyndman said. “It knocked him down to earth a little. He had to buckle down to work on his game.”

The younger Hyndman, 44, lives in Newtown, Pa., and holds a 3.5 index at Pine Valley CC and Huntingdon Valley CC. He played in several two-man tournaments with his grandfather, who he described as a perfectionist.

“He could hit it right down the middle, but if it was a little off the neck, he’d be disgusted,” Bill Hyndman said.

Most of the 144 players who will descend on Southern Hills in July in an attempt to get their name on the Trans-Miss trophy might never accomplish everything that Hyndman III did, but they should draw inspiration from his career.

“One of the coolest things about my grandfather was that his golf career was from ages 40-70,” Bill Hyndman V said. “He played on five Walker Cup teams. He had some hardships in life – he lost a brother in the war and suffered some financial hardships – but he had a dream to play golf. And he did that at a later age. He was able to play his whole life and still was competitive into his 70s.”
CORKY NELSON IS quick to downplay the notion of having any tangible competitive edge headed into the 15th playing of the Trans-Miss Senior Championship.

Nelson, the 69-year-old defending champion, owns a winter home less than nine miles from the host course, La Quinta Country Club. He's comfortable and more than familiar with the area and will be able to sleep in his own bed each night during the prestigious event.

Just don't ask him to admit any of that means he has an upper hand against the field.

"I don't think it's an advantage," said Nelson, who will tee it up and defend his 2013 title May 19-22. "I play there once or twice a year, so it's not like I play there every week."

Nelson shot 1-over-par 217 for 54 holes last year to win the Trans-Miss Senior by one shot over Cyrus Whitney of Oro Valley, Ariz., at the Gallery Golf Club in Tucson. Nelson, a Dallas resident since 2006, used precision driving to emerge as the champion. He missed only two fairways for the championship. Playing second shots from the fairway on par 4s and par 5s is always preferred, and it's a trait Nelson has used to win other big events such as the Jim Rivers Senior Cotton States Invitational and SOS Fall Classic in 2011 and the 2010 Gateway Senior Championship.

Like many great golfers, Nelson got his start in golf via the caddy yard. Born and raised in Santa Barbara, Calif., Nelson's junior high suffered a fire that burned down a large portion of the school. Students then attended class in “split schedules" and the after-school sports programs were suspended. Nelson finished school by 11 a.m., and with no sports to play he began caddying at nearby La Cumbre Country Club.

The job provided him money, an entry point to the game and an introduction to the club head pro San Randolph, who took an interest in Nelson and taught him the fundamentals of the golf swing.

"I caddied there for four or five years," Nelson said. "I cleaned clubs, picked up balls from the driving range. It gave me exposure to the game."

Nelson played college golf at Cal-Poly in San Luis Obispo and graduated in 1967. He's been playing amateur golf ever since. After he retired in 2008 from Celanese, the chemical company for which Nelson was the Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, Nelson was able to give his competitive golf game a higher priority.

He's a member at Dallas National, and the Quarry at La Quinta. The latter is a driver-hybrid from La Quinta Country Club, where Nelson keeps a winter home.

"La Quinta Country Club as a reputation for having some of the best greens in the valley," he said. "It's a great course."

As for defending his title, Nelson said he won't think much about it.

"At my age, I play in these events to have fun and be competitive," he said. "I have no expectations beyond that."
TRANS-MISSISSIPPI

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2014

Trans-Mississippi Senior Championship
May 19-22
La Quinta Country Club La Quinta, CA
Entries Open: March 3
Entries Close: May 5

111th Trans-Mississippi Championship
July 7-10
Southern Hills Country Club Tulsa, OK
Entries Open: February 10
Entries Close: June 2

Trans-Miss Four-Ball Championship
September 7-10
Club at Las Campanas Santa Fe, NM
Entries Open: June 16
Entries Close: August 25