



THE 19TH HOLE

BY RANDY YOUNGMAN

GOLF OUTING WAS A LABOR OF LOVE FOR FAZIO LAYOUTS

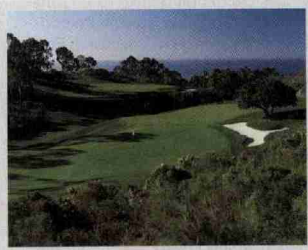
"Good morning, Mr. Youngman. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to play three Tom Fazio-designed courses in Orange County on the same day before summer's extended daylight ends. As always, should you fail to complete the mission for any reason - whether it's slow play ahead of you or your surgically ravaged right knee and/or cranky back giving out - your editor will disavow all knowledge of your actions. This tape will self-destruct in five seconds. Good luck, Randy."

Yes, that was my mission in early July, when the days were still long and my backswing was still short, so it certainly didn't seem impossible.

How hard could it be if I secured the right tee times at Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine and the Ocean North and Ocean South courses at Pelican Hill Golf Club in Newport Coast? Steve Friedlander, vice president of golf at the courses, took care of the strategically staggered tee times - 6 a.m. at Oak Creek, 10:05 a.m. at Ocean North and 3 p.m. at Ocean South - and I was ready to begin my quest: "Fazio 54."

Fifty-four holes in one day didn't seem particularly daunting - in theory, that is - because I once played 100 holes in 12 hours during a charity marathon at Coto de Caza. Granted, that was when I was a younger Youngman, but in recent years I've also played 36 holes on four consecutive days in the Lake Tahoe area and lived to write about it.

I also thought I was well prepared



THE GOLF COLUMNIST'S 54-HOLE ODYSSEY ON THE LINKS ENDED ON NO. 18 AT PELICAN HILL SOUTH.

this time, packing extra socks, an extra pair of golf spikes, two extra shirts, a knee brace, a new tube of sunscreen and two extra sleeves of Titleists in my golf bag. But when I hit the freeway at 4:45 a.m., I began having second thoughts as soon as I turned on my Sirius/XM radio channel and heard Linda Ronstadt belting out the lyrics from "Hurt So Bad." Was that an omen? Why couldn't it have been John Cougar Mellencamp singing "Hurts So Good"?

Well, too late to turn back now. When I arrived at Oak Creek, I was greeted in the parking lot by head professional Duncan Simms, my playing partner for my opening round. We were the first group off, and he had been briefed on my mission, so we flew around the course in 2 hours, 50 minutes, without ever hurrying. Why can't other golfers play at that pace?

Since it opened to the public in 1996, Oak Creek has been one of my favorite tracks because of the same feature that still makes it a must-play today. It is forgiving, or "user-friendly," as I call it. Hit a shot slightly off-line or a little too long and there's a chance on some holes for your ball to bounce out of the rough toward the fairway or off a bank onto the putting surface. That's not an accident - it was by design, as Fazio told me at the grand opening

many moons ago. (Unlike some architects - Pete Dye leaps to mind - Fazio wants you to have fun and come back.)

I left Oak Creek at 9 a.m. and had plenty of time to travel the 7.1 miles to The Resort at Pelican Hill, where Fazio's award-winning Ocean North and South courses are the centerpieces of the world-class resort and its 504-acre hillside village featuring ocean-view villas and bungalows, a spa, gourmet dining venues and more. OK, it's the definition of a paradise.

Chris Carlson - a longtime friend, Associated Press photographer and fellow golfaholic - joined me at Pelican for my final 36 holes and to document my growing fatigue with his camera lens. He's also a much better golfer, as he quickly demonstrated by holing an 80-footer for birdie on the North's first hole and hitting it stiff on No. 2 for a tap-in birdie. The showoff. To prove it wasn't a fluke, he also birdied Nos. 10 and 18.

We finished the North in a leisurely 4 hours, 19 minutes and, after rehydrating with Gatorade and grabbing a couple packets of Advil in the pro shop, we headed to the first tee on the South, my favorite course in Orange County. This time, we didn't see another group until the 15th hole and finished in 3 hours, 40 minutes at 6:25 p.m.

I'll admit the final 18 holes were a progressive struggle, but my score didn't reflect it because I had eight 1-putt greens. Stupid game.

My "Fazio 54" final totals: 12 hours and 25 minutes, 239 strokes, three birdies, two lost balls, three coats of sunscreen, two shirts, five quarts of Gatorade, two bottled waters, two sandwiches, two Advil tablets, one cookie - and one great time.

Mission accomplished. **SG**

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