

'LONGER HITTERS WILL HAVE A

BIG

ADVANTAGE'

—DANA FRY, ERIN HILLS ARCHITECT

A panoramic view of the US Open venue Erin Hills in Wisconsin showing the 9th green in the background

"IF IT'S SOFT AND THERE IS LITTLE WIND 10-UNDER-PAR COULD WIN. IF ITS DRY, IT WILL PLAY TOUGH AND EVEN PAR COULD WIN."



Golf Digest India Exclusive

June is United States Open Championship month. Every year, future US Open sites are announced by the United States Golf Association (USGA) with much fanfare. In 2010, it was announced that Erin Hills would play host to the 117th US Open slated from June 15-18. USGA estimates a \$130 million economic impact for Southern Wisconsin - including direct, indirect and induced spending leading to and during the championship. Golf Digest India spoke exclusively to Dana Fry, one of the three architects who were entrusted with the design and layout. Fry speaks on a variety of subjects related to golf architecture, including how the Erin Hills was built, and later selected to host the second Major of the year. **Excerpts from the interview...**

BY AMAN MISRA
aman@teamgolfdigest.com

GDI: How was the experience of working in a team of three along with Ron Whitten and Dr Michael Hurdzan on the design and construction at Erin Hills?

DF: I went to work with Dr. Hurdzan on April 1, 1988 and became his partner in 1996. We worked on over 100 projects together over a 24 year period and produced many great courses during that timeframe. Ron Whitten was a good friend of ours for many years and got involved in the Erin Hills project when we were interviewing for the project.

The three of us were all very involved in the project from its beginning. All of us are very different personalities with different strengths and weaknesses. Obviously we didn't agree on everything but we all had a great amount of respect for each other and through discussions we always arrived at a consensus. But we all had one common goal which was to build the best course possible on this great piece of land. I would say that the process of building Erin Hills became

the highlight of our business careers.

GDI: What is the process for a golf course to get selected for the US Open Championship?

DF: In the case of Erin Hills a few years before construction started, Ron Whitten wrote an e-mail to Mike Davis (then tournament director of the USGA) describing this great site that we hoped to build a course on and the enormous potential it had. It peaked Mike's interest and later that year he made his first trip to Erin Hills. Like everyone who toured it, even though no golf holes had even been built he saw it's potential. From that day forward the USGA had an interest in Erin Hills.

Finally in 2004, construction started and even before it was finished, the USGA offered Erin Hills the chance to host the 2008 US Women's Public Links Championship which it accepted. The course opened for play in 2006 and in 2008, Erin Hills was awarded the 2011 US Amateur and finally in June 2010, the 2017 US Open.

The course sits on 652 acres of land and people who toured the site were mesmerised

by its sheer beauty, dramatic landforms and endless potential. With the belief of David Fay (executive director of the USGA between 1989-2010) and Mike Davis behind it, eventually we had all of the USGA's support.

GDI: Once a course is selected, what are the stages in the preparation process?

DF: At Erin Hills many improvements were made to the course in advance of the US Amateur and US Open. Some were to create a better golfing experience, some to create better agronomic conditions and others were to challenge the best players in the world. Many people were involved in this process including the owner (Andy Ziegler of Artisan Partners LLC), his team, the architects and the USGA. Potential improvements were discussed among all parties and the improvements were agreed upon by all involved and then implemented.

We worked very closely with the USGA in fine tuning the course to create a fair but challenging course for the best players in the world. Some additional tees were added, bunkers were brought more into play or additional bunkers added. Greens were softened, and in a couple of cases relocated. We also increased the size of the practice putting green, and created a state of the art practice facility.

GDI: Minimal earth was said to be moved while building Erin Hills. In your opinion should this "naturalness" be the case with all golf course design?

DF: Erin Hills by modern course standards involved moving minimal amounts of earth but that doesn't mean all courses could or should be built that way. To create a truly naturally course you need a site that allows that type of course to be built. It will not work on sites in steep topography, on dead flat sites or sites with very poor or rocky soils. So my answer to this question is to build a natural looking course you need the right type of site.

GDI: Describe the nature and setup of this golf course...

DF: I think the greatest asset Erin Hills has is the amount of options that are available for the USGA to set the course up. The course is built on 652 acres and from the back of every tee could play over 8200 yards.

The USGA would never do that but combine all those tees, the multiple different angles they can play from, and the variety and changes they can make from day to day are almost limitless. It has a Par 3 that is a pitching wedge and Par 5s that stretch over 680 yards. The scale of Erin Hills is enormous and in all probability larger than any course to ever host a Major championship.

GDI: Six public courses including Erin Hills have been chosen to host the US Open. In this context, how important is it that public courses hold a tournament of such magnitude?

DF: Back in 2002 - Bethpage Black GC a municipal golf course on Long Island, New York hosted the US Open. The USGA felt it was important to grow the game, and for that purpose - the US Open at times be played on public courses that anyone could play. Before that the only public venues to host the US Open were Pebble Beach & Pinehurst #2. The USGA felt they needed to add more. So now we have the three mentioned above, Torrey Pines, Chamber's Bay and Erin Hills. I completely agree with what the USGA has done and hope the trend will continue to host future US Open's at public access venues.

GDI: Speaking to the press at Augusta, Mike Davis said scoring will be lower at Erin Hills as compared to other US Open sites. What do you think will be a good score at this Open?

DF: The winning score will be completely dependent on weather conditions. If it's soft and there is little wind 10-under-par could win. If its dry conditions, playing fast and firm and windy watch out because it will play tough and even par could win.

GDI: Do you have any pre-tournament favourites?

DF: Mid-June in Wisconsin typically will still have softer conditions and because of this I think longer hitters such as Dustin Johnson, Rory McIlroy and Jason Day have a big advantage. The USGA expects to play Erin Hills GC at Par of 72 around 7700 yards. All this can be adjusted depending on weather conditions but I do believe flying the ball in the air for long distances and with wider than normal fairways, length will be a huge advantage.



The 18th tee overlooks the clubhouse and "Holy Hill" National Shrine of Mary

"I THINK THE GREATEST ASSET ERIN HILLS HAS IS THE AMOUNT OF OPTIONS THAT ARE AVAILABLE FOR THE USGA TO SET THE COURSE UP."



GDI: What is your opinion on building a course for the retail golfer versus the professional?

DF: Almost all courses being built today should be built for the average golfer to enjoy the game, have fun, and be a source of relaxation and to enjoy the company of the people they are playing with. If you build a course that will only test the professionals the average golfer will not enjoy it and eventually quit coming to that course or playing all together which ultimately hurts everyone in the golf business.

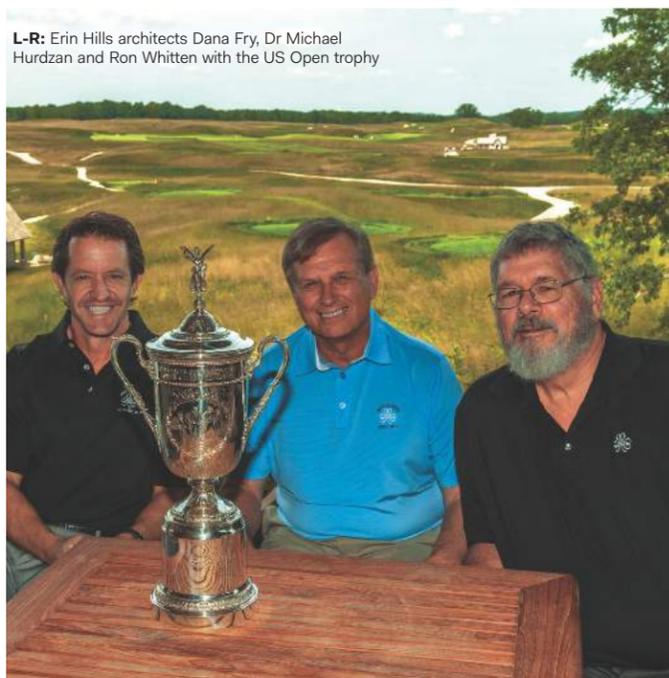
GDI: Keeping in mind changes to the equipment and pace of play, how has golf course architecture evolved from the 1800s to now?

DF: Obviously much has changed to include better equipment, better turf conditions, better athletes, etc. The game has changed from more of a finesse and feel game to a game of power. Players are hitting it longer and longer so golf courses have had to adjust. Instead of courses being built on 100 acres like they were in 1900 we need 200 acres today. The landing areas in 1983 when I started in the business were built at 267 yards from the back tee and today we build them at 300 yards or more. In 1983 if you had houses down both side of a golf hole you would have 260 feet between the property boundaries on either side and today to build that same type of hole you need a minimum of 350 feet but preferably more.



Bunkers behind the 10th green highlights the course's defence

L-R: Erin Hills architects Dana Fry, Dr Michael Hurdzan and Ron Whitten with the US Open trophy



Erin Hills quick facts

Location - 7169 County Road O Erin, Wisconsin 53027
www.erinhills.com
Area covered - 652 acres
Year opened - 2006
Type - Public
Total holes - 18
Designers - Dr Michael Hurdzan, Dana Fry and Ron Whitten
Greens - Bentgrass
Fairways - Fine fescue
Owner - Andy Ziegler

Major Championships hosted

2008 US Women's Amateur Public Links (Won by Tiffany Joh)
 2011 US Amateur (Won by Kelly Kraft)
2017 US Open (June 15-18)
US Open Tickets - usga.org

How to get there - Erin Hills is located 35 miles northwest of Milwaukee and 115 miles from Chicago. There are seven airports depending on your need. A shuttle service between these airports and Erin Hills also makes things easier, along with the option to ship one's golf bag to reduce the inconvenience of traveling heavy.

Best finish by Indians at the US Open

Shiv Kapur - T23 (2014)
Jeev Milkha Singh - T36 (2007)
Jyoti Randhawa - CUT (2006)
Arjun Atwal - CUT (2010)
Anirban Lahiri - CUT (2015,2016)

UPCOMING U.S. OPEN SITES

2018 Shinnecock Hills G.C., Southampton, N.Y.
2019 Pebble Beach G. Links
2020 Winged Foot (West) G.C., Mamaroneck, N.Y.
2021 Torrey Pines (South) G. Cse., La Jolla, Calif.
2022 The Country Club, Chestnut Hill, Mass.
2023 Los Angeles C.C. (North)
2024 Pinehurst No. 2
2025 Oakmont (Pa.) C.C.
2026 Shinnecock Hills G.C.

		TOTAL YARDAGE		ERIN HILLS SCORECARD		RATING & SLOPE				
		7800				MEN'S				
		PAR - 72				BLACK 77.9/145				
HOLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	OUT
Black	608	358	476	439	505	237	607	492	165	3887
PAR	5	4	4	4	4	3	5	4	3	36
HOLE	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	IN
Black	504	403	464	215	613	370	200	481	663	3913
PAR	4	4	4	3	5	4	3	4	5	36