

Rees Jones is excited as his redesigned Torrey Pines South gets set to host U.S. Open

by Ed Zieralski

SAN DIEGO - When golf architect Rees Jones looks over Torrey Pines South, he sees a course that will play much harder in June.

Because he redesigned both of them for U.S. Opens and because both are public courses played by the masses, golf architect Rees Jones finds it easy to connect Bethpage Black on Long Island, N.Y., and Torrey Pines South on the bluffs of La Jolla in San Diego.

LOOKING SOUTH - When Reese Jones looks over Torrey Pines South, he sees a course that will play much harder in June. CNS Photo by K.C. Alfred. "I'm proud of both of them," Jones said during his visit here during last month's Buick Invitational at Torrey Pines. "Both of them are very special to me. I coined the 'People's Open' for Bethpage Black when we did the work there, and this is the second 'People's Open' because this is a public golf course that anybody can play before or after the Open."

For Jones, though, the similarity pretty much ends there.

When former USGA Executive Director David Fay enlisted Jones to turn the Black, a neglected state golf course and one of five in Bethpage State Park, into a U.S. Open site, he only asked that the man known as the "Open Doctor" perform arthroscopic surgery on A.W. Tillinghast's body of work that had become unsightly.

At Torrey Pines, Jones went deep and did the equivalent of quadruple bypass surgery as the good doctor from Montclair, N.J., both toughened and beautified William Bell's original design of Torrey South.

"Bethpage Black was more a restoration," Jones said. "This basically is a new golf course on the same site."

Fay only paid Jones a couple of expensive dinners to refurbish the Black Course as Jones donated his fee by giving back to public golf.

Jones was paid for his original work at Torrey, where the Friends of Torrey Pines spent a total of \$3.4 million to refurbish it, paying Jones from that sum. But Jones since has donated his time for additional work at Torrey, including last summer's considerable changes on the par-4 fourth hole. Mark Woodward, the city of San Diego golf operations manager, said recently that it took the city a while to get the right leadership, staffing and equipment needed to highlight the improvements Jones made on the course.

Jones agrees.

"It took them a while to realize what they needed to do maintenance-wise and to keep the course up," Jones said. "But with Mark Woodward in there now, they now realize they need to do more applications and more preventive maintenance. Mark has aerified it 16 times since he's been here. Now that Mark has Jon Maddern (as assistant) there, you have two superstars taking care of the golf course."

He predicts the winning score will be under par at Torrey in June because the rough won't be that severe even if the greens are lightning quick. He also addressed several other topics about the course and the U.S. Open during his visit to Torrey Pines for the Buick Invitational:

- He didn't see the Buick Invitational as an "audition" for the U.S. Open: "They're shooting low numbers because it's so wet. It's not going to rain in June. It's going to be a much different golf course in June. It's going to be firm and fast and the greens, which are at 10 now (on the Stimpmeter), probably will be at 13 for the Open. They're going to have to hit better shots to stop the ball. The balls are going to go through the greens, which they aren't today. When it's wet it's target practice. When it's dry, it's a much tougher test."

- On the continuous cart paths on the South Course and mandatory cart-paths-only rule for the public leading to the U.S. Open: "I know it's inconvenient to some degree because you have to walk in a ways to the fairways. But that's really preserving the surface when it's wet like this."

- On Torrey's length, which at 7,607 yards and played as a par-71, will be the longest U.S. Open course in history: "We have three par 5s for the Open and two are over 600 yards (the ninth and 13th). But those are both, to some degree, still two-shot holes. We lengthened Baltusrol 17th to 650 yards, they still went for it."

- On the 18th being a par-5: "I agree with 18 being a par-5. What it really does is there still is going to be a horse race going on when they get to 18. Anything could happen. Bogey, eagle, birdie. I would have probably made 9 (now a par-5) a par-4. No. 9 probably will be the easiest hole in relation to par. They'll play 6 as a par-4, but 9 as a par-4 would have been interesting."

- On the Open being a par-71: "I think by going to a par 71 we've really brought more people into the mix. Look what Zach Johnson did last year at Augusta. He's got a great wedge game. Basically you'll only have two long par-4s - 6 and 12. I'd rather the red numbers be higher. When you have a par-71, they're going to be little bit lower."

- On building the controversial new tee box on the par-5 13th and adding over 250 yards of carry over a canyon for the tee shot: "A par-5 is three shots and two putts. I don't blame them (for the criticism). They'll think Tiger is going to have an advantage and guys like J.B. Holmes and Bubba Watson will have an advantage. But that hole is downwind, and I don't care what the length is, a lot of guys will go for that."

- He likes the amount of choices available to USGA set-up man Mike Davis when he chooses tees and pin placements during the Open. "The last few years Mike Davis has taken conditions into account. He doesn't say from Day One that this is where the tee is going to be. We won't know a lot of what he's going to do until Thursday (first day of the U.S. Open). He's going to move a lot of the tees around, depending on pin positions."

- What are some of your current projects?: "I just re-did Oakland Hills for this year's PGA and we're doing some tweaks at Bethpage for next year (for the return of the U.S. Open)."

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