

Bob Ford

A Real Pro

BY DANIEL CASCIATO

For the eighth time in its history, Oakmont Country Club will be the host site for the U.S. Open, and Bob Ford, PGA Director of Golf at Oakmont, says that he can't wait for the championship to come back to the region this June 11-17.

"It's the chance of a lifetime to watch the Open in your hometown," says Ford, a PGA Master Professional and Oakmont resident. "I want to encourage everybody to come out to see it."

Ford, who is a highly-accomplished player himself and one of the top PGA club professionals in the country, also serves as Head Professional at Seminole Golf Club in North Palm Beach, Florida, during the winter months.

He has competed in three U.S. Opens—in 1980, 1983 (tied for 26th) and 1996 (tied for 40th) and 10 PGA Championships. He tied for sixth in the 2005 PGA Club Professional Championship. In 1987, he was named the national PGA Golf Professional of the Year and in 1988, he was named National PGA Club Professional Player of the Year. He was a 1998 inductee into the Western Pennsylvania Sports Hall of Fame. He also co-wrote the book *Golf: The Body, the Mind, the Game*.

Ford recently took some time out of his hectic schedule to share his thoughts on the Oakmont Country Club, the U.S. Open, and living in Oakmont.

How long have you been golfing and what got you started?

I've been golfing since I was 12 years old, and my family was a major contributor to my beginning.

What is your most memorable golfing experience?

When the U.S. Open was in Oakmont in 1983 and I was the host professional, I qualified to play and played all four rounds.

What kind of training do you recommend to improve your game?

To work with a PGA golf professional, a coach and to regularly take lessons.

What is the most common mistake (or two) that you see golfers make?

The first is that they try to figure it out on their own—that's a very common mistake. Another common mistake is that they try to lift the ball off the floor.

What makes Oakmont Country Club an attractive place to play?

The history of the championships and the tradition of the club. It's one of the very storied venues in the game. People from all over the world have heard of it and want to come play it.

Can you describe some of the similarities and differences between the Oakmont Country Club and the Seminole Golf Club?

Florida golf and northeastern golf are just two very different things. They're both wonderful golf courses. The similarities are that we both have in the range of 200 bunkers on each golf course which is very rare; so they are both heavily bunkered. Seminole has a phenomenal amount of wind because it's on the ocean.

What is it about Oakmont that makes the USGA keep coming back?

The fact that it's hosted all these Opens and that it's proven to the USGA that the golf course is worthy. Also, the members are so accommodating to the USGA that the relationship we formed over the years have just lent themselves to returning every decade.

What does it mean to this region to be hosting the U.S. Open once again?

Probably upwards in the range of \$200-\$300 million (laughing). More than that, what it means to the region is that it gives everybody such wonderful memories and access to the stars of the game. We've had wonderful memories of being at the Open and all these great players play, like Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson, Tiger Woods, and Ernie Els. It's really a great opportunity for our local people to get to see the stars and see a major championship. It's pretty awesome actually.

What changes have been made to the course to get it ready for the U.S. Open?

Over the last six years, we've just went through an extensive renovation where we redid the bunkers on the golf course and moved them strategically throughout the course. We also lengthened about seven of the holes on the golf course and renovated all of the ditches on the property. It was a pretty drawn out, expensive process, but it's all done now and we should be good to go.



Besides golfing, what are some of your other hobbies?

I'm just a big sports fan. I love watching hockey, baseball, football, and college basketball.

What are some accomplishments in your life that you are most proud of?

Personally, I'm most proud of my three children (one daughter, age 16, and two sons, 14 and 12) and my 27-year marriage to my wife, Nancy. Professionally, having the length of tenure at Oakmont is something I'm very proud of. Beyond that, I'm proud of the assistants that I had who went on to become head professionals around the country. Mentoring those young people has been a great thrill for me.

What was the best advice someone ever gave to you?

It's nice to be important; but it's more important to be nice.

What do you enjoy most about Oakmont?

It's close to Pittsburgh and I love going down to watch the Penguins, Steelers, Pirates, and Pitt. I love the access to all the sports facilities that the region offers us. Oakmont is just a wonderful community that has a lot of charm to it. The neat thing about Oakmont is that it's a part of Western Pennsylvania culture and everybody in Western Pennsylvania feels like they own a part of it. Everybody feels that Oakmont belongs to the community like the Steelers and the Pirates do.

Do you have any favorite places in Oakmont?

I like to hang out at Casey's and Hoffstot's—two wonderful restaurants in Oakmont. SA