



THE RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

A MEMORABLE HISTORY OF THE RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

How the Barclays Came to Ridgewood



The final approval for Ridgewood to play host to the 2008 Barclays was received in early February 2008, a mere six months before the tournament would be played. But the full story of how the event came to Ridgewood begins in 2003.

Throughout its history Ridgewood has played host to numerous golf competitions including the 1935 Ryder Cup, the 1974 US Amateur, the 1990 US Senior Open and the 2001 Senior PGA. The 2001 Senior PGA was, at best, a mixed success. A combination of a tough economy and uncooperative weather resulted in the club receiving a relatively modest financial reward for its efforts. The decision to erect the corporate hospitality tents on the practice range

deprived the members of use of the range for the greater part of the 2001 season.

After the 2001 Senior PGA Championship it was not clear whether the club's membership was in favor of hosting future tournaments. In 2003 RCC's president, Fred Marcon, sent out a Master Plan survey to all members. In addition to asking questions about the Master Plan for the club and golf course, the survey sought feedback regarding professional tournaments. The result showed that over 2/3 of the membership was in favor of hosting future tournaments. Approximately one tournament every ten years was the preference.

In 2003 the PGA TOUR contacted Dave Reasoner about the possibility of hosting the AmEx Championship. Two TOUR executives visited the RCC facility. Although the AmEx Championship did not materialize, the impression made during that visit would play a key role four years later in ultimately landing the Barclays.

In 2005, a committee was formed by then President Alex Khowaylo to actively explore tournament possibilities. Joining Alex on the committee were Gregg Boron, Bob Kobel, Dave Reasoner, Head Professional, and Todd Raisch, Superintendent of Greens and Grounds. The focus was to be on championship caliber events that could be comfortably handled by the club's facility and bring financial and other benefits to the club. The committee determined that the Women's US Open would fit these criteria. The USGA was contacted about the possibility of Ridgewood hosting the event in 2011, the next opening on their calendar.

Ridgewood emerged as a strong candidate. After months of meetings and discussions with the various USGA committees the club was successful in gaining support for its proposal. Only one step remained before the event

would be awarded to RCC, approval from the USGA Executive Committee. To almost everyone's surprise, in February 2007 Ridgewood was turned down. The USGA explained that they had committed to play the 2009 event in Saucon Valley and the 2010 competition at Oakmont, both courses in the state of Pennsylvania. They did not want to return to the northeast for a third year in a row. An even greater concern was Ridgewood's presence in a major media market with numerous options for the fan's entertainment dollar. The Women's Open had typically favored a smaller market venue to avoid being swamped by the local competition. Ultimately, the 2011 event was awarded to the Broadmoor Resort in Colorado.

In September 2007, only seven months after failing to land the US Women's Open, Ridgewood received an inquiry from the PGA TOUR. After holding TOUR events at Westchester Country Club continuously since 1967, the relationship between the PGA TOUR and Westchester had become strained. Although the TOUR had a multi-year contract to continue playing at Westchester, they were seeking a better and more permanent arrangement for the Barclays. The PGA TOUR knew that Ridgewood had hosted the 1990 Senior Open and the 2001 Senior PGA Championship events. The golf course had provided a fair test and the TOUR was pleased by how well the club had managed the events.

The status of the Barclays was enhanced beginning in 2007 with the establishment of the FedEx Cup, a season long competition that awards a large cash prize to the golfer who accumulates the most points. The FedEx Cup provides an incentive for the game's best players to compete in late season events such as the Barclays, which is held in late August. The TOUR's goal was to establish a 4-year club rotation in the NY Metropolitan area to elevate the stature of the FedEx competition.

Ironically for the PGA TOUR, reaching an accord with Ridgewood proved to be the easier half of the negotiation. Agreement was quickly reached on key deal points including Ridgewood's hosting fee, revenue from ticket sales and corporate tents, and the amount the PGA TOUR would pay to repair damage to the course as a result of the tournament. After a draft agreement was struck, it took only one four-hour session which included the attorneys for both sides to reach a "handshake" agreement. But all of this would have been meaningless unless the TOUR could extricate itself from the contract to play the 2008 Barclays event at Westchester through 2010. The negotiation dragged on for months. As a result, when the PGA announced in February 2008 that the Barclays would be coming to Ridgewood the following August, the club had a mere six months to prepare!

Even more than in previous tournaments, Paramus would be a key partner with the club in hosting the event. The mayor and council were immediately supportive and welcomed the surge in economic activity that would surely accompany the event. The borough's Emergency Preparedness Plan was given a very high priority. The 2008 Barclays would be played less than seven years after the 9/11 terrorist attack. With its close proximity to New York City and its numerous shopping malls, Paramus had been identified by the Bureau of Homeland Security as a potential target. Security was a key consideration as daily tournament crowds were expected to potentially exceed 20,000. Paramus was also pleased with the plan to contribute a portion of tournament's net proceeds to local charities. Bergen Community College was the happy recipient of a substantial payment to use its dormant-in-August parking lot.

It is interesting to note that the idea for what we now know as the Championship or "composite" course did not spring from the club's agreement to host the 2008 Barclays. Head Professional Bill Adams, Dave Reasoner's predecessor, and Todd Raisch had done preliminary work designing an 18 hole course that would play longer and tougher for championship caliber events. They had laid out an initial Championship course that included the same holes as those used later but in a different order. Initially, the 10th hole on the Championship course was going to be 4 Center. But this presented transportation and logistical headaches. Where would the staging area



be placed for players signing in for their tee times? How would players beginning their Thursday/Friday round on hole number 10 be transported in carts to their teeing area without significantly disrupting play on the other holes? Scenarios where players would be ferried over the Paramus course and through the cemetery were explored and rejected. The PGA on several occasions said they considered the problem unsolvable and the opportunity to host was almost lost.

The “eureka” moment came when Todd Raisch suggested a reordering of the holes on the Championship course to make the more easily accessible 6 East the 10th hole. Players teeing off on hole number 10 could be driven down the 9 East cart path and dropped off at the 8 Center green which was maintained as a practice green. They then walked across the 2 Center fairway in a players-only crosswalk to the staging area. While the East-West combination offered a course slightly longer than 7,000 yards, the new Championship course presented a more formidable 7,391 yards.

A popular misconception among Ridgewood’s golf members is that numerous changes at the direction of the PGA were made to the course to accommodate the 2008, 2010 and 2014 Barclays tournaments. Aside from the construction of five new tee boxes and alterations to two others, no changes affecting the playability of the course were made at the direction or suggestion of the PGA TOUR. The construction of new bunkers, the relocation of others and green expansion work resulted from the Golf Course Master Plan developed by Gil Hanse in 2001, long before there was any thought of RCC hosting the Barclays.

Ridgewood shares hosting duties for the Barclays tournament with Plainfield, Liberty and Bethpage Black. The event will return to Ridgewood in August 2014.

Following the Barclays success in 2008 and 2010 some members have asked about raising the bar even further and making application for Ridgewood to host a US Open or a Ryder Cup event. The club had played host to the Ryder Cup in 1935 when the event was in its infancy. The club actually considered applying in the late 1990s for a US Open or Ryder Cup tournament. Both possibilities were quickly deemed unfeasible largely for the same reasons. The infrastructure demands of these tournaments to accommodate press, corporate hospitality and gallery are so vast that the club, if chosen, would be forced to allow intense construction on the 9 holes that would not be used in the competition. The ensuing damage on those 9 holes would likely result in their loss for the entire golf season. The devastation experienced by Winged Foot when it hosted the US Open in 2006 confirmed RCC’s cautious approach. Upset among Winged Foot’s membership immediately following the tournament was so great that they voted overwhelmingly to never host another US Open! They subsequently reconsidered.

So, as we look ahead to hosting another Barclays this summer, think how different things might have been if the USGA had not been concerned about playing the US Women’s Open in a major market.

