



Nicklaus

SIGNATURE COURSE

Future Site of Match Play

BY JACK RICKARD EDITOR

When the late George Mehl and brother David were in search of a golf course architect to design a golf course that would be the centerpiece of the La Paloma development, the two finally decided on Jack Nicklaus.

“We talked to a lot of designers and it was an easy decision. Jack was a great choice,” said David Mehl, president of Cottonwood Properties.

That was 1983.

More than two decades later, David Mehl faced the same decision; he needed an architect to lay out two 18-hole courses - this time in the Dove Mountain area. Naturally, he selected Nicklaus.

“We had a wonderful experience with him at La Paloma,” Mehl said. “We saw his intensity, we saw his love of design, his enthusiasm. He loves it.”

Back then George and David Mehl often played doubles tennis with Nicklaus on his many visits to Tucson.

“Jack’s a great athlete and at that time was an avid tennis player, and quite a good tennis player,” Mehl said. “He’d schedule extra time so we could play doubles.

Tennis time today is scarce, as are the days the two would race around their work in progress on foot. “Now we ride,” admitted Mehl.

When the Mehls hired Nicklaus in ‘83, it was to be the 26th golf course on his design resume. Now he has done close to 200. Nicklaus and his design firm currently are working in 29 countries.

The 36-hole layout that also will include a Ritz-Carlton Ho-

tel on an 850-acre site will be strictly Jack Nicklaus, not a member of his design company. The development also will offer 350 home sites.

“Both are Jack Nicklaus Signature Courses,” Mehl explained. “With that you get Jack’s personal attention. He’ll make ten to fifteen visits here.”

“The site the golf courses at Dove Mountain will play across sits at about 2,700 feet and is one of the prettiest high deserts you will see, and one of the prettiest saguaro forests you will ever see in the desert,” Nicklaus said. “The site is nestled against the base of the mountains, and it has fantastic views. The property is very gentle within, but it has enough movement to create great interest throughout the golf course.”

The championship course at Dove Mountain will become the site of the World Golf Championships Accenture Match Play Championship in 2009. The tournament will move from the nearby Gallery Golf Club after next year.

The first 18 holes to be completed, and the site of the Match Play, will measure 7,833 yards from the championship tee. “We need that kind of length to challenge the golfer,” Mehl said. “With the low humidity and the altitude, that’s really similar to a 7,200-yard golf course.”

Mehl has noticed one definite change in Nicklaus’ design philosophy since La Paloma. “His style has matured. He has more concern for the average golfer,” Mehl said.

“You’re got to be able to create it so people can play the golf course,” Nicklaus said. “So I have to get it to where they can play the golf course and then get to where the gorillas,



as I call them, the guys that bomb it, are tested too. You've got to have a combination of those things. It's fun. Obviously I enjoy doing it."

Mehl said the course that will be the site of the Match Play has double fairways, which will allow spectators easy transition to adjoining holes.

"We've got space for a wonderful gallery site on 10 and 18," Nicklaus said. "And on 14, 15, 16 and 17, we've got a central area which is elevated, which people can go up and see all four holes. The course is designed for gallery-friendly usage. We'll finish the first nine this year and the second nine will be grassed up next spring, so we'll be ready for 2009 quite easily."

"It's hard to describe how exciting it is to walk around with Jack Nicklaus and watch him in action designing a golf course," Mehl said. "He is an amazing artist and just obviously an incredible golf mind. Combining those two things into his design talent is really just a beauty to behold."

"What you're trying to do is bring man and nature together to enjoy a game played outdoors," Nicklaus said.



David Mehl, President, Cottonwood Properties