

Carr McCalla's diary from the 2010 U.S. Open

Louisiana Golf Association Executive Director Carr McCalla served as a rules official for the U.S. Open held at Pebble Beach recently. Here is McCalla's diary from that event.

Tuesday (6/15/10)

Off to the airport at 6 a.m. My wife's at her home in Indiana helping care for her dad, who recently broke his hip. As a consequence, my son Ben has drawn the assignment of taking me to the airport. I'm still a bit tired, the Open typically falls the week immediately after our State Am so I just got back from Koasati Pines late Sunday and put in a full day at the office yesterday trying to be sure all the loose ends were tied up before I head west. Once I see gorgeous Pebble Beach this afternoon, I'm sure I'll catch my second wind. All of the Open venues are wonderful tracks, but there's something about Pebble that just takes your breath away. I go through Dallas and am scheduled to arrive in San Jose at 11:30 a.m. It's just over an hour's drive from the airport to Monterey. I'll check in at the hotel when I get there and then take the shuttle to the course.

We ordinarily don't get our assignments for Thursday and Friday until the Rules meeting Wednesday afternoon. However, I got an e-mail yesterday from Jeff Hall, who is in charge of the assignments, with a tentative list. It appears that my Thursday group will be Terry Pilkadaris from Australia, Rich Barcelo, from Reno, Nevada, and Gary Boyd from England. I don't know a whole lot about any of them. One of the things that makes the Open unique is that it truly is 'open' to anyone. If you want to play and have the requisite handicap index, you can advance to the Championship via local and sectional qualifiers. My Thursday guys have taken that route and will have the experience of a lifetime this week. I really enjoy walking with 'qualifiers.' They are just as excited about being at the Open as I am and, as a consequence, they're much more willing to converse with us rules officials during the round. We start off No. 10 at 12:30 p.m., the first group in the afternoon wave.

I go off No. 1 on Friday at 1:03 PM with Camilo Villegas, Zack Johnson, and Luke Donald. I had Donald for two rounds last year at Bethpage and also a couple of years ago at Oakmont. He's pretty quiet, as most of the touring pros are.....maybe 'focused' would be a better description. I'll look forward to being with Villegas and Johnson as well. Johnson's short game is well-documented. I walked with Tim Clark last year at Bethpage and was tremendously impressed with his short game. It'll be neat to be able to compare he and Johnson.

Wednesday (6/16/10)

I got to the course early this morning. I was able to get my sister and brother-in-law tickets for the week and I'm meeting them at noon for lunch. As a consequence, I'll have to get around the course before then as I need to get back to the hotel to clean up before our rules meeting this afternoon. I toured the course with Mark Hill, Executive Director of the Kentucky Golf Association. Mark and I both spent some time with the Tennessee Golf Association years ago. We finished our walk around 11:30 a.m. and I headed to the USGA Hospitality Room to find my sister and brother-in-law. They had gotten to the course earlier and watched from the grandstand behind No. 18 green until time for lunch. We had a good visit at lunch, then I headed back to the hotel and they headed back out onto the course. The rules meeting was at Quail Lodge in Carmel Valley. It was about a 30-minute ride out as our bus driver took a couple of wrong turns.....only 15 minutes back to the hotel.....I was worn out so I headed to bed pretty quickly.

Thursday (6/17/10)

We're staying at the Monterey Marriott. It's only a short distance north of Pebble Beach but the route the shuttle takes to Pebble is quite circuitous.....and the traffic can be somewhat congested. The shuttle is supposed to run every 15-20 minutes or so but I had to wait almost 40 minutes on Tuesday when I was trying to get to the course. It's been a little better the last couple of days but I'm glad I have a late starting time today so I don't have to worry about whether or not the shuttle will be on time or the traffic will be congested. I met my sister at the merchandise tent at 9:30. She had quite a list of people she had promised to bring back a Pebble Beach keepsake for. I had a smaller list as well.....so we did our shopping.....and then she headed out to watch some golf.

I headed to the locker room to get ready for my walk. I hadn't gone over the hole-by-hole notes last night since I knew I'd have time this morning to review them. The USGA staff puts together a 2-to-3 page paper that documents all of the rules contingencies on each hole for us. It lists all of the obstructions, TIOs, etc., etc. that we need to be familiar with/aware of so that we can be somewhat ready if a ball ends up in a position where we'll need to make a ruling. They have a draft of that document available for us when we arrive so that when we walk the course on Tuesday and/or Wednesday we can take a look at areas that we feel might

come into play. I spent 45 minutes or so going over the notes then headed out for the 10th tee. In 2002, the USGA began starting off both Nos. 1 and 10 on the first two days of this Championship and my group today (Pilkadaris, Barcelo, and Boyd) starts on the 10th. There's a shuttle that will take us out to the tenth tee.....at Pebble the No. 10 tee is about as far away from the clubhouse as is possible. I've decided to walk out because the shuttle I'll have to catch is also a significant walk away and then it's a 20-minute ride and another 10 minute walk to actually get to the tee.

Not one ruling today. It's not unusual to have a number of rulings when you have a group of qualifiers. Two years ago at Torrey Pines I had almost a dozen rulings one day, but today that was not the case. My guys didn't play great but they never got themselves far enough off course to need my help. We were the first group off No. 10 in the afternoon wave and I was hoping that we wouldn't have any slow players as the first group can have a huge impact on the pace of play if they get off to a slow start. Once we began our round, I quickly realized we had one player that could be an issue. Fortunately, we were OK on pace until we got to the 17th tee. The 17th and 4th tees share a teeing ground and we had to wait about three minutes for the group on No. 4 tee to finish with their tee shots before we could play off the No. 17 tee. That put us a bit behind our pace and then we had a four-minute search in the hazard off No. 18 tee for a ball Boyd hit into the ocean that put us a bit more behind. I called into the rover to tell them we were behind and that they might want to put us 'on the clock' on No. 1. Fortunately for us, the last group to start on No. 1 had some early problems so once we made the turn to the front side we were never out of position with that group.....even though we were 'over' our time. We were never put on the clock since we were always 'in position' relative to the group in front of us.

All in all, it was a pretty uneventful day. Barcelo had 77; Boyd and Pilkadaris 78s. We finished around 5:30 and I headed to USGA Hospitality for some dinner and to see how all my other 'rules cronies' rounds had gone. I got back to the hotel about 9:30 and fell asleep watching the Golf Channel.

Friday (6/18/10)

I met my sister and brother-in-law at 9 a.m. for breakfast. They wanted to see Tiger so I suggested they head to the grandstand behind No. 18 green to catch him as he made the turn from No. 18 to No. 1 (he started on No. 10 today). Once we finished eating that's what they did. I hung around USGA Hospitality watching TV (the telecast came on at 10 a.m.), then headed to the locker room to get ready for today's round. I start at 1:03 off No. 1 today so I didn't have to worry too much about getting to the tee on time. The first tee is about 40 yards from the locker room so it won't take me long to get there today. We got off on time at 1:03 and the first holes were pretty benign, rules-wise. Villegas hit a huge drive off No. 2. It's playing as a 505-yard par-4 this week and he had 159 yards for his second shot. I'm no mathematician but that calculates to a 346 yard drive! He made a 10-footer for birdie there and played well all day. Once we got on the green on the par-3 fifth, Johnson called me over as he and Villegas were surveying their putts. There was a blemish on the green between Johnson's ball and the hole that they couldn't decide whether was a ball mark or a spike mark. I took a look and it was quickly apparent to me it was a ball mark. The greens here are extremely firm and many times a ball mark is not easily identified as such because it doesn't leave much of a mark. From one angle you could distinctly see an indentation that was clearly made by a ball. As you might guess, Johnson was pleased with my determination and quickly repaired the ball mark and holed his 3-footer for par.

Donald started the day at even par after shooting 71 yesterday; Johnson was at one over, while Villegas was at seven over after his 78 on Thursday. It was apparent Villegas knew he'd have to play well today to make the cut and he hit driver a good bit more often than Johnson and Donald for that reason. Johnson and Villegas both hit it tight on the short par-3 seventh with Johnson missing his short birdie putt, but Villegas knocking his two-footer into the middle of the hole. Villegas is quite the crowd favorite, especially among the ladies. He will occasionally get into his 'Spider-man' position to read a putt and that elicits an interesting response from the females in the crowd.

Again, a pretty uneventful day until we got to No. 14, a par-5. When we got to the green, Donald and Villegas called me over again. Donald had hit a great third shot into the green and his ball had landed right behind the hole, creating a ball mark that had slightly compromised the integrity of the hole. I repaired the damage and they played on.....and on.....and on. The 14th green is probably the most difficult on the course to hit. It has an upper level that is tiny and a lower level that is sloped so severely that they can't even use it for a hole location. Johnson was over the green in three and hit his pitch a bit too hard. It crested the slope and once it finally stopped rolling it was 10 yards in front of the green with an almost impossible angle to the hole. His next was over the green again, his sixth shot ended up basically where his fourth had been. His seventh finally found the green.....and two putts later he had a quadruple bogey nine. It was difficult to watch, none of his shots had been unusually bad ones, it's just that there is literally no margin for error. The quad had put him at eight-over for the Championship and it appeared at the time that it would require finishing 36 holes at seven-over to make the cut. He kept his wits about him, made a birdie on No. 16, got up and down from the bunker on No. 17 and made a good par on No. 18 to shoot 77 and finish on the number at seven-over. Donald struggled most of the day but, as is the case with the really good players on Tour, ended up getting the absolute best out of his round, shooting 75 and finishing at four-over for 36 holes. Villegas shot a two-under 69 to also make the cut at five-over.

Saturday (6/19/10)

We got our assignments late Friday afternoon for Saturday and I have the 20th group of the day, which goes off at 12:40 p.m. The USGA and NBC have planned for the final group to finish at around 11 p.m. Eastern time, so the first starting time is not until 9 a.m. today. I didn't know who would be in my group until the cut was made and Saturday's pairings were announced. The cut at the

U.S. Open includes anyone within 10 shots of the lead and with Graeme McDowell leading at three-under, all those at seven-over will play the weekend. As I left for the hotel last night the pairings were being handed out. I'll be with Bo Van Pelt and one of two amateurs that made the cut, Russell Henley from Macon, Georgia. Henley plays at the University of Georgia and won the Haskins award (golf's equivalent of the Heisman) as the best collegiate player this past year. I'm sure there will be a number of Georgia Bulldog fans barking at our group today.

I introduced myself to Van Pelt, Henley, and their caddies on the practice putting green before the round. Henley's caddy is his older brother Adam....I think he's more excited about being here for the weekend than Russell is. Henley got off to a tough start, with bogeys on the first two holes. The tee was up on the dogleg left third and both Van Pelt and Henley tried to bite off a good chunk of the dogleg. Henley found the fairway but Van Pelt played his drive a bit too far left, which brought about my first ruling of the day. His ball ended up behind the grandstand left of the fairway and behind the dual teeing ground for Nos. 4 and 17. We determined his relief and he dropped into a relatively good lie. His second shot carried just short of his target and ended up in some high grass just over the greenside bunker, giving him a horrendous stance for his third shot. He almost whiffed his third, then had to play his fourth away from the hole, and two putts later he had a double-bogey six. Henley had hit his approach shot to within three feet and made the putt for birdie. The fourth hole tee was up as well, playing only 280 yards. Henley hit first and his driver actually found the miniscule opening at the front of the green, ending up in the rough just over the green. A chip and a putt later and he had his second consecutive birdie, offsetting his opening two bogeys and getting him back to even par for the day. The par-3 fifth was next; Henley pulled his tee shot to the left and ending up behind the grandstand to the left and behind the green. On some of the temporary immovable obstructions (TIOs) on the course the USGA allows a player to take relief on either side of the obstruction, and this was one of those TIOs. We determined where Henley's relief would be on both sides and it was apparent that his best drop would be on the side opposite where his ball was. After completing the process of determining where to drop, he hit a good shot that ended about 20 feet below the hole and then sank the putt for an unbelievable par....the crowd erupted and the grin on his and his brother's faces was a mile wide. It had taken about five minutes for us to get through the ruling, so we were a bit out of position. I radioed in to the rover on the sixth hole to let him know that we had had a relatively lengthy ruling and that I felt we'd be back in position soon. Van Pelt and Henley both are pretty quick players and I was confident, assuming we didn't have any more rulings of the sort we'd had on No. 5, that we'd be back in position in short order.

Van Pelt had an awful day. He got on the bogey train and couldn't get off. He doubled No. 3, made a great up-and-down bogey on No. 4, pared No. 5, then bogeyed nine of the next 10 holes. He chipped in for a birdie two on the very difficult 17th and made par on the 18th to shoot 82. As tough as the day was, he never, ever, lost his professionalism. If you hadn't been watching his round, you would never have known that he was struggling. After the round, I talked with him briefly and told him that it had been an honor to walk with him because of the way he had handled the adversity of the day. Over the years, I've had the opportunity to walk with a lot of touring pros, club professionals, and amateurs and, believe me, that is not always the case when a player's having a bad day. He showed a tremendous amount of respect for the game in the way he handled himself and I wanted him to know that at least one person appreciated his behavior.

Henley shot a one-over 72 and put himself in position to finish in some rarified air for an amateur with another good round on Sunday.

Sunday (6/20/10)

NBC wants the Championship to end around 9 p.m. Eastern time on Sunday so we're going off a bit earlier today; our first starting time is 7:15 a.m. I go off at 8:45 with Texan Chris Stroud and Gareth Maybin from Northern Ireland. This was the fourth consecutive day they had played together. No rulings at all today; my only involvement in the round was a trip to the rocks/beach on No. 18 to help look for the ball Stroud hooked over the cliff. Today was a bit cooler than earlier in the week but still gorgeous. I've had the chance to visit some wonderful venues over the last number of years but Pebble is still on the top of my list. There really is something about these tiny greens overlooking the Pacific, Stillwater Cove, and Carmel Bay that is simply breathtaking. Stroud finished with a 73, while Maybin had a 75.

I got a play-by-play of the last couple of holes on the phone from my wife on the way to San Jose late Sunday afternoon. My flight home leaves early Monday morning so I'm staying near the San Jose airport tonight. It was quite an exciting finish with Graeme McDowell taking home a pretty special first win on American soil; although as is sometimes the case, it appears the golf course was the ultimate victor on Open Sunday.

One of the bright spots of the day for me was Bo Van Pelt's round. As you may remember, I had Bo on Saturday and he struggled mightily in the third round. He turned it around on Sunday, firing a three-under-par 68, tying for the best round of the day. Good things do happen to good people and with the way he conducted himself on a trying day Saturday, he certainly deserved his comeback round on Sunday.

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