



“Rory wasn’t even born when I designed this course!”

The magnificent National course was created from nothing by brilliant course designer Peter Harradine. *On The Tee* caught up with him this week.

Q What are your thoughts on the way things are going so far?

I’ve watched a lot of the action on the television and I’m here at the course today [Sunday]. I was a bit disappointed that the wind stopped the day before it got started! It’s always very difficult to design a golf course that is influenced by wind, like my course in Doha. It definitely makes things more interesting and more challenging, but the course is playing pretty difficult this week. I always tell everybody that it’s a lot easier to make an easy golf course difficult than a difficult golf course easy.

Q Would you prefer to see it play tough, or to see lots of birdies?

I think it’s great if these guys shoot low scores. Just to look at the scores that a few of the local pros and amateurs shot over the first two rounds gives you an idea of how hard it is. At the end of the day, we want a show. For the more important tournaments, the tours don’t have too much input, but at the lesser events they’re much more involved. There are certain tees that are never played here, because I think the organisers want some lower scoring. Fans want to see a lot of birdies. They don’t want to see players struggle. If the best players in the world play around par, it’s impossible to

appreciate just how difficult the course has to be set up. For a normal scratch player, he’s struggling to break 85. So I think around -15 or -16 for an event like this is a good winning score.

Q What do you make of the course changes that have been made since the championship came here six years ago?

It’s a shame that they put the real estate on the Abu Dhabi Golf Club. They’ve taken one or two great hills away. As far as the supplementary bunkers, I think the ones they’ve put in lately are pretty good. The game evolves, and courses have to evolve with the game. It’s like a car – you have to keep on servicing it. This course was designed 22 years ago! We had no site to work with. It was a salt flat originally. So everything you see now is completely artificial. Even the little hill that we built the clubhouse on was never there.

Q How does it make you feel when you see players like Tiger Woods and McIlroy fighting it out on your golf course?

Oh it makes me extremely happy. We [Harradine Design] have seven courses on the European Tour, but Abu Dhabi is one of the flagships. When I first designed the original layout of the course in 1989,

McIlroy was not even born! Woods was only 14! I’m very proud that the best players in the world are now playing the course and saying nice things about it.

Q A lot of the players have commented about the grainy greens this week.

I think the grainy excuse is for the people who putted badly – I’m sure those who putted well aren’t complaining! I think it’s important to realise that these courses were built for normal players. It’s a transitional nightmare if you oversee greens. I think they’re the best greens in the UAE at the moment. They have never been changed or rebuilt, unlike some others I could mention! So I think that’s a testament to how well they were built originally.

Q What is your view on Abu Dhabi as an emerging golf destination?

I think it’s going in the right direction. I’m very happy they are planning to rotate the championship, because it will showcase the emirate more. I think the next step for Abu Dhabi is a public course, to get beginners into the game. The championship courses are fantastic, but let’s have a place that’s more affordable and easier for high handicappers to enjoy. That to me is the next logical move to build an interest in golf. ♣