

The art and the deal

BY RON WHITTEN

Donald Trump has 100 Greatest fever. It's an affliction of many a rich golf course owner, a compelling urge to promote one's course as deserving of a spot on *Golf Digest's* next ranking of America's 100 Greatest Golf Courses. It's never a matter of ego, mind you. It's simply a matter of justice.

But other rich owners at least have a golf course. So far, Donald Trump has just a piece of land and a golf course architect. To be sure, he has an excellent piece of land (in Bedford, N.Y., on the highest point in Westchester County) and a top-flight golf architect in Arthur Hills. Still, it's very early in the rating game to be waging a campaign.

But The Donald is nothing if not eager. So eager, in fact, that he took time last fall to tramp through underbrush, silk suit notwithstanding, to show off the potential of his property.

It is impressive. There are granite outcroppings begging to be tee boxes, tree-lined ravines aching to be fairways and an open meadow already embracing a stretch of natural holes. Centerpiece of this land is a 75-year-old mansion called Seven Springs, childhood home of Kathryn Graham, publisher of *The Washington Post*. (There's another *Post* connection here.

Trump's project manager is Dino Bradlee, son of longtime *Post* editor Ben Bradlee.)

"I'd been trying to get this land since 1985," Trump said. "I was finally able to get it three years ago [from Rockefeller University], when the market was at rock bottom. I paid about \$9 million for it. Today, land prices have gone totally nuts. Houses on 30 acres up here are selling for \$40 million. I got lucky. Frankly, if I hadn't been able to buy it right, I couldn't do this course.

"I didn't realize just how incredible this land is from a golfing standpoint until Arthur Hills came along. Of the five architects we contacted, Arthur's routing was the best by far. So we went the Arthur route."

Trump actually has three courses in the works. This one is called The Mansion at Seven Springs. There's also Trump National, near Winged Foot GC (where Trump is a 5-handicap member), being built by golf architect Jim Fazio (Tom's

older brother) on the site of the existing Briar Hall GC. Jim Fazio also is handling the design of Trump International GC near West Palm Beach, Fla.

Why, Trump was asked, doesn't his masterpiece course bear his name, while the other two do?

He thought for a moment. "It will," he said. "In some form. I haven't fully decided yet, but it will probably be called The Trump Mansion at Seven Springs. Yeah, that's it. The Trump Mansion. I think that's good for me and good for the place."

Since *Golf Digest* requires a course to wait five years to become eligible for its 100 Greatest, Trump's first objective is a Best New Private Course award.

"I'm looking to make this the best course in the United States," he said. "If this turns out the second-best new

course, I'd be so disappointed. Because what I'm doing here is extra special."

Steve Wynn said the very same thing about Shadow Creek several years back, he was told.

"Yeah? Well, Steve and I are a lot alike," Trump said. "We're both very creative guys. Both very competitive.

"I've played Steve Wynn's course with him. Considering the fact he had to work in the desert, it's terrific. But they don't have this. His was built on a flat piece of open sand,

nature at its worst. What we have here is nature at its best.

"I think this will be far superior to Shadow Creek. That's our intention. We have better land. We have better location. We have a clubhouse that could not be built by anybody, at any price. It's no contest. It's like running the 100-yard dash [and] we're on the 90-yard line at the start."

Trump plans all the right touches. No homesites on the course. Tees close to previous greens, so everyone can walk.

"The only thing I won't have," he said, "is tradition, 50 years of U.S. Opens or PGAs. At some point, I'll have that, too.

"I'd like to see this be a top-10 course, not just a top-100 course. We're doing everything that brains and money can buy to make this a top-10 course."

And if, in the process, he bumps Winged Foot West out of the top 10?

Trump shrugs. "Well, Winged Foot's my club. But this is my baby."



Best intentions: Trump (center) with Hills and associate Drew Rogers.