

Sandbaggers wary of *this* Dean's list

By James Achenbach

BONITA, CALIF.

It wasn't that Dean Knuth planned it this way, but his name and his ongoing campaign to eradicate sandbagging are changing golf vocabulary.

A typical comment from those who have had their tournament handicaps reduced: "I made the Dean's list."

A shorter version: "I got Knuth'd."

Who is this man who has emerged as Public Enemy No. 1 in the eyes of all-too-frequent winners of handicap events? He is a former lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy who became senior director of the U.S. Golf Association handicap department. He is the man primarily responsible for developing the USGA's course rating and Slope rating systems – the "Pope of Slope."

After 16 years, Knuth (pronounced Ka-nooth) left the USGA and became national manager for wireless solutions for Northrop Grumman Corporation. Meanwhile, the Knuth Tournament Point System has gained a foothold in the western United States and is spreading rapidly in the East.

Used by associations and individual clubs, the KTPS provides a template under which golfers can have their handicap strokes reduced in net competition. It does not change the USGA handicaps of these players.

There are some parallels here between Knuth's military career and his war against sandbaggers. In the Navy, Knuth was credited for developing a method for finding Soviet submarines and inventing a tactic for fighting them.

Sandbaggers, who pad handicaps to provide themselves with a better-than-average chance to win tournaments, might be characterized as being every bit as evasive as Soviet subs.

Knuth (www.popeofslope.com) is serious about catching them.

"My motivation was to investigate golfers who win more than their fair share," he said. "I've been accused of being a socialist, but it would be nice if everyone had an equal chance to win. There are some people who take advantage of the (handicap) system. I am trying to identify those people."

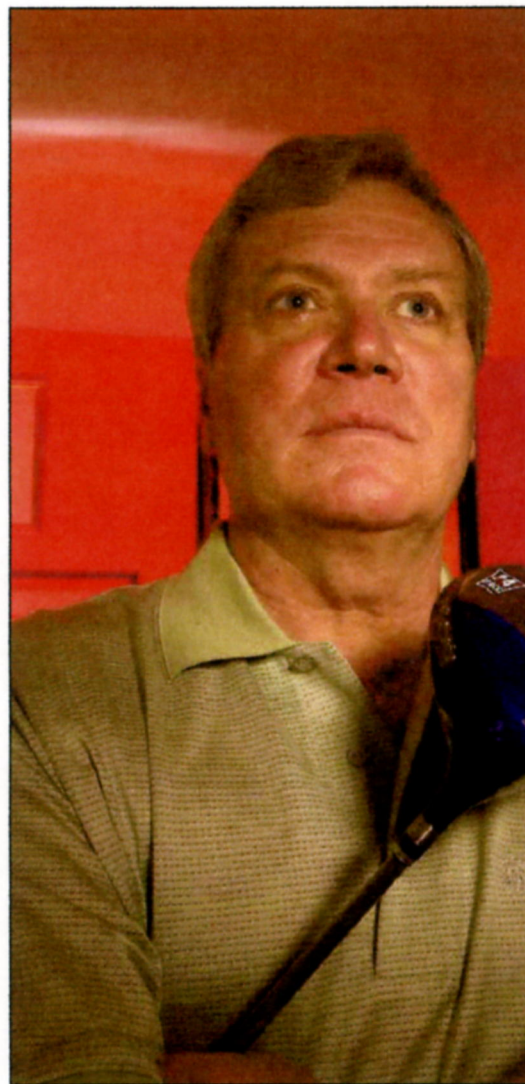
"Sure, there are golfers who rise to the occasion. When they need to pull off a great shot, they do it. I think my system deals with them in a fair and evenhanded way."

Why is it important to have an impartial system? Because history shows that when some golfers legislate against other golfers in the same club, the results can be ugly.

One lawsuit went to the Montana Supreme Court before being decided in favor of the club's handicap committee. In Florida, a woman won a defamation of character lawsuit after board members reduced her handicap and proceeded to talk about it.

Knuth, 59, grew up in Eau Claire, Wis., and majored in mathematics after being accepted at the U.S. Naval Academy. Today, his best friend is former Navy classmate Chuck Yash, who went on to become vice president of Spalding's golf division and then president of TaylorMade and later Callaway.

In his spare time, Knuth designed a driver called High Heat. He says the driver's face, made of high-grade titanium from Russia, vibrates at a



higher frequency and thus transfers more energy to the golf ball.

So what does a golfer say after a long, straight drive with the High Heat?

"I hit a Knuth."

World Amateur event takes handicap enforcement to next level

The best job of handicap regulation in the world of golf?

Look no farther than the PGA Tour Superstore World Amateur Handicap Championship, played each year in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

The World Amateur attracts about 4,000 golfers, each competing on a net basis. Several hundred handicaps are reduced before or during the tournament, and invariably a few contestants are disqualified during the 72-hole tournament.

When a golfer says he's in jail, he normally means that his path to the green or flagstick is blocked by trees

or other obstacles. At a recent World Amateur, though, one contestant found himself in another kind of jail – the Myrtle Beach city jail.

After being disqualified because of his handicap, the entrant screamed at tournament officials and shoved a security guard. He was led off in handcuffs.

In another instance, Al Simon of Charlotte, N.C., was disqualified in 2005 after winning the overall championship at the World Amateur. In the last two rounds, Simon posted consecutive net scores of 58.

"It probably looks a little fishy to some people," Simon said, "but, believe me, I just had two good

days of golf."

The World Amateur is a huge social event as well as a golf tournament, and those who are disqualified are allowed to continue playing. They just can't win prizes.

"We work very diligently," said tournament director Steve Mays. "We have a handicap reduction system, and we have a handicap committee that includes handicap experts and PGA professionals."

"The people who enter may not be the best players in the world, but this really is their U.S. Open. We treat everything and everybody very seriously."

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