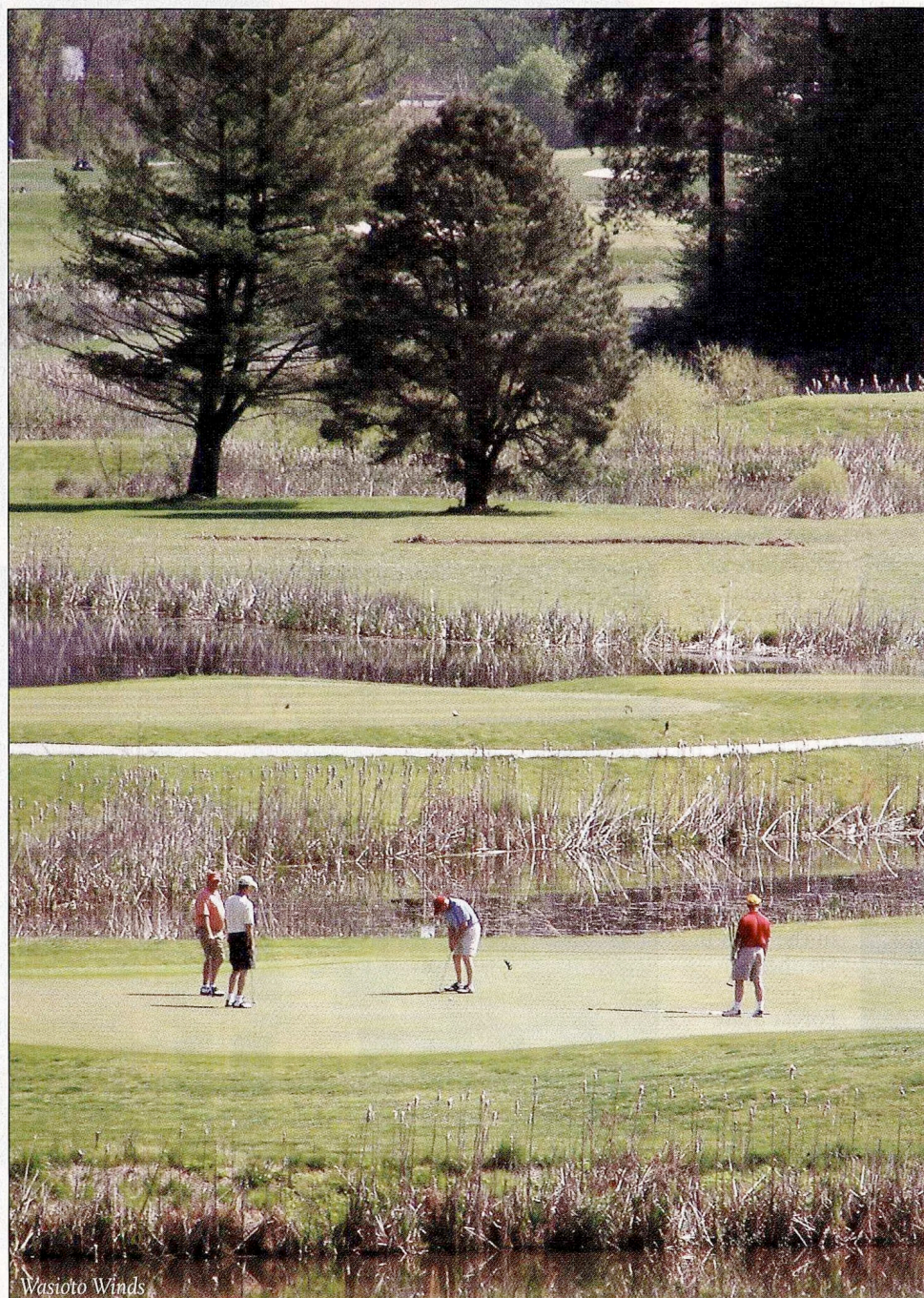


When it comes to golf courses,
**Kentucky has many gems
hidden in the rough**



Wasioto Winds



Since May, Kentucky State Park golf courses have been flying Ryder Cup flags in anticipation of the 37th matchup between Europe and the U.S.

"We're excited about it," said **Dan Strohmeier**, the park system's golf director. "We'll have a lot of visitors both before and after the event."

Kentucky is best known for its whiskey distilleries, horse racing and bluegrass music, but golfers know the state has plenty of hidden gems, particularly within the state park system.

The system's Signature Series features four national award-winning courses—Wasioto Winds at Pine Mountain, Hidden Cove at Grayson Lake, Eagle Ridge at Yatesville Lake and Dale Hollow's course.

With their remote settings and natural beauty, the state parks' golf courses create a unique atmosphere for golfers who might typically play tracks surrounded by residences.

They won't spot neighbors grilling out or teenagers having a pool party at residences lining the fairways. Here, trees line the fairways, and wild turkeys, deer or an occasional bobcat might dart across tee boxes or greens.

...Because of the actual land itself, these courses are second to none because of their natural beauty.

"You can get connected with nature," said **Bruce Bottom**, Dale Hollow's PGA professional. "You don't hear the horns and traffic—it's really a neat experience."

"We can be really busy, but you won't know it."

The Dale Hollow course, which opened in 2003, is a **Brian Ault** creation that incorporates the ridges and hollows into the design. Its signature hole is No. 15, a 194-yard par-3 that features a natural rock wall sloping down into a ravine just short of the green.

The course plays 7,023 yards from the tips, and it features 61 bunkers and bentgrass tees and greens and zoysia fairways.

"Most of the holes were put on top of ridges," Bottom said. "They just did

a wonderful job of routing the course."

Of the 13 18-hole golf courses in the state park system, eight are considered part of the Signature Series, the newest and most modern designs.

The first Signature Series course to open was Wasioto Winds at Pine Mountain, a links style layout designed by **Michael Hurdzan**. With water in play on

13 holes, the par-72 course plays 7,137 yards from the back tees.

Situated at the base of Pine Mountain State Park, Wasioto Winds' backdrop of mountaintop woodlands is in stark contrast to the wide open links design. There is one elevated tee on No. 12, a par 4 that boasts a "Beware of Poisonous Snakes" sign.

No. 5 is a 500-yard par 5 with water on both sides. With a narrow fairway, you have to be pretty accurate with both your tee and second shots. The penalty is that familiar water plop if you're not.

If you want to make a short and historic detour to one of the oldest continuously played golf courses in the U.S., point your car south of Pine Mountain State Park toward Middlesboro. The 9-hole Middlesboro

Country Club was built in 1889, and it's perfect for a quick half-round after playing Wasioto Winds.

Like the rest of the state parks, Pine Mountain features hiking trails and a full-service inn and restaurant. Most parks offer fishing, camping and boating opportunities.

"State parks are famous for lodging, great food and natural beauty," Strohmeier said. "Because of the actual land itself, these courses are second to none because of their natural beauty."

The newest Signature Series track in Kentucky opened for play in May—the General Burnside Island course, another design by Ault, who also created Hidden Cove. Burnside was closed for 18 months, and it reopened complete with a new pro shop and driving range.

"The golf course is spectacular," Strohmeier said. "Past patrons will be amazed when they see the changes that were made."

"This is a completely new golf course that will be fun and challenging for all levels of golfers."

Sitting on a 400-acre island, the course offers plenty of views of Lake Cumberland.

"It was our most dated, but since it reopened, it's received rave reviews," Strohmeier added. "Now it plays 6,400 yards from the back tees, and it's just a fun course."

Bottom said he played it soon after it opened and called it "very nice."

"They gutted and redid everything," he said.

If there's a drawback to the courses within the state park system, it's the fact that they're in remote spots in Kentucky. It's not like you're going to stumble on these courses.

But because many parks are within driving distance of other parks, Strohmeier suggested devising your own Kentucky State Park golf trail. Wasioto Winds, Dale Hollow and Burnside create a triangle in the southeastern part of the state.

And with the state's Tee's and Zzz's program, golfers can stay and play at parks throughout the state. The all-inclusive packages include overnight lodging, breakfast and dinner and a round of golf with a cart.

Bottom said about 20 percent of Dale Hollow's 24,000 rounds a year come from park resort guests.

"A lot of our play comes from regulars who live within 50 miles of the park," Bottom said. "But then we also have groups drive in from Lexington and Louisville, too."

Quality golfing at Kentucky's state parks might be fairly well known among Kentuckians, but with the Ryder Cup, the parks will have a chance to showcase these gems hidden in the hollows to scores of out-of-staters and international visitors expected to converge on the Bluegrass State.

—J. ERIC ECKARD

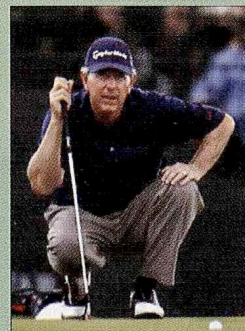
Irwin's Ryder Cup advice

There's no doubt that Hale Irwin is a winner.

The three-time U.S. Open champion has amassed an impressive record on both the PGA and Champions tours. Irwin has 65 victories on both tours, and he's the all-time Champions Tour money leader.

Today, Irwin balances time between tournaments and building golf courses. Recently, I sat down with Irwin over lunch at the Wisp Resort in western Maryland, where Irwin's new Lodestone Golf Course is expected to open in 2009.

We talked about the changes in golf technology, his recent play on the Champions Tour and the overall state of golf today. With the 2008 Ryder Cup coming up, Irwin, who posted an impressive 13-5-2 record in five Ryder Cup appearances, also weighed in on the Europeans' dominance in recent years.



So, Ryder Cup. How is that different than everything else?

Irwin: Well, the really big difference is that fundamentally these guys are part of your team and therefore you can in fact pull for them and mean it. ... You do live and die with the success of your teammates. That's the biggest difference. Just competing, it's not that big a difference. I think we put way, way too much attention and pressure on the captain and his picks and who pairs with whom. Nonsense. Those guys are all players, and they should be able to play. And they're professionals. Now, how they approach that is something else. If they're distracted by all the other stuff, then they're not the consummate professional that we think they are.

You think that's what's going on right now?

Irwin: Absolutely.

What solves that? Take away the captain's choices?

Irwin: Take away all the baggage they bring along. Everybody's got their trainer; everybody's got their shrink; everybody's got their nutritionist; everybody's got their nanny. They've got all this stuff, and no one thinks for themselves anymore. They rarely make a decision. They have their own coach, "What'd I do wrong?" Well, figure it out. ... Instead of slaving away and trying to have someone else try to tell you what to do, why don't you figure it out? Then, you'll have some success. That's just a very broad stroke of my opinion. I think a lot of times, the support system there is way too supportive. I think you can be supportive without interfering.

But don't the European players have those same nutritionists, coaches ...?

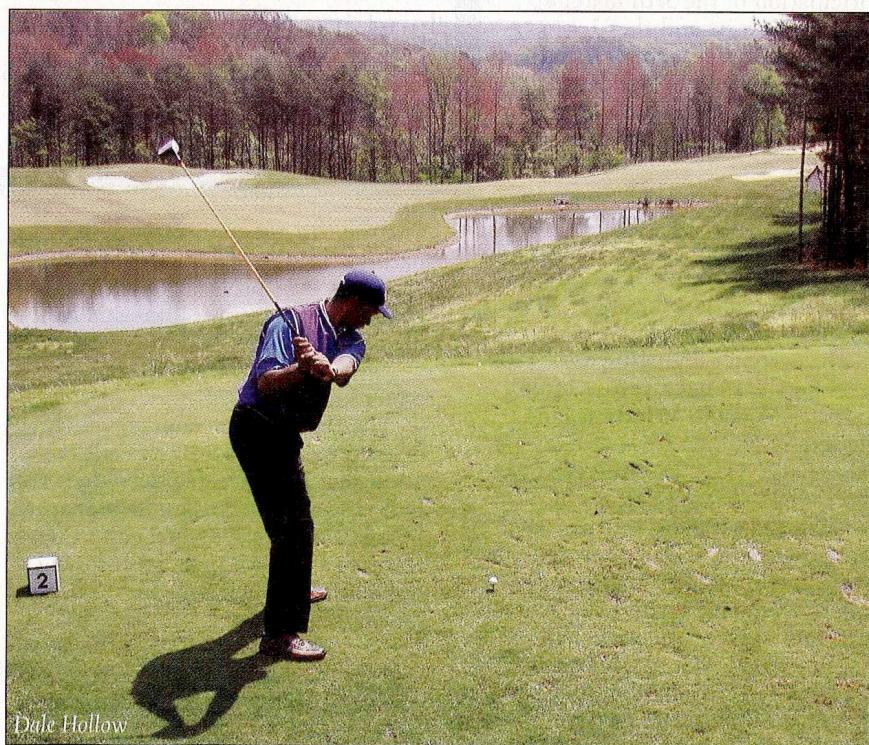
Irwin: Not to the degree ... see I don't know. I think it's a different type issue. They still travel together. You'll see the Europeans when they come over here, go down to the hotel lobby and look for a drink together or tea or coffee or something. They still band together. Our guys, they load up their airplanes and off they go. Or they come back and be with their families, which is fine. But it's just a different environment. That environment is more conducive to togetherness and sharing and whatever it may be.



Dale Hollow

All eyes in the golf world will be on Kentucky in September when the best players of Europe and the United States battle it out in Louisville for the 2008 Ryder Cup.

But Ryder Cup mania hit the state long ago, and across Kentucky, you can already find evidence of the event that's expected to generate more than \$120 million for the state's economy.



Dale Hollow