



Mountain Shark

BY RYAN SLABAUGH AND GREG REED

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Each leaf, each flower, looked as if it had been scrubbed clean for the television cameras. The course appeared so manicured, every blade of grass seemed to have been placed by hand and trimmed with cosmetic scissors. The air was warm, but not too hot, and comforted the spectators into a traditional Sunday afternoon malaise. This was the Augusta Masters in 1996, when Greg Norman was a golfing god, pre-Tiger, post-Bear, and nicknamed “The White Shark” for his ruthless class.

While the setting was perfect, the script wasn't for Norman. The day started with the 41-year-old in the lead by six strokes, but ended with a torrential 78 and included this terrible moment, when he heard the splash of the 7-iron coming up short at the 12th, the moan of the crowd, the lead gone, and hearing that players already done with their tournament had left the clubhouse because they couldn't watch the sad tragedy unfold: a shark, drowning in a creek.

The Shark, in a moment most golf fans hate to remember, stood, extended his arm and dropped the ball on the other side of Rae's Creek, the centerpiece hazard at the 12th hole of the Masters, the biggest tournament in golf. The gallery had felt it coming, this storm, the one that had been dogging Norman's career since he had started. “He's choking,” they said. “He's doing it again.”

Two hours later, after Norman was almost through with the greatest collapse in tournament — perhaps golf — history, he looked, to quote the headlines the next day, less like a man-eater and more like a minnow.

Despite winning 86 tournaments during his 29-year pro golf career, Norman might never shake the images of his Masters collapse, where he ended up losing to Nick Faldo by five strokes. But in the business arena, Norman has achieved a level of success matched by few other businessmen, let alone golfers. As head of Great White Shark Enterprises Inc., Norman presides over a sprawling empire that touches everything from golf course design to winemaking.

His corporate reach is growing in the High Country, where he designed a course for Red Sky Ranch in Wolcott and, most recently, for The Cornerstone in Montrose. The dry, arid terrain suits the Australian golfer-turned-entrepreneur who brings a reputable name to course design, and despite his experience at Augusta, who isn't afraid to build a creek next to a green. Perhaps, it's his way of sharing the pain that wreaked havoc with his legacy.

Greg Norman at his newly designed course in Cornerstone, Colorado. A soft opening of nine holes is expected for the summer of 2007.
Cornerstone Colorado



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Cornerstone on ice

The first time Norman saw the 6,000 acres of property at Cornerstone Colorado, it was during the winter of 2004, and the Shark was on a snowmobile. Between Montrose and Telluride on the Uncompahgre Plateau, Norman's view was framed by the Sneffels Ridge of the San Juan Mountains and Cimarron Ridge. Yet, he witnessed more than a scenic mix of aspen groves, rock outcroppings, steep ravines, meandering streams, alpine meadows and abundant wildlife — he saw fairways and greens.



Greg Norman
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“You know the secret?” asked Norman on a day when he was wandering around Montrose, spending a few hours at the course to introduce his latest work. “The snow really told me the ground underneath was perfect. When we came out here, the snow was pure, it was soft. You could see it all parting around the trees where the glades were, where the trees were. You could see the golf course laid out in the snow. ... When the snow melted, we knew exactly where we wanted to go.”

Since its inception in 1987, Greg Norman Golf Course Design has completed projects on five continents, and Norman said he found a gem on the Uncompahgre. The course will play to 7,900 yards from the professional tees, and ranges in elevation from 8,800 feet to 9,361 feet. Fittingly enough, he made the highest point the 12th green — a thousand miles away from the “other” 12th — and filled it with scintillating views of the Sneffels Ridge, far away from nearby creeks.

Norman does more than just design golf courses. The golfer from Down Under is now an international businessman, owning his own clothing line, wine estates, production company and turf company, and still works as a spokesman for sporting gear manufacturers like MacGregor. A busy man, yes, but having a ranch in Meeker allows him to get to Cornerstone quite often, in all weather.

“You only have one shot at this. The developers are spending a lot of money on this course. You don’t want to screw it up the first time and come back two years later and say, ‘Oh, by the way we need to come back and spend a couple more million dollars and fix what we should have fixed in the beginning.’”

“If you spend the time on the site, get to know it in all weather conditions — like the snow, like the summer when it can be 100 degrees, when it’s getting in the fall season now and what the wind directions are — you get to know the golf course.

“So in the end product, you know that you’ve given it your best.”

Course superintendent Tom Huesgen comes to Cornerstone after 10 years as superintendent of one of the most fabled courses in the world — Pebble Beach. When Norman’s away, Huesgen’s charged with supervising the construction, along with Weitz Golf International. While work began on the Cornerstone course in fall of 2004, most of the work has been done since spring of ‘05, with a “soft opening” of at least nine holes planned for midsummer 2007.

A different world in Wolcott

Norman’s design at Cornerstone is much different than his work at Red Sky Ranch near Wolcott, where Norman’s design called for massive construction, earth-moving and a lot of disturbance to the landscape.

For all its engineering, the Red Sky course is a marvel. Where the rough ends, a thirsty desert begins filled with spruce bushes and red, cracked clay, a landscape home to George Jouflas, a descendent of long-time ranchers in the area, and who still lives on site. Like Norman, Jouflas traded the tools of an old trade for a cell phone and investment portfolio. Real estate sales are booming in the area and, while the Jouflas family has asked Vail Resorts Development Company to take care of the area, the resort is filling its fairways with million-dollar homes.

Unlike the Red Sky Ranch course, Norman was allowed to incorporate a least-disturbance philosophy at Cornerstone. The entire 6,000-acre community was created with a Wildlife Management Plan, and the course is not exempt.

Cornerstone’s holes have been benched into the slope of the ridge at different levels, transitioning from one distinct environment to the next. The course will feature bentgrass tees, greens and aprons, with Kentucky

bluegrass in all other maintained areas.

Drought-resistant grasses will be introduced to facilitate the project's water conservation and water quality enhancement programs. Out-of-play areas will be re-vegetated with a palette of fescue grasses, native plants and woody species that produce self-sustaining ecosystems. Native areas will also be hydroseeded with yarrow, lupine, Indian paintbrush and other indigenous wildflowers.

“What you have here is a course that sits very nicely on this property, as opposed to a piece of property that was turned into a golf course,” Huesgen said. “The majority of our disturbance has been just to move the topsoil. Everything else has been very natural.”

The course takes up 350 acres, and Huesgen pointed out that most courses are only spread out over 120 to 130 acres.

“There's a lot of space between holes,” he said. “It's going to be very rare that you'll have someone on the green in front of you or waiting behind you.”

For Norman, life goes on. While his business grows, new golfing legends are born. If he hasn't already, he will be able to look back at the memories of Augusta, his new enterprises in Western Colorado, and rediscover a quality inherent to the soul of the sport: Golf is about navigating the beauty that surrounds us, just like a shark. To be successful, one must remain focused, despite losing plenty of teeth along the way. †

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