

Burton's Path Leads To Fulfillment

The path Dan Burton took in golf almost led him to something completely different, during a time when he asked a question that many young golfers pose to themselves: Am I good enough to play this game at the highest levels?



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For Burton, the answer was no. Rather than have his dreams remain unfulfilled, however, Burton chose another path that links him to the game's highest levels – as an administrator and an official, not a contestant.

Burton, 65, the former president of the Golf Association of Philadelphia, is in his third year as a vice president of the USGA and his first as the chair

of its Championship Committee. He is responsible for the organization's 13 national championships and directly in charge of its five biggest events, including the U.S. Open and the U.S. Women's Open, which will be contested next month on back-to-back weeks at Pinehurst No. 2 in North Carolina.

If Burton, a resident of Lititz, Pa., were any happier with his job, his face would be locked in a perpetual smile.

"Just to be able to be involved in golf at the highest level in the world for a person like me who really, really loves golf, it's like a dream come true," Burton said. "It's not work. It's not hard. And this is the job that I most desperately wanted to do."

Chairing the USGA Championship Committee normally is a high-pressure job at the U.S. Open but the task appears doubly difficult this year as golf's national governing body plays its most significant championships for men and women on the same golf course on consecutive weeks.

There appear to be plenty of challenges, even if that's not a word he'll use.

"I think it's historic, so to me, it's an opportunity more than a challenge," he said. "I think we're ready for it. We've spent a lot of time on all

the little nuances of how this will go."

Burton's love of golf goes back to his hometown of Marietta, Ohio. He took up the game there after being diagnosed with concussion symptoms that forced him to abandon baseball and running. But the new game gave him a new outlook.



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"When I went home [after his first lesson], I told my mother, 'I really like this game,' " he said. "From that moment to today, I have loved golf every day of my life."

Burton captained the golf team at Florida Southern, where he was named most valuable player his last two seasons, before going to work in the banking industry. But the golf itch was too strong, and he decided after 2½ years of office work to see if he had what it took to take the plunge into professional golf.

It didn't quite work out.

"I took the year off and used my own money to see how good I could

get," he said. "But I realized in that year that I just wasn't good enough to play at the highest levels. I never turned pro. I would have loved to have played at the highest level. There is just nothing like tournament golf – nothing."

After Burton moved to Lancaster,

Pa., he started to become interested in golf administration. He joined the executive committee of the Pennsylvania Golf Association in 1994 and accepted the same position three years later with the Golf Association of Philadelphia. He would serve with GAP for 11 years, the final three as president.

"I really love everything about the Golf Association of Philadelphia – the member clubs, the people, the players," he said. "The staff was great; everybody was interested in doing better every day. It just was a tremendous experience for me."

After GAP, the USGA reached

out to Burton. The association interviewed him at Bethpage during the 2009 U.S. Open and named him to its executive committee at its annual meeting.

Burton has risen steadily through the ranks. Last year, as chairman of the equipment standards committee, he was involved in the controversial ruling that eliminated the anchored putting stroke for all golfers regardless of skill level.

"You feel the burden of doing the right thing," he said. "We spent an extraordinary amount of time on this. I spent over 200 hours talking to other people on the phone about the rule and how I came to the conclusion that anchoring was not a stroke. I'm very comfortable we did the right thing."

Burton, managing director for RBC Capital Markets, still plays to a 1.4 handicap index but admits that is mostly based on his winter golf. He'll be too busy to play much this summer when he'll be traveling in his USGA role.

"That's OK," he said. "I'm at the stage of life where this is far more important to me than playing."

The chosen path for Burton turned out to be a rewarding one. The dreams he had in golf, while not as a player, have been more than fulfilled. ●