



Circling Raven

Jud Heathcote and Idaho Golf

by Jason Deegan

Jud Heathcote sits in the clubhouse of Circling Raven Golf Club in Worley, Idaho.

He's got a wad of money on one side of the table and a load of scorecards on the other. He's

laughing and joking with a handful of guys after a day on the links, miles away from where he came into fame.

Heathcote looks nothing like the maniac who roamed the sideline

for decades at Michigan State University, winning a national championship with Magic Johnson in 1979.

As the Spartans coach, Heathcote would rant and rave and



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with his signature move, bang his head with the fist repeatedly after a boneheaded play. But in this setting at Circling Raven, roughly 30 miles away from his retirement home in Spokane, Wash., Heathcote is enjoying a moment of serenity now.

“It’s a beautiful course, one of the best I’ve played,” Heathcote says.

Circling Raven seems to have that soothing affect on just about everybody. He is among the lengthy list of stars who has visited this unlikely golf outpost in the northern panhandle of Idaho and come away raving. Movie stars like Samuel L. Jackson and Dennis Franz (former NYPD Blue star) and Hall of Famers, such as point guard John Stockton and baseball’s Joe Morgan, and even pro golfers have gone out of their way to play Circling Raven, an 7,189-yard amenity of the Coeur d’Alene Casino Resort & Hotel.

PGA Tour star Rich Beem holds the record on the three-year-old course with a 65. The most recent celebrity sighting was the LPGA’s Wendy Ward.

“Circling Raven is a lush, beautiful golf course that challenges you from start to finish,” says Ward, a 3-time member of the U.S. Solheim Cup Team. “The greens are similar to U.S. Open setups in that it is helpful to position your ball in the correct quadrant of the green. And the setting of Circling Raven, out in the grassy, rolling hills, is so relaxing and beautiful.”

Circling Raven teams with the Coeur d’Alene resort course, and its famous floating island green, in nearby Coeur d’Alene to provide one of the nation’s most unique golf destinations. The two are part of the northern loop of the nine-course Idaho Golf Trail, the state’s version of Alabama’s successful RTJ Golf Trail.

Idaho’s panhandle offers up wonderful rolling terrain for golf and scenic lake-front settings, much like northern Michigan. Don’t confuse the Coeur d’Alene Resort and the Coeur d’Alene Casino Resort & Hotel despite their similar names.

The Coeur d’Alene Casino Resort & Hotel (www.cdacasino.com or 800-523-2464) and Circling Raven in Worley are owned and operated by the Coeur d’Alene Indian Tribe on a reservation covering 345,000 acres, spanning the western edge of the northern Rocky Mountains.

The casino, once just a tiny bingo operation, has brought life back to the tribe that just 15 years ago suffered from 80 percent poverty, according to Bob Bostwick, director of public relations for the resort.

“There were 75 jobs in 1991 (within the tribe),” he says. “There are now 1,300, including 800 at the resort. Within (the near future), we’ll have an RV park, 225 hotel rooms and another course. If you’d seen the area 12 years ago, the changes have been immense.”

While the 202-room hotel and casino are nice, the course is a

blockbuster. It offers up almost as much risk-and-reward as the casino.

Florida-based architect Gene Bates, who once teamed with Fred Couples, let the open, sweeping prairie land dictate his routing. Of the 620 acres available, only 100 are maintained, giving the layout a natural feel.

Wetlands play into 13 holes. There’s no sense in listing the signature holes. At least 10 of them are worthy of such praise, but the par-5 12th and the downhill par-4 15th, carved from the pines, are memorable. The course is named after Circling Raven, a spiritually powerful leader from the tribe who used the raven to guide him on journeys, warn of danger and show the way to fish and game.

Your round might turn into a spiritual, soul-stirring journey as well. Golf Magazine, in its Sept. 2006 issue, wrote the course “would have a significant impact on our 2008 Top 100 Courses You Can Play rankings.”

The 25-acre practice facility and the clubhouse grub live up to Circling Raven’s high standards.

About 25 minutes away, the lone course at the Coeur d’Alene Resort (www.cdaresort.com) has been nationally renown since opening in 1991.

The Scott Miller creation provides one of the greatest experiences, or gimmick some might say, in golf. The tee shot and ensuing boat ride to the floating island green on the par 3 14th hole should be on every golfer’s to-do list, much like playing

Pebble Beach Golf Links and visiting Ireland and Scotland.

The 15,000-square-foot green complex, decorated with three pines, splashes of red flowers and two bunkers, is made of 105 foam-filled concrete blocks. Acting as a pontoon attached to computer-operated cables, the whole thing can be moved on a daily basis, ranging from 100 yards to 175.

But the island green isn't the only attraction. The course is meticulously conditioned with more than 59,000 flowers planted throughout. The carts are custom-built with heated seats. The rakes

for the bunkers are hidden in the ground next to each hazard, intelligently out of play.

A recent redesign, completed in 2005, stretched the layout from a sporty 6,300 yards to a manly 6,735 yards. Besides being a beauty, it's now a beast, too.

While it doesn't have a casino, the Coeur d'Alene Resort, one of just 12 to receive a Gold Medal rating from Golf Magazine in its latest rankings of the country's top resorts, does have an award-winning spa and five restaurants on-site. Two hand-crafted Honduran Mahogany water taxis, another

luxurious amenity, shuffle players on the lake to and from the course.

Are you sold on a visit yet? Contrary to what you might believe, there is world-class golf, and more, in Idaho. As Heathcote might say, Circling Raven and the Coeur d'Alene resort course are a slam dunk. They're as good a 1-2 punch for golfers as Johnson and Greg Kelsner were for Spartan fans back in that magical season of '79.

For more information on these two and other courses of the Idaho Golf Trail, visit www.inidaho.com/idahogolftrail or call 800-844-3246. MG

Photo courtesy of Floating Green



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