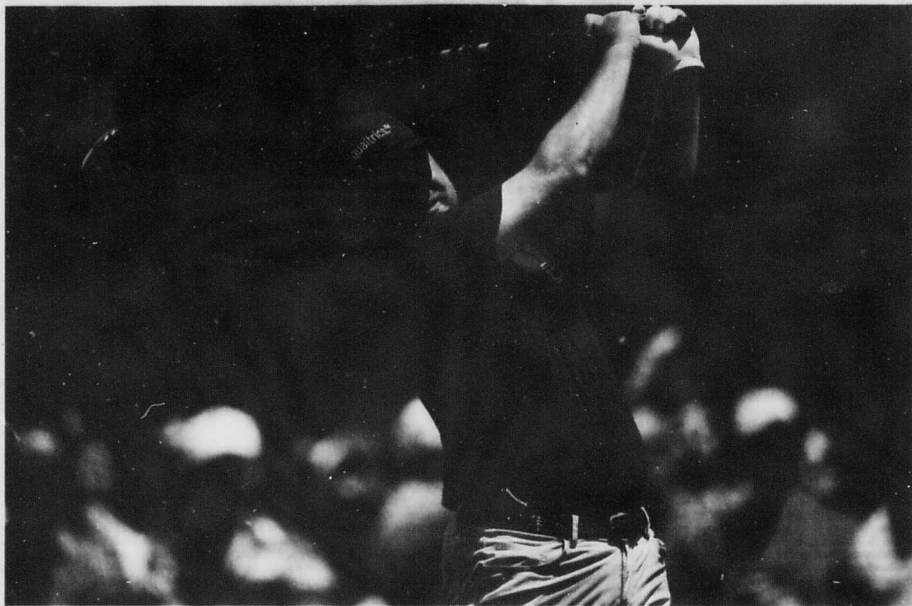


SPORTS



FRANK FRANKLIN II - Associated Press, the photo

Former BYU All-American Zac Blair hits from the first tee during the final round of the Travelers Championship at TPC River Highlands on June 25, 2023, in Cromwell, Conn.

Keeping the dream alive

Utah's Zac Blair still envisions building the perfect golf course in his home state.

By KEVIN REYNOLDS

The Salt Lake Tribune

The last time the US Open traveled to Pinehurst, Zac Blair was a 23-year-old rookie who didn't know a life without qualifying for majors.

He turned pro in March of 2014 and by June had finished with a T-40 against golf's best. His father, Jimmy, carried his golf bag up to the final hole as the world watched — a dad, a PGA Tour player himself, passing on the torch to his son's promising career.

A decade later, Blair will return to Pinehurst. But life hasn't been as smooth as those first few months. He had to claw just to get into this field by playing 36 holes

over 10 hours at a qualifying event on golf's "longest day." Before that, the last decade has seen him tear his labrum, lose his tour card and only appear in three majors since that tantalizing debut.

But perhaps the long road, and the longest day in golf, suits Blair better.

It certainly fits his profile as a player — a plucky golfer who ranks 181st in driving distance but gets by on accuracy. And maybe it fits him as a person, too, as Blair keeps plugging away at his dream to one day build his own golf course in his home state.

Blair had the vision of building The Buck Club in Utah for a decade. The dream seemed to fall apart five years ago when he ended up changing plans and building

a different course in South Carolina called The Tree Farm.

But the hope remains: Like his career, he can circle back down the road and eventually build his Utah course.

"Definitely," he told The Salt Lake Tribune. "How I looked at it, I felt like The Tree Farm would be a really good proof of concept. Show people that I could be involved in building something really cool and making it work, and making it a place where people enjoyed. Kind of going and being able to do it in Utah, maybe later down the road."

Blair started his quest to build a Utah course almost a decade ago. Growing up, his father owned a few courses around Utah and he'd sketch out different holes

here and there. When it was Blair's turn on the PGA Tour, he played the most elite courses and then sequestered himself to read about the architecture.

He jotted down what he liked and what he didn't. He started mapping out what a course in Utah would look like. In the earliest renderings, the course route would start with a 530-yard par five and end with a 600-yard beast of a hole.

He didn't have the funds to build the space but he put the idea on social media and started selling merchandise with The Buck Club's prospective logo. People bought in and Blair formed an annual golf tournament in Tennessee, at Sweetens Cove Golf Course, to raise money for

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How a Utah softball coach uses Oklahoma's championship to build Utes into a contender

Pitching coach Paige Parker looks to build similar culture to Sooners after they won eighth national championship.

By JASON BATAO

The Salt Lake Tribune

A smile grew on Paige Parker's face, as she watched her alma mater, Oklahoma, parade around blue and white confetti on her TV screen.

For the fourth consecutive year, the Sooners won the Women's College World Series last week in Oklahoma City, their eighth national championship since 2000. Utah's pitching coach is ever-familiar with OU's dynasty. She was a centerpiece for the Sooners in the circle from 2015-18, serving as their pitching ace en route to two national championships and four All-American nods.

To this day, even more than

1,200 miles from Norman, Oklahoma, Parker supports her former team behind the scenes, but — even more — she uses it to influence her coaching style on the Utes.

"The relationships that they build with the players is something I take away," Parker told The Salt Lake Tribune. "I'm still really close with coach Patty Gasso. The relationships that she builds and the culture that she instills every year is something I obviously try to take into what we're doing here at Utah."

For the second season in a row, Utah secured a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

The Utes fell short of advancing to the Super Regionals, however,



SUE OGDON - Associated Press, the photo

Paige Parker, center, celebrates with teammates after Oklahoma defeated LSU at the NCAA Women's College World Series in Oklahoma City on June 6, 2016. Parker is now a pitching coach at the University of Utah.

after being defeated by South Carolina 5-1 in the Durham Regional. In 2023, the Utes advanced to the WCWS for the first time since 1994 before dropping back-to-back games to Washington and future Big 12 foe Oklahoma State.

Those increments of progress

to Parker are a sign the Utes are headed in the right direction. She, like the Sooners, wants to create her own history alongside Utes head coach Amy Hogue in Salt Lake City.

"I think we're in a good spot," Parker said. "Back-to-back years

of making it into the NCAA Tournament is a really good start. Making it to the World Series is a goal every single year."

"I'm always instilling in our athletes that work ethic is what it takes to get there and also just the

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