Having completed my degree in 2006 from Writtle College, I decided I needed to gain as much practical experience as possible.

I had heard about the Ohio Program through college and trade magazines and wanted to find out more. I got in contact with Mike O’Keeffe (www.top.osu.edu) and went to meet with him in person at Harrogate Week. The programme brings young, 19-28 year old single turf applicants from around the world to the States for 12-18 months. You have to be drug free, have no criminal record and be willing to work hard while over there, if you want to be placed at a top club.

After speaking with Mike I decided to submit the forms as soon as I could. They were received by the end of January and I was starting at Quail Hollow by mid-March, so the whole process happened very quickly.

Once I arrived in Charlotte I was given a tour of the course and it was off to work. Luckily for me there were two Ohio State interns from Australia working at Quail; Simon Beilby had been there for a year and Patrick Casey had been there for two weeks. This was good for me as I had people who understood what I was going through and could show me the ropes and help me settle in.

Since 2003, Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, North Carolina, has been home to the Wachovia Championship. The tournament has always attracted the best golfers in the world, with 30 of the top 35 taking part in the 2007 championship.

The course was originally designed by golf course architect George Cobb in 1961. In the intervening years, the course underwent a series of improvements, including modifications of several holes by Arnold Palmer in 1986 and a redesign by Tom Fazio in 1997 and 2003. The course is renowned for having the toughest three finishing holes on the PGA TOUR schedule for the past few years.

The championship traditionally starts around the first week of May and the preparation starts months in advance. As I arrived in mid-March preparations were well underway and I now have an understanding for the term “out of the frying pan and into the fire”. From the moment I arrived we were working from dawn until dusk, at least six days a week in a high pressure environment, so I had to adapt to this very quickly especially as interns were given extra responsibilities and duties.

- Tournament Heights of cut
- Greens -.110 inches (2.8 mm)
- Tees, Approaches and Collars - .240 inches (6.1 mm)
- Fairways - .350 inches (8.9mm)
- Intermediate rough - .750 inches (19mm)
- Primary rough – 3 inches (76.2mm)

The greens are double cut in the mornings and once again in the evening. Everything else is cut once in the morning and once in the evening with the exception of the primary rough which is left. Approaches are rolled twice a day but the greens are not.

The largest area to be cut is the fairways which are approximately 30 acres. This is done in 45 minutes using up to 15 fairway mowers cutting in a “flying V” hole by hole in one pass.

To make it possible for all the cutting to be carried out in a short space of time (under three hours) a huge amount of machinery and staff is needed. During the tournament there were over 30 full time staff and up to 100 volunteers from all over the USA and even Australia.

The machinery is supplied by Charlotte-based Jacobsen, who kept a steady supply of machinery coming in the weeks leading up to and during the tournament.

Machinery supplied by Jacobsen for the tournament:
- 8 greens mowers
- 9 fairway mowers plus 2 clean up mowers
- 12 tee/approach mowers
- 2 collar mowers
- 20 golf cars
- 14 mower trailers

This is only a small sample of equipment supplied; other machines include sand pros, rough mowers, flail mowers, utility vehicles and shuttles.

This is in addition to the equipment already owned by the golf course.

The Transition
Charlotte is within the transition zone of the United States. This means that Quail Hollow has a mix of cool and warm season grasses including Creeping Bentgrass, Tall Fescue, Fine Fescue, Perennial Ryegrass, Bermuda grass and Zoysiagrass.

The day after the tournament has finished, work began on transitioning the course from cool to warm season grasses. This process includes scalping down the rough practically to the soil, in order to expose the Bermuda rhizomes.

The rough was predominantly Ryegrass and after the tournament was up to 12 inches high in places. This grass has to be scalped down and removed, using a combination of rough and flail mowers for the transition to be successful. It is important to remove the organic material to allow the sunlight to get through to the Bermuda and allowing the transition to happen as quickly as possible. The scalping of the rough was a very long and slow process, taking approximately one month to complete, with the mowers working non-stop throughout this period.

Bentgrass Maintenance
Throughout the summer, the maintenance of bentgrass greens in a warm season environment is an ongoing challenge. The greens were G2 bentgrass inter-seeded with A1 bentgrass. Heights of cut on the greens were maintained at .120 of an inch (3.05mm) during periods of heat over 38 degrees Fahrenheit. To prevent wilting of the turf we would syringe the greens when needed by putting out a light mist of water using a half inch hose. The purpose of syringing is to replace moisture lost by the plant through transpiration, but with out moistening the soil. In addition to the syringing, static and portable fans were used to cool the soil surface. The greens were only irrigated once a week, but this was done using a heavy application known as flushing. This would flush the greens of salts in order to keep the EC levels down. After the greens were flushed, the Sub-air system would be activated to move excess water out of the rootzone and into the drainage pipes. This keeps the playing surface firm and encourages deeper rooting.

Due to the difficult environment which we faced, an intense program of chemical and fertiliser was undertaken. This includes the use of many different fungicides to control a long list of diseases such as brown patch, dollar spot and pythium. Foliar fertilisers based on soil and tissue test results were also used on a regular basis along with the use of different plant growth regulators.

The greens are hollow tined three times a year, once in early spring,
once in early summer and once in early autumn. In addition to the
hollow tining, dry ject machines were also used. The greens were
also vent tined and hydrojetted throughout the summer to help
improve gaseous exchange.

**Summer Projects**

Throughout the summer along with the regular course maintenance, a
number of projects were taking place.

This included a substantial drainage project of fairways and approaches
and the re-build of the 8th bunker.

The drainage project lasted for eight weeks, with the interns starting
at 5.30 in the morning to lift the sod, number it and then move it
away before the contractors started to install the drainage. Once the
contractors had finished for that day, we then had to put all the sod
back in the right place, water and then roll it. With only one hole being
closed per day, it often meant that we were working until dark to get
the hole ready for opening the next day.

The re-build of the 8th bunker involved working with one of Tom Fazio’s
designers to re-shape the face and shorten the total length making
parts of the green more visible from the fairway allowing for more pin
positions. Also the alterations were designed to improve the playability
and make maintenance easier.

The total re-shape, including the replacement of the drainage system,
liner, sand trapper and sand took just five days to complete.

**Overseed**

The overseed involves re-seeding the entire course with various different
cool season grasses, with the exception of the greens which remain
creeping bentgrass all-year round.

The process begins with raising the heights of cut to encourage vertical
growth and discourage lateral growth. This is done to help provide a
thinner sward to allow the seed to fall through the canopy and make
contact with the soil.

During the last week of September the overseeding begins with all the
areas being scalped down, and the fairways, tees and approaches being
verticut. This process is done to create as many gaps in the canopy as
possible and to reduce competition from the Bermuda.

The Species and rates are as follows:

- Tees – Fine Fescue® 800lbs per acre (896kg per hectare)
- Approaches and collars – Fine Fescue® 600lbs per acre (672kg
  per hectare)
- Fairways – Ryegrass® 350lbs per acre (393kg per hectare)
- Rough – Fine Fescue® 400lbs per acre (448kg per hectare)
- Shaded areas – Tall Fescue – as needed

**Irrigation of the Overseed**

The irrigation operating system at Quail Hollow is Toro VP Sitepro and
the pump station is Flowtronex PSI with an operating pressure of 130
PSI. The total gallons per minute are 2250 (8516.25 litres).

During the overseed period it is important to keep the seed wet at all
times, and as rainfall in Charlotte was very rare in 2007 the irrigation
system was working overtime to keep the whole course wet.

Trying to water the entire course at least three times throughout the day,
while avoiding play was challenging to say the least. To avoid putting too
much pressure on the pump and to keep the correct operating pressure
at each head, only 16 heads per 9 holes could be run at a time making
the task even harder.

**Winter Work**

During the winter time, the work really slows down because of the
weather. Typically we would have frosts in the morning but that would
lift by mid morning. There is very little rainfall so the average winter
day is cold and sunny with blue skies, much better than a cold wet
winter in England!

During this winter, a lot of tree work was taking place due to the effect
that the drought had on the pine trees. This included de-limbing any
dead branches and removing dead or dying trees to help improve the
health of the remaining trees and to reduce the risk of limbs falling on
staff and golfers. This was done using a mechanical lift allowing us to
get to the top of the trees, often over 60 ft high.

I would like to thank David Withers and his team at Ransomes Jacobsen
in Ipswich for their scholarship and for all the kind support and help in
getting me over to the States. Also I would like to thank Mike O’Keeffe at
the Ohio State University, Jeff Kent and all the staff at Quail Hollow Club
for making this such a beneficial and memorable experience for me.

**About the Author**

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