The Waste Management Phoenix Open is one of the PGA Tour’s most popular tournaments and attracts over half a million fans – the most to attend a golf event anywhere in the world. It’s been held annually at TPC Scottsdale in Arizona in the South West of the USA since 1987.

Its 16th hole has become one of the most famous in golf as a ‘coliseum’ of around 20,000 seats is erected around the 160-yard par three, generating a raucous atmosphere similar to a football match with spectators cheering shots that land on the green and booing those that miss. It was the location for a famous Tiger Woods hole in one in 1997. This year the tournament was won by local favourite Phil Mickelson.

The Action Begins

My jobs for the week were mowing greens in the morning then cutting fairways in the evenings. In total we had about 65 staff working during tournament week, in our pre-tournament meeting we were told it can get a little crazy during the week as there will be a large crowd and most will be drunk!

The course was ready for the Monday Pro Am although very wet, but the weather forecast for the big week was good. The height of cuts were greens 2.875mm, tees, approaches and fairways 10mm, intermediate rough 1.25 inches and rough three inches. Due to the large numbers of spectators we received a police escort to the course in the afternoons from our compound which was surreal – spectators were filming us on their mobiles.

Another frost on Thursday meant start times were put back by an hour, and some rounds could not be completed as it was too dark. This delayed us getting out on the course for the evening jobs and meant more cutting in the dark. Spotter were posted at any hole that a player had marked their ball to make sure that the marker was replaced at the same spot should any mowing need to done. Any more frost delays could have meant the tournament continuing into Monday which would have been a real headache for everyone.

Friday fortunately had no frost and play started on time with the remaining 1st rounds completed before the 2nd round started. A new record Friday attendance was registered of 121,901. Fantastic weather and local favourite Phil Mickelson leading the tournament then swelled numbers to a new record Saturday attendance of 179,022. Cooler weather and a clash with the Superbowl on Sunday lowered crowd numbers to 58,791 giving a massive overall total of 525,821. Mickelson won despite a late challenge from Brandt Snedeker.

We did have one brief opportunity to sit in the coliseum on the 16th for the remainder of the day. It certainly is different with unbelievable crowd noise and Mexican waves!

The experience was amazing, I wish I had considered going through the OSU programme before. I really would recommend it to greenkeepers wanting to train at a top course and add important experience to their CV. If you’re interested contact Mike O’Keeffe at okeeffe.1@osu.edu

I was also lucky enough to receive a scholarship from Syngenta which covered health insurance and other fees. This was a reward for my efforts, and I was very honoured to be one of the five selected for it.

I have to thank my family Anna, Callum and Katie, who let me sacrifice my time away from them in order to fulfil an ambition. Also thank you to Mike Wells, Eddie Adams, Cal Roth, Jeff Plotts, Mike O’Keeffe and Torquay Golf Club and to Brandon and his team for making me so welcome at TPC Scottsdale.

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“The coliseum on the 16th is certainly different with unbelievable crowd noise and Mexican waves”
There are essentially two main types of dedicated petrol powered pole saw on offer; fixed length units with a reach of up to around 3.0m and telescopic designs that may extend to perhaps 4.50 to 5.00m. The saw element will be based around a 10, 12 or possibly 14in guide bar.

Combination tools, where the working element can be swapped between a brushcutter, saw head or myriad of other tools are a further alternative. These are well worth considering where a pole pruner is less likely to see anything other than occasional use.

The downside is that combination tool prices are typically higher than dedicated tools. A pole pruner attachment on its own could cost over £300. Quality rigid pole saw prices vary a great deal, but budget around £400 as a starting point.

Some designs allow the standard shaft of rigid units to be extended to 500 or 1,000mm. These extra lengths can be bought at a later date, but if you need longer reach consider telescopic units from the outset. These will carry a premium of typically £30 to £100 but this can be less than opting for an extended non-telescopic designs.

Reach and power

For safety, a pruner needs to be operated at around 60 degrees to the branch. This is to allow pruned material to fall without hitting the operator. As such, the actual reach of a pruner is less than its total length. As a rule, it pays to buy a longer pruner than you may think you need.

Although combination tool power units are increasingly offered in two-stroke or four-stroke designs, dedicated power pruners are more likely to stick with a two-stroke of around 20 to 30cc developing 0.6 to 1.5kW in power output. But you may find more powerful units on offer. The key consideration is weight as a heavy tool can be difficult to place accurately. Vibration levels on some designs can be quite high so consider this if the tool is to be worked for extended periods.

In most cases, a body harness is supplied to help support the weight of the tool when moving it around, but a support harness may also be supplied for use in work.

Working a pole saw is straightforward for thin, lighter branches. These can be cut in one action from the top down. Thicker and heavier branches need cutting with care.

Can you prune and chop as you wish?

When we last looked at power pruners, we mentioned the need to work within any Tree Preservation Orders. A TPO is made under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999. Typically made by the local planning authority (usually a local council), a TPO can protect either a specific tree or applied more broadly to protect trees within a specified area.

A TPO is most commonly used in urban and semi-urban settings and is aimed at protecting trees for the public’s enjoyment. Generally a TPO takes into account the ‘amenity’ value of a tree or woodland and can include its nature conservation value or its visual ‘impact’. If a tree is not visible or accessible from a public place a TPO will not usually be enforced.

On a golf course, you should never just assume everything is OK and you can treat trees as you like. A tree subject to a TPO should be listed in a way that its owner or person responsible for its protection is aware of its status. But these issues can get forgotten, so it can pay to check. Hedges are not covered by TPOs, but as tree units in a hedge may be.

TPOs are public documents and can be inspected at the local planning authority’s office, or online.
Think before you prune

James de Haviland looks at how to prune troublesome low branches and explores some of the best products on offer.

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Loop handles are typically fitted to combination tool or split shaft models, the four-stroke Makita EX250LH having a choice of five different attachments. You need to do a few sums before assuming a multiple tool design is a more cost effective buy than a dedicated alternative.

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It is best to cut back towards the trunk progressively in sections to reduce both the weight and volume of material falling. This will help protect the tree and prevent a long branch swinging back and clouting the operator.

For a clean cut at the trunk, larger branches should be undercut by a third before sawing through from the top. The aim is to produce a clean cut that allows the ‘wound’ to heal quickly and prevent disease entering the tree. As a guide, keep the cut close to the trunk but retaining enough branch bark at its base to grow over and heal the ‘wound’.

Capacity wise, most pole pruners will tackle a 40cm diameter branch if the saw chain is sharp. That is not to say working up to this size is recommended but a good sharp chain can allow even a modest pruner to tackle quite a hefty branch. As a rule, it is always better to prune lightly and leave a cleanly cut truncated large branch that can then be properly sawn off close to the trunk with a chainsaw. In most cases it is best to leave this to a trained arboriculturist, particularly on specimen trees.

Makes and models

Stihl and Husqvarna remain the key initial ‘power tool’ choice for many professional users; these two companies have the widest product offering and have strong dealer support pretty much throughout the country – although of course there are alternatives.

So what should you be looking for? Job one is to work out what you want the tool to achieve. For many a key job is to just take out the odd branch that catches when mowing. A light pruner that can be carried on a mower at the beginning of the peak mowing season in spring could be just the tool for the job. Opt for a combi tool, and the head can be swapped to allow a line trimmer to be fitted to deal with the odd patch of difficult to reach grass too. A good option where one person would otherwise need to go back to fetch tools to finish the job after mowing.

Telescopic power pruners are pretty much the best option for most users as these tools have extra reach ‘built in’. A downside is that these pruners do not take kindly to rough handling, operators sometimes allowing the cutting head to drop to the ground when cutting and damaging the shaft. Unlike a brushcutter, the cutting element needs to be sharpened and lubricated too. If a pruner needs to be ‘forced’ to cut, the shaft can get damaged, compromising the tools longevity.

With regards to power, a tool with greater capacity may get the job done faster but it may come with a weight penalty.

For occasional use this is less of an issue, but consider the type of harness on offer. A good harness can make heavier tools easier to move around and operate when not working to full reach.

There is tremendous change when it comes to both dedicated power pruners and combination tools that can be fitted with a pruner head. The latter, such as the pictured Solo 109LG Combi system, is a versatile choice that will enable the power unit to be used for other jobs such as brushcutting.
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"How To..." guides are now available exclusively to BIGGA Members, on a range of Human Resource topics. These short, handy guides provide practical, step by step guidance on a range of subjects. The guides can be downloaded and used to help you develop your knowledge and implement new processes within your workplace.

To access the "How To..." guides, log on to the BIGGA Members Area at www.bigga.org and click on Member Resources.

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There is tremendous choice when it comes to both dedicated power pruners and combination tools that can be fitted with a pruning head. The latter, such as the pictured Solo 109LG Combi system, is a versatile choice that will enable the power unit to be used for other jobs such as brushcutter.
How do you feel you are perceived by golfers?

The majority of golfers think poorly of greenkeepers, a finding confirmed in this exclusive survey, which contacted 74% of BIGGA members about their perception of greenkeepers. The respondents indicated a lack of respect for the work that greenkeepers do, with only 37% feeling that greenkeepers are respected by members, and 42% saying greenkeepers are not respected by members.

Survey respondents also highlighted the difficulties that greenkeepers face, with 35% of respondents saying that they believe greenkeepers are not respected by other golfers, and 27% saying that they believe greenkeepers are not respected by their own members. Only 21% of respondents said that they believe greenkeepers are respected by other golfers, and 17% said that they believe greenkeepers are respected by their own members.

Survey respondents were also asked to rate their level of interaction with club golfers. Of the respondents, 42% said that they do not interact with club golfers, 28% said that they interact with club golfers occasionally, and 13% said that they interact with club golfers regularly. The vast majority of greenkeepers are attempting to interact and communicate with their members, but many feel their voice isn’t always heard. This is a two-way street so look out for ways to learn more about course maintenance and a don’t be afraid to ask your greenkeepers questions. They know what they are talking about and will always be willing to help.

There definitely is a mixed perception of greenkeepers by golfers. There are those who can appreciate the difficulties in maintaining year-round quality surfaces, and then there are those who expect to play a well-maintained course whenever they want, whatever the weather with no disruption to play from greenkeeping practices. The latter tend to view the greenkeeper as the enemy and see any course closures as his fault. Unfortunately, they can often be the more vocal.

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“As people who just mow grass and cut down trees, there is no understanding of what and why we do work, but I ask them: ‘What would happen to their garden if they walked up and down it 200 times a day?’”

“I think they view us as very important in the overall running of the golf club. They realise that without us there would not be a course for them to play on. They also think sometimes that we do things to annoy them (arinate, top dress etc) but in reality these tasks are essential and the majority of the membership totally understand the actions we take. We have a good relationship with our members but it has to be worked at; communication at all times with them is the key to a good relationship.”

Survey reproduced in full, courtesy of Today’s Golfer
How do you feel you are perceived by golfers?

The majority of greenkeepers feel they are respected by most of their club’s members, but this can be undermined by a lack of understanding of what is required to maintain good playing qualities and a small proportion of golfers who do not respect them and question their abilities. More and more golfers have started to view greenkeepers as professionals in the last five years, but, according to the men themselves, there is still plenty of room for improvement.

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There’s definitely a need to improve the way greenkeepers are perceived by golfers. There are some who can appreciate the difficulties in maintaining year-round quality surfaces, and then there are those who expect to play a well-maintained course whenever they want, whatever the weather. However, it’s important to remember that these are the men who understand what is required to maintain a quality course and who are willing to work hard to achieve it. Communication and education are key to improving the perception of greenkeepers by golfers.

We sent out a 16-question survey to Today’s Golfer and hundreds of greenkeepers filled it in. The results were fascinating and thought-provoking...
How good are golfers at putting divots back?

It seems we’re a bit better at replacing divots than repairing pitch marks, but with 29 per cent of golfers still below the required pitch mark repairer in your pocket when on the course and ask the pro or greenkeeper if you need guidance on how to properly use it. And remember, just because your ball finished off the green, it doesn’t mean it didn’t land on it.

**Blame**

Very good 12% Good 25% Average 39% Poor 1% Very bad 12%

Greenkeepers believe fewer than half golfers repair pitch marks to an adequate standard. Make sure you always have a pitch mark repairer in your pocket when on the course and ask the pro or greenkeeper if you need guidance on how to properly use it. And remember, just because your ball finished off the green, it doesn’t mean it didn’t land on it.

**DO GOLFERS DIRECTLY BLAME YOU IF THEY FEEL THE COURSE HAS NOT MET THEIR EXPECTATIONS?**

Yes 74% No 26%

It’s right and understandable that greenkeepers are held to account for course condition, but they can’t control the weather and many face decreasing budgets. These factors have to be taken into account when assessing how good a job is being done. After the wettest summer in 100 years and a horrible winter, it’s likely your garden probably isn’t looking its best, especially if you’re spending less on it. Greenkeepers are fighting the same problems, but on a far larger scale.

**FORE!**

**GENERALLY, DO PEOPLE WAIT TO HIT INTO A GREEN YOU’RE WORKING ON?**

Usually 78% Rarely 14% Always 7% Never 1%

The majority of golfers wait for greenkeepers to clear the green but with 15 per cent experiencing this issue on occasion some players still need to think about that. No one should have to worry about being hit by a golf ball on the course, whether working or playing. Just think about how angry you get when you’re nearly hit by a ball.

“A golfer would rarely, if ever, play into a green when another golfer is on it, but a greenkeeper cutting or rolling a green or changing a pin position seems to become invisible to them.”

**WHAT ARE THE MOST OVERLOOKED ASPECTS OF COURSE CARE?**

There are a wide range of areas that greenkeepers feel are overlooked by golfers, from simple things like properly replacing divots and repairing pitch marks, to things the golfer may not see such as drainage, machinery maintenance and biological and ecological knowledge. It’s obvious that the majority of greenkeepers would be over the moon if all golfers did the simple things like replace their divots, repair their pitch marks and rake bunkers properly when leaving them.

**Drainage.** This includes installing and maintaining. When a course floods members are up in arms but when the flooding stops few committees will spend the right amount of money, the excuse being that it does not happen very often and it is a lot of money. If the committee shows no interest in drainage, staff impact and enthusiasm will be minimal as it can be a very dirty job!

**Pitch marks and fairway divots.** After that it would be lack of care in bunker repair after use.

**Members are completely unaware of the work that goes on behind the scenes to maintain a golf course.**

The high profile work such as mowing and top dressing they see every day but they have no knowledge of the skills required in other areas. For instance, machinery grinding and servicing requires a good deal of training and skill yet some players still believe that winter work involves us playing cards.”

**IN SOME EUROPEAN COUNTRIES GOLFERS NEED TO PASS A TEST TO BE ALLOWED TO PLAY GOLF WHICH INCLUDES A SECTION ON ETIQUETTE AND COURSE CARE. DO YOU THINK THIS WOULD BE OF BENEFIT IN THE UK?**

Yes 91%

In some countries where golf is relatively new you have to prove you have enough ability and knowledge to take care of the course and not be a danger to yourself and other golfers, but the history and tradition of golf in the UK means this knowledge is usually assumed here, even from beginners. It’s clear that many golfers could benefit from brushing up etiquette and course care – you can improve your knowledge at www.randa.org.

“Greenkeepers may not think golfers fully understand their role and do as much to help as we could, but they certainly think we are a friendly bunch, Not one greenkeeper taking the survey said golfers were unfriendly so let’s maintain that by chatting with greenkeepers when we see them.
How well do golfers repair pitch marks at your facility?

- Badly 45%
- Average 39%
- Very badly 12%
- Well 4%
- Very well 0%

Greenkeepers believe fewer than half golfers repair pitch marks to an adequate standard. Make sure you always have a pitch mark repairer in your pocket when on the course and ask the pro or greenkeeper if you need guidance on how to properly use it. And remember, just because your ball finished off the green, it doesn’t mean it didn’t land on it.

What are the most overlooked aspects of course care?

There are a wide range of areas that greenkeepers feel are overlooked by golfers, from simple things like properly replacing divots and repairing pitch marks, to things the golfer’s eye doesn’t see such as drainage, machinery maintenance and biological and ecological knowledge. It’s obvious that the majority of greenkeepers would be over the moon if all golfers did the simple things like replace their divots, repair their pitch marks and rake bunkers properly when leaving them.

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How friendly are golfers when you come into contact with them?

- Friendly 59%
- Average 21%
- Very friendly 20%
- Very unfriendly 0%
- Unfriendly 0%

Greenkeepers may not think golfers fully understand their role and do as much to help as we could, but they certainly think we are a friendly bunch. Not one greenkeeper taking the survey said golfers were unfriendly so let’s maintain that by chatting with greenkeepers when we see them.

A golfer would rarely, if ever, play into a green when another golfer is on it, but a greenkeeper cutting or rolling a green or changing a pin position seems to become invisible to them.”

Fore!

Generally, do people wait to hit into a green you’re working on?

- Usually 78%
- Rarely 14%
- Always 7%
- Never 1%

The majority of golfers wait for greenkeepers to clear the green but with 15 per cent experiencing this issue on occasion some players still need to think about that. No one should have to worry about being hit by a golf ball on the course, whether working or playing. Just think about how angry you get when you’re nearly hit by a ball.

DO GOLFERS DIRECTLY BLAME YOU IF THEY FEEL THE COURSE HAS NOT MET THEIR EXPECTATIONS?

Yes 74%  No 26%

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How good are golfers at putting divots back?

- Average 58%
- Good 12%
- Very bad 4%
- Very good 1%

It seems we’re a bit better at replacing divots than repairing pitch marks, but with 29 per cent of golfers still below the required standard there is plenty of room for improvement. It only takes a few seconds to replace a divot or fill one with sand (if it has been provided). It also goes a long way to improving the look and playability of your golf course and can save the greenkeepers valuable time that could be spent repairing or improving other areas of the course.

In some European countries golfers need to pass a test to be allowed to play golf which includes a section on etiquette and course care. Do you think this would be of benefit in the UK?

Yes 91%  No 9%
RESPECT

What could be done to increase the respect golfers have for greenkeepers?

It’s clear that the key here is communication and education as this was mentioned in virtually every response. Greenkeepers believe that if golfers knew more about what they are doing and why, we would understand the challenges they face and passion and pride they have for producing the best course possible. Ask your greenkeepers what they do. They’d appreciate you taking an interest and you’d benefit from the added knowledge.

The standard of general course care and maintenance is clearly a big annoyance for greenkeepers but there are a few other things that drive them crazy too. Taking trolleys and buggies onto tees and too close to greens, leaving litter on the course, ignoring signs, failure to observe health and safety and general moaning all feature prominently in the survey answers.

- “Having a moan to the green staff about a subject that is being carried out by direction of the club, which they would have received emails and notices about. When golfers try and bully greenkeepers to change what they are doing for the good of the club.”
- “Playing from the back tees when not playing in a competition.”
- “Taking trolleys and buggies too close to greens and generally not caring for the course.”
- “When golfers don’t accept that the course is shut for reasons beyond our control. For example, waterlogged, frozen or snow. We do not do it for our own gratification, it’s necessary. It would be far easier just to open it than to have to tell several upset golfers that it’s closed, but it’s about the bigger picture.”
- “Most golfers want a Rolls Royce, but only want to pay for a Skoda.”
- “A golfer once asked if we spray the stripes on the green.”
- “We were once asked to remove four new signs from around the putting greens which read ‘no chipping onto putting greens’ because they didn’t say ‘please’.”
- “A member with an injured leg playing a round of golf on a bicycle.”
- “I saw a golfer take a trolley into the bunker and then rake the footprints but not take the wheel marks once he’d played his shot. He was a bit put out when I pulled him up for it but said he was sorry and played on.”
- “Once when I was fertilising the tees I heard one golfer ask their playing partner what we were doing. The partner replied, ‘they’re feeding the birds, that’s why we have robins’.”
- “A golfer hit a ball and then told the driver that he would not have hit it if the train was on time. And someone once mistook a mushroom for the top of his ball. It exploded into bits when he hit it.”
- “A golfer hit two balls into a pond off the 1st tee, then threw his clubs and bag into the pond in frustration. He returned 10 minutes later to retrieve his bag and collect his car keys from inside, before throwing the bag straight back into the pond!”
- “The funniest thing I’ve seen was a golfer knocking his tee shot into a bin that was level with the markers. It was a highly impressive two-yard straight right flop shot with a driver and it went in without touching the sides.”
- “There was someone who was trying to show off with his remote control trolley and he put it in a pond.”
- “A golfer walking down a fairway with his pants down because his drive didn’t make it past the ladies’ tee.”
- “A golfer once asked me for a scorecard and went off to the club house.”
- “Two ladies taking their tops off and running through the sprinklers on the green on a hot day (and I have the photo to prove it)”
- “Once when I was fertilising the tees I heard one golfer ask their playing partner what we were doing. The partner replied, ‘they’re feeding the birds, that’s why we have robins’.”

What’s your pet hate about club golfers?

How good are golfers at raking bunkers at your facility?

Bad 42% Average 38% Very bad 14% Good 6% Very good 0%

More than half of us don’t maintain bunkers to the required standard. Having to play from an unraked bunker is one of the most frustrating things in golf and it only takes a minute or two to rake them properly. Remember to leave the rake in an appropriate place so it doesn’t affect play and can be easily found by other players, and ask your pro or greenkeepers if you’re not sure about how to properly rake a bunker.

What’s the best conditioned course you’ve seen in the UK?

More than 40 courses were named in the survey with championship venues and links courses understandably taking the majority of the votes. It seems Scotland has the best greens with Carnoustie, Royal Aberdeen and Loch Lomond leading the standings with six votes each and Tulliberry with four. The top English course was Wentworth (four votes) and The Belfry at The Belvoir, Royal Porthcawl, St Andrews, Sunningdale, The Grove and Hanley Common matching three.

Survey reproduced in full, courtesy of Today’s Golfer

WHAT DO YOU DO TO HELP EDUCATE YOUR MEMBERS ON YOUR ROLE AND THE CHALLENGES YOU FACE?

Every greenkeeper who took the survey is making efforts to communicate with their club members, improve knowledge of what they do and keep golfers updated on the course. It’s our responsibility to make the most of these opportunities so we can understand their role and take better care of courses ourselves.

- “We have monthly members meetings in the clubhouse, a YouTube channel and members can email us and arrange a meeting. We use the bar so it’s informal.”
- “I visited an open day invitation at our workshop and only two people attended – me and my deputy!”
- “I communicate all the time. I don’t like problems left to fester. If I hear of an issue, big or small, I will resolve it as soon as I can. I talk to members and submit monthly reports.”
- “We’ve just started to do a greenkeepers blog so that I can explain any work we do. Before, it was me telling the greens convener and hoping he understood and then properly communicated it.”

Survey reproduced in full, courtesy of Today’s Golfer

What’s the funniest/weirdest thing you’ve seen a player do/say?

- “I tried an open day invitation at our workshop and only two people attended – me and my deputy!”
- “I communicate all the time. I don’t like problems left to fester. If I hear of an issue, big or small, I will resolve it as soon as I can. I talk to members and submit monthly reports.”
- “We’ve just started to do a greenkeepers blog so that I can explain any work we do. Before, it was me telling the greens convener and hoping he understood and then properly communicated it.”