

Lively Readies Medinah for the 2006 PGA Championship

Part of the 13th tee will be removed in order to bring in 11 inches of gravel that will serve as a base for 4 inches of asphalt that will cover about 1½ acres of the 13th fairway on Course 1. This will create a perfect bus staging area! WHAT!?!?!?

This is the life of Tom Lively, CGCS at Medinah Country Club.

Medinah Country Club, the 54 hole layout in suburban Chicago, will host the 2006 PGA Championship, August 14th-20th on the No. 3 Course. This layout has played host to many professional golf tournaments in its history and this event will be the 5th major at the Top 100 venue. I wanted to find out what was involved in preparing for an event of this magnitude. This is the first in a two or three or four part series (heck I may start a reality show). In this visit I wanted to find out what has changed at Medinah Country Club since the last time it hosted a PGA Championship in 1999. I also wanted to know how the daily routine changes in order to prepare for this event. I found out it is not so much the week of the event that appears daunting but the activities leading up to it.



The effect of sand topdressing program is already apparent on the fairways at Medinah No. 3.

The Set-Up

The good news is that Medinah Country Club is fantastic on a daily basis. The putting surfaces consistently roll between 11 and 11½ ft, everything is green and the birds sing the song of your choice. Well, maybe the last one was a stretch. The club normally has a 73-person maintenance crew. This year the number was elevated to 80. The staff began working seven days a week in May and they are not expected to reduce their hours until at least September. The level of maintenance is tremendous. It takes 37 people to mow everything on Course No. 3, and this occurs everyday.

The Penn A1/A4 greens only average 4,200 square feet. The expected height of cut for the tournament will be 0.115 inch and the desired speed of 12-13 feet should be easily obtained with double mowing or single mowing and rolling according to Lively. The fairways, tees and collars are all maintained at 0.350 inches and it is not expected that the tournament mowing height will dramatically differ. The fairways are verti-cut weekly and top dressed every 4-5 weeks. This practice has vastly improved the playability of these surfaces and in a short time 1-2 inches of sand has accumulated on top of the course's native clay medium. The rough is being currently maintained at 3 inches and it is expected to be between 4½-5 inches for the start of the tournament. Two fertilizer applications have already been

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TOURNAMENT TIME
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The 13th from the new tee, the hole is now 247 yards.

applied to the roughs and two more are scheduled before the start of the tournament. It is furious. At 3-3? inches it is thick and a ball nestles down in it to the point where a sand wedge is the only option for all but the best players. Accuracy will be at a premium tournament week.

The Changes

Under the guidance of Rees Jones the course underwent a renovation in 2002. Changes were made to every hole on the course with the exception of #12. The course was stretched to 7561 yards, a PGA Championship record. I will not list all of the changes do to space limitations, but I will highlight the ones that struck me. A hole by hole run-down of changes can be found at www.pga.com/pgachampionship/2006/. Some changes were

drastic such as lowering the landing area on three holes by six feet to allow golfers a vantage of the green from the tee. Several greens were moved or altered. Many tee complexes were changed and additional tees were constructed to help lengthen the layout. The bunkers were altered to include more contour and to better frame approach shots. The new sand that was brought in, closely matches what Lively uses for topdressing. Many of the new bunker complexes have pop-up spray irrigation heads added to them to allow the staff to water the Kentucky bluegrass surrounds and also moisten the 4-5 inches of sand to keep it from getting too soft. Over 300 trees were removed, most around greens to allow more light and air movement to certain areas. In print these changes may seem

excessive but it looks fantastic and will play just as well. When asked what he would have done differently Lively's response started, "I usually don't get talked into things..." It was suggested that Penn G6 be used to grass the collars. It turned out that it could not handle the stress of foot traffic and turning mowers and had to be replaced with a similar mixture to the greens. In such an undertaking one mistake of that magnitude seems allowable.

Beyond the changes made by the Rees Jones, Medinah No. 3 has seen many improvements preparing for the PGA Championship. Sod and seed have been established inside the tree line. Trees have been trimmed, pruned and moved. Lively estimates that 90% of the trees on the property have been affected by an intensive maintenance program implemented

One of the many grandstands and hospitality tents being constructed in ready for the Championship.





The back of 12 green on Course No 3. The understory brush has been cleaned out and the area seeded.

over the last few years. Brush areas have been removed to increase the space available for corporate chalets and spectators. The Course No. 3 maintenance road will be removed and replaced. A perimeter fence will be heightened from six feet to twelve feet and a new screen will be installed for increased privacy. Many areas have been re-sodded that were showing wear from cart traffic. The greens received an additional aeration this spring. A new fresh water line has been installed to serve food service needs. An internal fence has been removed to beautify the grounds as well. All of this culminates into a course that is awesome to behold. The PGA pros that have played the layout recently are very excited.

Behind the Scenes

Anyone who has attended a PGA tournament has noticed the tents and bleachers that accompany such a sporting event. There is a lot of infrastructure that goes into an event of this size. People need to park, eat, drink and perform other natural human functions. The benefit that Medinah Country Club has is that they own a lot of land adjacent to Course No. 3. The downfall is that most of this land lies under the other two courses. The start of this article sets up a real world example of what is happening at Medinah Country Club. The back nine at Course No. 1 closed on June 13th in order to allow for construction to

begin. The 13th fairway of Course No. 1 is adjacent to Medinah Road and it will serve as a bus stop for the 38 buses that will be transporting attendees in air conditioned bliss from the free offsite parking areas set up for the event. After removing the corner of the tee and taking down the perimeter fence, a fabric barrier will be laid down to insure the 11 inches of gravel sub-base for the 4-inch thick asphalt parking lot will not be pushed into the clay strata below. The 1-? acre area that was a creeping bentgrass fairway will be the functional entrance to the 88th PGA Championship. Just beyond the entrance parking lot is the 12th fairway of Course No.1. This will be the

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home of the food and beverage services and the 38,000 square foot PGA Championship Pro Shop. These tents will be constructed on top of wood decking and carpet. A similar set up will be employed for the media tent on the 11th hole. The 14th hole at Course No. 1 will play host to the vendor tents. These will be situated on top of 11 inches of gravel over the fairway. Adjacent to this area is a temporary transformer that was brought in to accommodate for the electrical needs of the event. A gravel path will also be installed across hole numbers 10, 11 and 14 of Course No. 1. It will serve as an egress point for the players to enter the clubhouse from their parking area.

The flow of foot traffic will allow patrons to enter Course No. 3 near 18 green and 1 tee. The distance from the bus lot to Course No.

3 is very short and convenient. This is a departure from other events that have had walks of 2 miles or more from the parking lot to the clubhouse. In order to accommodate the parking and tent areas 60 irrigation heads needed to be removed and the irrigation line needed to be rerouted. There can be no live lines under any of the temporary surfaces. In total, 4 acres of creeping bentgrass will need to be replaced on Course No. 1 after the tournament. On Course No. 3 itself, there will be 53 corporate chalets of which 33 are located along the 1st and 18th fairways. The PGA is also in the process of selling corporate bleachers on the course.

Anticipation

The day I visited the course I would have characterized play as brisk. There appears to be anticipation from everyone as to what is

coming. I know the members at Medinah Country Club appreciate the effort that must be put forth to have an event like this go well. Cart traffic will be discontinued July 14th and the closing date for Course No. 3 will be determined based upon weather and conditions. It is anticipated that the course will have about one week to brace itself for the onslaught of golfers, spectators and media. Tom looks forward to the 60 volunteers that will arrive tournament week to help with maintenance before and after play each day. The volunteers can look forward to being involved with a first class staff at a first class facility. Tom Lively has a great attitude about the entire process. He puts it best when he said "You can't have an event like this unless you really want to."



225 yards to the fairway on the 605 yard 14th on Course No. 3.

