

Chrysler-Plymouth Tournament of Champions

North-South Course at Grand Cypress GC, Orlando
Head Superintendent: **Tom Alex**; North-South Superintendent: **Shane Mathews**; Assistant Superintendent: **Andy Smith**; New Course Superintendent: **Dan Burdette**.

Saturday, January 14th. It is exactly one week since a devastating storm front wreaked havoc on metropolitan Orlando with squalls and tornadoes. Another severe front indicated by a brilliant red slash on the weather radar is advancing slowly across the state toward Orlando. It is the morning of the third round of the LPGA Tournament of Champions. Central Florida is once again under a Tornado Watch

Tom Alex and staff wait anxiously for a sunrise that won't happen. Finally, when enough twilight is showing they begin their morning course preparation routine with one eye on the radar and an ear tuned for thunder. Tom is the first to admit that they are blessed with a small field of players (40) which translates into 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. tee times off the first tee only. This gives the crew ample time to double and triple cut the greens as needed for required speed; mow tees, collars, approaches, fairways, fair-rough cut and hand rake bunkers ahead of the first group.

During the day if any inclement weather threatens, a crew member stands by each green with a squeegee to remove any possible sanding water. Later in the afternoon as the players begin to clear the first few holes the crew duplicates the morning routine and in addition mows the primary roughs to boot.

Actual preparation for the event and in turn the fall/winter season begins in October with the overseeding of the golf course. The unusually warm fall required additional seed applications above the normal 100,000 pounds to achieve desired density in fairways and roughs. The normal 10-lbs.-per-thousand bent/poa mix on the greens ended up closer to 14-lbs.-per-thousand. Tom prefers multiple mowings (2-3x) in the morning and evening to achieve green speed rather than mechanical rolling for this event. He explained, "The LPGA requested a course that

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Florida leads the nation in hosting a total of 14 combined LPGA, PGA, and Senior PGA golf tournaments. This is part one of a three part series that will cover those fourteen events. We hope to provide a glimpse into the trials, tribulations, and triumphs that come with preparing for these special events. Along the way we may also discover some turf management tips and techniques that will help you prepare for your own special tournament!

had firm, fast fairways and greens that would hold shots. I felt that if we rolled these greens too much they'd be too firm to accept their approach shots."

Tom is able to put close to 50 people on the tournament course for the daily preparations by borrowing staff from the other courses on property. In fact, Dan Burdette comes down from the New Course one month prior to the event and oversees the North nine and resident superintendent, Shane Mathews concentrates on the South nine which has the finishing holes. Their goal is to have "No Ground Under Repair" or as Tom put it, "no white paint" by the LPGA advance team. They succeeded in reaching that goal for the second straight year

The radio crackles, "Tom there is a severe storm cell moving in with lightning activity!" Pow! A bolt hits nearby. Tom calls Shane and Dan to get the crew off the course until the cell passes. Tom and I are in an open cart making a mad dash for shelter ourselves. As the rain drenches us and runs down our faces, Tom turns to me grinning and says, "Hey Joel, just another day at the office, right?"

Well, the tournament got lucky and the front passed without postponing the round. Months of planning and hard work could have been wiped out in an instant, but fortunately not this time! Everything else went as planned and Dawn Coe Jones shot a 7-under score to win the event. Sometimes you wonder how many people realize just exactly how much work and effort was on the line during those tense hours as the storm poised to strike. For Tom and staff and all of us, it is just another day at the office.

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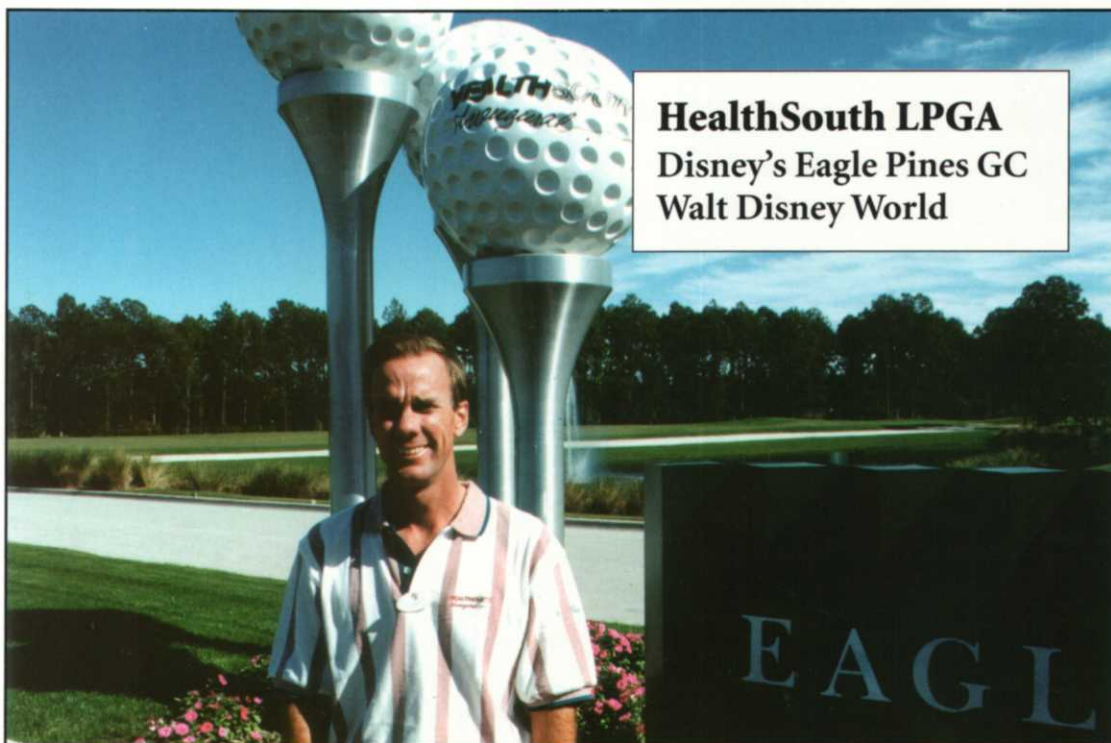
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Head Superintendent Tom Alex (top left) checks with weather radar. North-South Superintendent Shane Mathews (above in print shirt) goes over last minute details with crew. Assistant Superintendent Andy Smith, far left, and New Course Superintendent Dan Burdette await word to get started.

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Disney's Bonnet Creek Head Superintendent Scott Welder (above) Eagle Pines Superintendent Pat Hennessey (right) faced a tournament week with a very busy schedule. See story, Page 70.



HealthSouth LPGA Disney's Eagle Pines GC Walt Disney World