Sawgrass crew did exceptional job

I mentioned in last month's column that I had an upcoming meeting at Sawgrass prior to The Players Championship. In fact, we did play the Valley Course and Marsh Landing on the Sunday and Monday prior to The Players Championship. I had the opportunity to look at the Stadium Course and talk to a few of the tour professionals who would be playing the course over the next few days.

As you know, much criticism came from the tour professionals regarding the condition of the course — the major concern having to do with several greens that had nearly bare spots. From my viewpoint, and after talking to a few professionals, the tees, fairways and rough were in fine condition; there were problems with some greens.

In my opinion, Fred Klauk and his staff conditioned the golf course to its best possible shape, under the circumstances, which were:

• Over 40 inches of rain in the fall followed by a hard freeze in December, allowing only a short growing-in time;

• The Players Club is basically a public facility, like the links at Pebble Beach. Thousands of rounds are played just a week prior to the tournament, allowing very little time for conditioning the course;

• Although the Sawgrass facility is surely becoming one of the best in the country, this north Florida community is certainly not tropical. The growing season usually begins in late March. I appreciate the Tour's desire to leave the course open as long as possible before the tournament. Perhaps under certain conditions it could be closed a week or two earlier, but that's not my call. Commissioner Beman operates one of the best, if not the best, sports management organizations in the world. The policy board will come up with a solution to the course's condition. I might add that no one was more disappointed in the condition of the greens than the Tour staff.

Tour professionals do have the right to be critical and they will continue to be outspoken on course conditioning. In many cases, constructive criticism provides the impetus to make necessary changes. It is interesting that this year's champion played the same golf course as everyone else and his putting was exceptional. If the greens were in as poor condition as reported, Jodie Mudd is a miracle worker.

Mark Leslie's column recounts the many contributions the late Don Rossi made to golf. I'd also like to remember Hal Short, who died suddenly last month. Hal was a principal of Golf Course News' parent company, United Publications, Inc., He was a great salesman and influential in the launch of Golf Course News. He will be missed.

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