Many host courses leaving planning to tournament preparation experts

By Bob Seligman

Professional golf tournaments may only take a week to play, but planning can take place year-round.

From the important — marketing strategies — to the minute yet significant things like having enough bathrooms for corporate sponsors, preparation abounds before first-round dew sweepers tee off.

Jim Cook, president of Championship Management Co. Inc., a golf tournament management firm in Palm Springs, Calif., said planning for the 1991 NEC World Series of Golf actually began while last year's event was being held.

"It's running a business," said Cook, whose company manages several events on the PGA.

Nicklaus will design and manage daily-fee courses

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Marriott Golf Management Services has signed a 10-year contract to manage public courses to be designed and developed by Jack Nicklaus' Golden Bear International in the United States and abroad.

Initial plans call for potential development of about 15 free-standing daily-fee courses. Sites under study include areas in northern California, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., southern Florida and Atlanta.

Marriott Golf, a division of Marriott Corp., will provide turnkey management services including turf maintenance, merchandising, food and beverage management. It will also direct local and national marketing efforts.

Marriott Golf will also consult with Golden Bear during the construction phase on all aspects of the course and facility design.

Speaking at contract signing ceremonies in North Palm Beach, Marriott Chairman J.W. Marriott Jr., said, "We're delighted to be associated with the premier golf organization in the United States and consider it a privilege to be part of a very significant role in bringing quality golf to hundreds of thousands of golfers in communities throughout this country."

Marriott Golf was created last spring and now operates 12 of its own facilities, has one under construction at Marco Island, Fla., and manages free-standing facilities in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area and Portland, Maine. Recently, Marriott Golf was awarded the contract to manage Treetops Resort and Golf Club in State College, Pa.

Golden Bear International President Dick Bellinger said: "Pursuing opportunities in the daily fee business is a natural extension for the company, which recognizes the daily fee business as "a tremendous growth opportunity considering the surge in daily fee golfers in the United States."

He said his company is "actively involved in identifying potential sites to create superior golf facilities for all golfers."
Tour will meet the course superintending agency that runs the version of The Skins Game. "One of the most important points is the extension of the event, it's what you build around the event from the client's perspective," Jonke said. Jonke said some of the on-site amenities involve putting together the hospitality village, arranging transportation and housing for the sponsors, organizing parties for the sponsors, and ensuring there are enough bathrooms and telephones for the sponsor's use.

"You do a lot of your selling and marketing the week of the tournament because the people are already there," Cook said.

MARKETING AND SELLING

A lot of marketing and selling is also done shortly before and after the event. Pentesco said Cadillac dealers will hold sales around the time of the Golf Classic. 

There may also be a dealer incentive program, where Cadillac will give dealers a trip to the event, or even a spot in the pro-am, if they meet sales objectives.

While sponsors get plenty of visibility during a major tournament, they may derive even more benefits by having a private outing after the tournament. "They can get their top clients there and spend some one-on-one time with them," Jonke said. "In certain cases, a company will get more benefits out of that than a regular tournament, if their main objective is customer entertainment."

Not only do sponsors have to be dealt with. So do members of the host country club. In order to ease the inconvenience of, in essence, having their club taken away from them for a week, Jonke said some tournaments give the members such things as clubhouse passes and preferred parking.

He said the country club also deals with such matters as where to put bleachers and concession stands, where to set up the ropes and stakes that separate spectators from the players, and where to station leaders boards, scoreboards, and communication systems for scoring.

PREPARING THE COURSE

The golf course must also be readied for the tournament. Shea said an agronomist from the PGA Tour will meet the course superintendant six to eight weeks before the event to get it in condition. He said the rough will be cut from 1-3/4 inches to 3-1/2 to four inches high, depending on the type of grass. Fairways are cut to one-half inch high, greens to one-eighth inch, and teeing areas to three-eighths inches.

A PGA Tour official will revisit the course one week before the tournament to review conditions and see that guidelines are being met. "By the time the tournament leaves town, the course is probably in the best condition it'll be in all year," said Shea. "The course has gotten rest. Normally, there are 300 rounds a day being played. During tournament week, there's only 150 rounds a day."

James Felton, a golf consultant in design, engineering and construction who has helped prepare courses for The Masters, U.S. Open and PGA Championship, said course preparation for a regular tour stop is pretty much clockwork. Preparation for a major championship may begin a year or more in advance of the event.

"They need to toughen up a course once every five to six years when they have a major (tournament) in mind," Felton said. "The equipment has gotten better. The players have gotten better."

TELEVISION AND VOLUNTEERS

Television must also be dealt with, especially with so many tournaments now on cable and the major networks. Broadcast towers have to be set up. Jonke noted that television determines what times a tournament can and can't be played, if the event is being televised.

Shea said it is important to make sure a tournament is finished on time, mainly in accordance with TV's schedule.

The coordination between the tournament staff and the volunteers is also important. Shea said the PGA Tour will work with the volunteers the week before the tournament so they know what's expected of them. Volunteers perform many duties, such as marshaling the tournament.
Fungicide Program Will Colleagues Green.

One important thing is booking the course as far in advance as possible.

"That's very crucial," Pentesco said. "Let's say we want to go to a private club. But if they have so many events on line, it may be hard to get it."

"Some courses will make themselves available. Some won't," said Stephen Pennington, proprietor of Great Golf Outings, of Roswell, Ga., which runs corporate golf affairs.

"Some may become available if a member is in the outing."

Corporate outings often feature leading professional players. Jonke said companies must determine how many pros they can afford. He said that top pros will command one-day appearance fees up to $75,000.

Jonke said Lee Trevino and Curtis Strange are reportedly in that range. Andrew McLean, director of charity events, the Cadillac Golf Classic, which will be played Aug. 3-4, is paying large appearance fees to each member of this year's tentatively scheduled foursome.

Greg Norman reportedly will get $75,000 per day for two days, Arnold Palmer $50,000 per day, Fuzzy Zoeller $20,000 per day, and Canadian pro Dave Barr $15,000 per day. (All figures are U.S. dollars except that of Barr, who reportedly is being paid in Canadian dollars.)

Pentesco said the pros are booked eight to 12 months in advance, to assure both their appearance and their release from the PGA Tour to play in the event, which is the same weekend as the Buick Open.

While the leading PGA Tour pros command huge appearance fees, Senior Tour and LPGA Tour players are also good for outings.

"The lady pros are the best to work with," Pennington said. "They're more accessible and less demanding and easier to work with."

There are many other ingredients to be added, especially to a corporate outing. What kind of format should be used? If you're using one professional, should the pro only be on one hole so all the amateurs can play with him or her?

If it's a special event like the Cadillac Golf Classic, do you want to have a group of only serious players, or do you want to include a golfer with a comedic personality like Zoeller's to add levity and entertainment?

Do you want the pros to be after-dinner speakers, especially if there's a party at the end of the outing?

Other factors must also be considered. How hard should the golf course be? Is it too demanding for the players?

What gifts and prizes should be given?

What services does the country club provide?

Does the sponsor feel more services are needed?

Should there be special contests for the longest drive and closest to the pin? Is hole-in-one insurance necessary?

Corporate planning any type of golf tournament requires lots of effort. But once the tournament, especially Tour stop, is over, the course is returned to its normal state.

"Once the tournament is over," Cook said, "you tear down a facility that took a year to build."

And then you start rebuilding it for the following year.

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