Tourney veteran Hahn prepping Oak Hill for riotous Ryder rematch

By PETER BLAIS

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — A golf course is going to suffer some damage during a major tournament. There's no way to avoid it. The key is how you deal with it.

So says Joseph Hahn, the 54-year-old head superintendent at Oak Hill Country Club here and host for September's Ryder Cup extravaganza. Hahn has also overseen the US Open and Senior US Open at Oak Hill and six LPGA events during his tenure at nearby Locust Hills.

"The biggest thing you come to appreciate about hosting a major tournament," Hahn said, "is the amount of preparation involved. Your crew, the tournament staff and outside contractors are all over your course. Everyone has good intentions. But with all that work and all those people, some damage to the course is inevitable."

"It really irritates you the first time it happens. But you finally learn that it happens every time and to everybody. The course eventually gets repaired and it's not such a big deal. It just comes with the territory."

And it's a territory the 40-year veteran of the course management business enthusiastically enters.

"Getting ready for major events brings out the best in people," he said. Hahn promises the East Course will be at its best when the Europeans try to wrest the Ryder Cup from the Americans in what has arguably become golf’s premier event.

Course conditions will be the same as for an Open. Green speeds will be in the 10 1/2-to-11 range, up from the 9 1/2 for members. Fairway cuts will be lowered from 1 1/2-inch to a tournament-friendly 7 1/16-inch. Intermediate rough, tees and collars will remain at their everyday best, but the primary rough will better than double its normal 2-inch height to 4 1/2 inches.

Three bunkers were restored to their original Ross-designed dimensions last fall. Every bunker on the course received new sand, 1,400 tons in all, so they would play consistently throughout.

While course conditions are similar to those demanded for an Open, the extracurricular requirements are much greater than for a normal PGA Tour event, Hahn said. For example, there were 15 hospitality tents at the 1989 U.S. Open here compared to the 57 planned at this year's Ryder Cup. More flag poles have to be planted to fly the colors of the various countries. Accommodations must be made for the gala opening ceremonies. Extra bridges have been erected for the anticipated crowds across Allen's Creek.

"Anything moving onto the course has to go through this office," Hahn said. But even with the additional Ryder Cup demands, most of the things any superintendent does, whether it be in preparation for a major tournament or the daily operation of the course, are a matter of successful repetition, Hahn said. That's the main thing he learned from the two men Hahn considers his mentors, Charles Ludecker and Lynn Davis.

Davis succeeded Ludecker as head superintendent at Brookfield Country Club in Clarence, N.Y., where Hahn first went to work on a grounds crew at age 14. Both men are deceased, but they were Hahn's professors in the University of Hard Knocks.

"My formal education ended with high school," Hahn said. "But they both saw I wanted something more and took me under their wings. They used to tell me something over and over, and then I'd make me do it over and over. The repetition used to irritate me. I hated it when I was living through it. But learning to do something the right way, and then being able to repeat it again and again, is the key to being a good superintendent."

On a more personal level, Hahn credits his wife Elaine and brother Pete, a fellow superintendent who died last year, with helping him succeed.

"My wife had to put up with a lot," Hahn said. "We had seven children. Many times she ended up having to take the kids to ball games and school functions because I was tied up at the course. Now that they are all grown [the youngest is 20], I'm looking forward to spending more time with her and playing a little more golf."

Hahn also plans to continue his involvement with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. He has served and will continue to serve on numerous GCSAA committees, he said. He also had a brief tenure on the board of directors.

But he lost a 1994 re-election bid, in part because of his support for several con

Continued on next page
Putting-green research priming pump for wisdom

By MIKE KENNA

FAH HILLS, N.J. — Thirty-eight preproposals were submitted to the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) Turfgrass Research Committee in response to its June 1 call for studies dealing with putting-green construction and maintenance. The USGA Green Section’s “Specifications for a Method of Putting Green Construction” uses sand as the principal component of the root-zone mix to provide adequate drainage and resistance to compaction, and incorporates a perched water table in the profile to provide a reservoir of moisture for use by turf.

The goal of the new research is to identify the best combinations of construction, grow-in procedures, and post-construction maintenance practices that prevent long-term problems, reduce environmental impacts, and produce high-quality playing surfaces. At the July 20 Research Committee meeting, 18 preproposals were selected for development into full proposals.

Final selection of full proposals will be made the last week of November. Ten to 12 projects will be funded at $20,000 per year for a period of up to five years. The Golf Course Superintendent’s Association of America has agreed to consider co-sponsoring a number of projects selected by its own Research Committee.

Several interesting questions are raised by the research preproposals which will directly benefit golf. Can the conditions for the removal of the intermediate (choker) layer be less stringent? How does the shape (i.e., angular or round) of the sand affect green performance? Why are some sands more stable than others? Can calcareous sands be used successfully in regions where they are more abundant?

The hydrology of movement of water through putting-green root zones will also be further investigated during the next five years. How does the profile design, root-zone composition, slope of the green, drain spacing, profile depth, and irrigation protocol impact water movement and the extent of water perching in a USGA green? How do these factors change over time? How do alternative putting-green construction methods stack up to the USGA Green Section recommendations?

Beyond these questions dealing with the chemical and physical properties of root-zone mixes, how should they be grown in and made ready for play? Are the extremely high rates of nitrogen used to accelerate growth a short-term solution to meet opening day but a path to long-term failures? How can dark, organic grow-in layers be avoided? What are the criteria for allowing play on new greens?

Several projects propose to thoroughly study the microbiology of high-sand root zones. What species of bacteria are found in new greens? Where do they come from? How do microbial populations change over time? What effect do they have on the development of layers high in organic matter? What effect do micro-organisms have on turfgrass pathogens?

These are just a few of the interesting questions that university scientists will attempt to answer during the next five years. It is important to remember that the answers will be based on thorough, side-by-side comparisons of a wide range of construction, grow-in, and post-grow-in regimes. The research will provide more sound, scientific information upon which the putting green construction and maintenance debate can be based.

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