High-level volunteers get down and dirty for comrades

By MARK LESLIE

PINEHURST, N.C. — Instead of a high schooler or college student tending bunkers during the U.S. Open at Pinehurst No. 2, there stood Augusta National Senior Director of Golf Course Operations Marsh Benson and Pebble Beach Golf Links superintendent Mark Michaud with rakes in hand.

The brotherhood of keepers of the green reaches new heights during major events when one of their members needs help, say superintendents whose courses hosted the four Majors this year.

"We were blessed to have a lot of volunteers," said Pinehurst Resort Director of Golf Course Maintenance Brad Kocher. "We had between 50 and 55 every day of the tournament. So we were able to do everything to the 'nth' degree."

Benson was "instrumental in showing us how he staffs for the Masters and we used a lot of his program as a template for what we did," Kocher said.

"I learned a lot, too," Benson said of his volunteer work at Pinehurst No. 2.

And Benson said he also received major help for his Major. One hundred seven individuals worked on Augusta National during the Masters, including 62 volunteers who did a wide variety of jobs, he said.

Superintendent Danny Quast, whose Medinah (Ill.) No. 3 Course in Medinah, hosted the PGA Championship in August, said he had 16 superintendent volunteers — a lot of them assistants, some from Florida.

He noted that Augusta is "crunch time for all the superintendents in the area, so it's understandable if others don't volunteer." And he added: "There is not one [local] superintendent who wouldn't help, if asked."

But since Quast has crews for Medinah's three golf courses, "we're in pretty good shape," he said.

Meanwhile, at British Open host Carnoustie Golf Links, in addition to volunteering superintendents, John Philp had "180 local schoolchildren working in shifts through the tournament to collect litter. They have been down since."

Kocher summed up the feelings of all four for future hosts of Major tournaments. "Anything we have here we would be glad to share," he said. "It improves the learning curve of anyone who is going to host a tournament."

Post-traumatic stress syndrome at the Majors

Continued from previous page

...during the tournament and the subsequent vehicles to remove it, the fairway is pretty bereft of grass. We'll have to do a process that allows the agronomic staff to move sod from the sunny locations, Benson said, to shady locations.

"A lot of the rough has disappeared this year and that has stood us in good stead for all the traffic," said John Philp, super Carnoustie Golf Links superintendent.

Dealing with bentgrass and fair different conditions outside Chicago, Medinah's Quast compared his experience hosting the Open in June and this year's PGA Championship in August.

"After the Open, you had your worst growing period," he said. "After the PGA, you have the best growing period. In Northern grasses the fall is usually your best growing time. After the U.S. Open, it was hot and humid and you got nothing to come up but crabgrass. This time around it should be favorable weather for recovery."

At Medinah, Philp is confident of an early return to normalcy. "The rough was quite powerful this year and that has stood us in good stead for all the traffic," he said. "Where all the public walked, it's padded it all down. The turf was so strong to start with, it's going to help with recovery. The players might not have liked it [the rough], but it's beneficial here with the recovery. There will be bits and pieces, no doubt. The 1st fairway and the [Barny] Burn will not be back to normal until next year. That was quite intense traffic. The public putting green on Links Parade had the physiotherapy unit on it and the BBC studios. It will not be a putting green again until at least next year."

Philp, too, has made changes for non-professional golfers to enjoy Carnoustie.

"A lot of the rough has disappeared now," he said. "A normal golfer could not get around in less than six hours. One of our first jobs was to cut down the rough to enable normal traffic to get round, but the fairways are just the same."