

SUPERINTENDENTS

Open superintendent happy morning after

Perhaps the second happiest man at the 1976 U.S. Open in Atlanta as Jerry Pate shot to within three feet of the 18th pin, clinching the victory from the fading grasp of John Mahaffey, was Bobby McGee, golf course superintendent for the Atlanta Athletic Club. Pate's approach shot won him the championship and assured McGee there would be no Monday playoff. The last-minute charge by the rookie professional ended a three-year marathon of planning and preparation for McGee and his regular staff of 25 men.

McGee and crew, plus 15 extras, had been working seven-day weeks preparing for the prestigious tournament. It was a grand success; over 145,000 fans (including the three practice days) watched the first Open ever held in the south. But because this was the first Open in the south, McGee had to contend with some special problems.

Bentgrass was one. It is difficult to maintain in hot climates. McGee had to be careful not to mow the grass too short on the greens, since they would burn out before the end of the tournament. To accomplish this, he carefully paced the length of the grass, cutting it successively shorter each day until the start of the tournament. By then, the greens

were approaching the USGA desired lightning speed. Rain during the four playing days slowed them somewhat, but McGee's crew kept them playable with squeegees. USGA officials, who now measure the speed of Open greens twice daily with golf balls launched from 20-degree-inclined planes, remarked about the consistency of the greens. To McGee's delight they announced "tremendous."

That bit of rare praise from golf's official association helped sweeten the stew caused after the first round of play when some of the more vocal pro's complained enthusiastically that the fairways were too high. The trouble was traced to the wheels on the mowers. The cutting-height settings were adjusted to compensate and the problem was corrected for the second round.

Another problem for McGee was the rough. The USGA specifies four to five inches deep. McGee's roughs are Bermuda grass, a late bloomer in North Georgia. Last year McGee experimented with a chemical, Gerbillic Acid, to boost the Bermuda growth early in the season. It worked. This year he applied four to five sprayings and by tournament time the rough was the way the USGA wanted it — rough.

Any large gallery, excited and twice caught in torrential Georgia thundershowers, can do a lot of damage to a superintendent's domain. This year's Open crowd did its share, especially in the areas surrounding the greens and important tees, such as the tricky par-

three 15th. Crossovers and walkways, particularly the crossovers that rutted the playing fairways, were the worst areas. Some reseeding will be required in these heavily traffic areas. Fortunately, they were few. In fact, damage to the actual playing areas was so slight McGee had the tournament's Upper Highlands Course, one of two at the club, back in action for the members in two days. He expects to use much less than the \$20,000 made available to him from tournament proceeds, specifically for post-play repair, to complete the task of returning the grounds to normal.

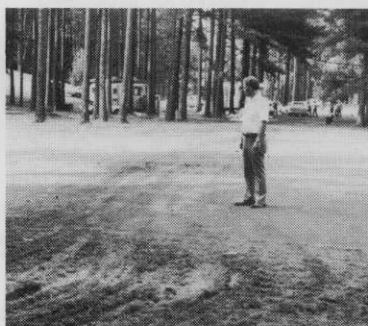
One last obstacle at the end of the Open was getting the half dozen giant 16-wheeled ABC-TV vans safely off the course. A hard rain the day after the tournament softened the ground again, and McGee firmly, but diplomatically convinced the crews to stay put until the sun dried things up. One smaller van from a Florida television station tried to exit over a clay-surface access road. It slid down a small hill and settled at a 30-degree list in the soft mud along the road. It

too had to wait for the sun.

With the tournament over, the grass on the greens can now grow a little longer. During the Open they were cut once in the evening and twice every morning before play. USGA calls for a standard grass length of 5/32 inch. Regular length, for the club members, is kept at 3/16 to 1/4 inch. The terrifying roughs will get trimmed back to a more civilized length, which must be a great relief to the club golfers.

Surveying the course damage, McGee, a 13-year veteran with the Atlanta Athletic Club and the son of a golf course superintendent from Rome, Ga., although gracious and polite, looked exhausted. Asked if he was upset with the damage and would he advise other superintendents to steer clear of such super events McGee said, "The damage doesn't bother me, not when it's for the right reasons.

"And no," he continued, "I wouldn't advise a superintendent to avoid this kind of event. It's a chance of a lifetime; and in its own way, it's rewarding."



McGee examines portion of playing fairway used as a crossover point by 145,000 fans and several television crews. Some of the worst areas will have to be reseeded.

Vehicles trying to leave the course over wet clay-surface access roads found the going a bit slippery. "Seemed like we were driving on ice," commented the driver of this Florida television truck. They had to wait for the sun and a tow truck.



Sitting amid the debris behind the lake at the 18th green, superintendent Bobby McGee is acutely aware that he is responsible for not only the golf course, but all of the grounds at the Atlanta Athletic Club.

