



## Battle Tested Bayonet *By Mike McCullough, NCGA Agronomist*

The recent Buy.com tour event at Bayonet golf course in Seaside was everything a professional golf event should have; great weather, talented field, difficult golf course and a fantastic finish. Now, who really cares who won, how nice the weather was, or who has the best swing on the Buy.com tour? Let's hear about how hard the golf course was set up.

Many of the players had nothing but praise for this hidden gem of a golf course located on the former US Army base. Other players had comments that can't be printed due to the family oriented style of the publication. Several players commented about how the course setup was the most difficult they had seen all year. The tournament scoring average can fortify those statements. The first two-day average was 75.5, compared to the first two days of a Buy.com annual tournament average of 71.7. The final two-day average at Bayonet was 74.4, compared to final two-day tour average of 71.2.

Tyler Dennis, a PGA Tour advance official, said that Bayonet is one of the toughest golf courses the Buy.com players will play all year. Frequently, tournament winners on the Buy.com tour will have winning scores that are near twenty under par. According to Dennis, there are only a handful of events that the winners are in single

digits under par. Dennis stated, "these guys are good players and they will make birdies." So when only three players broke par and the winner of the Monterey Peninsula Classic was only three under par, then obviously the course held its own.

Other PGA Tour officials were overheard saying that this was one of the toughest courses they have seen in their entire career. Both players and officials alike said the course was in absolutely fantastic condition.

PGA Tour agronomist, Harry Schuemann, evaluates playing conditions at tournament venues a week in advance of the event. Schuemann informed event organizers during this visit, the course was in tournament condition. It was a testament to the amount of work put in by Pat Finlen, Director of Maintenance, and Tom Bevan, superintendent and the crew.

Preparations for the event started as early as the third week of June. Some of the larger projects tackled for the event were the installation of new laterals to irrigate areas of rough that were previously barren, enlarged several tee boxes, pruned many, many tree limbs and removed hundreds of tree roots from the fairways.

Everyone did a remarkable

job of getting the course into major championship condition. Players, spectators and even a famous golf commentator verbalized how hard the golf course was set up and playing. Some even mentioned the setup was similar to a very famous course that also hosted a big tournament earlier this summer, Pebble Beach Golf Links.

Two areas that brought most of the attention or scorn, depending upon who you talked to during the week, were the length of the rough and the speed of the greens.

Double-cutting the putting surface every day for ten days prior to the tournament had the players struggling with short shots around the green. The only water the greens received during that time were a short daily syringing the morning prior to play. These practices guaranteed firm and fast conditions for the professionals.

Pool table smooth and parking lot firm, the greens were stimping in the high 10s for the weekend rounds. There was even some mumbling from players that can be only classified as the unpardonable sin of professional golfers: the greens were almost too fast.

One of the more interesting sites during the week of

the Buy.com event was watching the extremely talented players hit out of some very nasty lies as the rough was measured in some locations at over eight inches. Professional golfers affectionately refer to the rough as cabbage.

Personally, I think they need to coin another term, coleslaw. Coleslaw is defined as hitting the ball from one area of cabbage to another area of cabbage on the same hole. I witnessed more cabbage being shredded in one day than a week at the local sauerkraut festival. It's no surprise a couple of players withdrew from the competition due to "wrist injuries" sustained from hitting out of the rough.

Some golf fans might think making the golf course too difficult is not very much fun to watch. However, since the GCSANC had the chance to play the same conditions a few days prior to the event, it was interesting to compare the skill levels and scores of superintendents versus professionals. The professional golfers should have plenty of job security. There were many superintendents and others who couldn't even break a tee much less 80 during the six-hour marathon round.

