

Europe's leading Greenkeepers meet in Portugal

The PGA Europe Tour, sponsored by Volvo, will be playing for £16m in prize money in 1990, three times the sum on offer just five years ago.

Golf, both professional and amateur has moved from being a weekend pursuit in little more than a decade to become one of the fastest growing business ventures throughout the world, and now, not before time some might say, the contribution to the game by the professional greenkeeper is at last receiving recognition.

John Lelean, joined the PGA European Tour Greenkeepers at their first conference at the Penina Hotel in Portugal.

The Volvo European tour now extends from the Highlands of Scotland to the Persian Gulf, played on golf courses as varied as the traditional links at St. Andrews, through the heathlands of Surrey, the parklands at Woburn, the semi-tropical scrub lands of Spain and Portugal to the latest addition, the Emirates Golf Club in Dubai. Ask any of the players what they re-

quire from a tour venue and they will say - "Firm fast greens, flat teeing areas, tight lies on the fairways, well defined differences between semi-rough and rough, uniform sand in the bunkers and consistency from one course to the next".

A very tall order in a climate where the temperatures can range from 100 degrees to little above freezing on one

of Britain's bad days.

In the week before the start of the festive season, the PGA European Tour Management brought together on the Algarve Europe's leading greenkeepers, and golf directors. The dedicated professionals, whose skills in golf course preparation and presentation are an essential element to the Tour's success.

Although there have been previous meetings between the PGA European Tour Management and Golf Course Managers, this was the first fully structured conference where uninhibited discussion was given unbridled rein, overcoming with apparent ease the barriers of nationality and language. It could be said, greenkeepers speak with the same tongue when discussing their favourite subject - growing grass and maintaining golf courses. The three day conference at the Penina Hotel, was an outstanding success, despite a spell of the most inclement Algarve weather.

Course preparation is high on the priority list of the PGA European Tour. In 1989, Bruce Jamieson, previously a Tournament Administrator was appointed the Director of Agronomy, a position he is well qualified to hold. The son of the club professional at Turnberry, he developed an interest in greenkeeping and through the hard school of self education in grass culture progressed to the position of Course Manager at Royal Porthcawl. It is his job to act as the liaison between the greenkeeping staff and the Tour Manager, offering advice when required, setting the standards for course preparation and on occasions offering a shoulder to cry on.

He works in cooperation with Tournament Directors and Tour Administrators, who handle the course set-up and two consultant greenkeepers. Richard and Roger Stillwell, who spend most of the season travelling the Continent, visiting courses months ahead of a Tour event. A course preparation document has been in existence for man years. It is part of Bruce Jamieson's role to revise it.

Those involved with a tour event used

European Tour Director opens Penina conference

The growth of the European Tour, has now provided sufficient funds to bring greenkeepers together for the first of what is hoped to be a regular gathering of those responsible for preparing golf courses for tournament events, the Director of Tour Policy, Tony Gray, told delegates at Penina.

In 1936, the Daily Mail sponsored the first PGA event at Sunningdale with a prize fund of £2,000, which has now grown to £16m, the amount to be played for in 1990.

Overall sponsorship increased from £1.5m in 1979 to £30m last year, increasing still further for the coming year to £50m, which thanks to the involvement of Volvo, has been a significant breakthrough.

Outlining the development of the European Tour, Mr Gray told the forty delegates at the opening session at the conference, that in 1971

John Jacobs was appointed to the position of Tour Director General, whose main objective was to increase the sponsorship prize fund. He was succeeded in 1975 by Ken Schofield.

Although the PGA European Tour is now a separate organisation from the PGA, the charter remains almost unchanged. At one time their headquarters occupied cramped office space at the Oval Cricket Ground, now they are established in their own premises within the complex of the Wentworth Club at Virginia Water.

The European Tour organisation had become so complex that it was necessary to set up various divisions and George O'Grady became the Managing Director of PGA Tour Enterprises in 1984, whose main aim was to promote and market The Tour.

A further advancement has been the formation of a PGA Tour Properties and Development Division, which will be responsible for the construction of their own golf courses along similar lines to the USPGA Tour. These courses built to tournament specifications will also be available for the benefit of the golfing public.

The European Tour has still a long way to go, added Tony Gray. From the first tournament in France in 1970, the French Open, 25 of the tour events are now held on continental courses and last year they added Dubai to the list for the Desert Classic.



Tony Gray

Setting up the course for a tour event

Mike Tate is one of the European Tour's Administrators responsible for setting up a course for a tournament. It is his job to ensure that everything will be right for the start, reducing complaints and rules queries to the absolute minimum.

Mike and the other nine members of the travelling staff will be out on the course with the larks at first light on a Monday morning armed with a spray gun to check for possible worn areas which could be deemed "ground under repair", though if the course has been prepared with meticulous efficiency these areas will be hard to find.

High on the priority list will be the out of bounds markers, ensuring the stakes are clearly visible, there is a clear line from one stake to the next and the adjacent area has been strimmed to avoid doubtful decisions.

Water hazards are checked and marker posts are sited well back from the edge.

Bunkers, often a source of complaint are checked for sand coverage, both for equality of depth and the consistency. No golfer, amateur or professional can control a bunker shot if the ball is plugged in the sand. The leading golfers can all manipulate the ball out of the bunker, but if it is below the level of their feet, no one has control on the fly to the pin.

Ideally the sand should be lightly hand watered to provide a stable surface.

Rakes are checked to ensure there is one for every bunker and instructions given that these are to be sited

in the bunker itself. A somewhat controversial point with the average club, who use a variety of methods from spiked heads to hollow pipes to keep the rakes out of the sand.

Tees are regarded as too small by most professionals, particularly on the short holes where a three day event can cause considerable wear from iron play.

To counter this the rule of thumb is to put the markers at the back of the tees for the practice rounds, or the now usual preliminary pro-am event and move them forward daily as the tournament proceeds. Greenstaff are often advised to cover a small tee area, prior to a tournament to keep the golfers off.

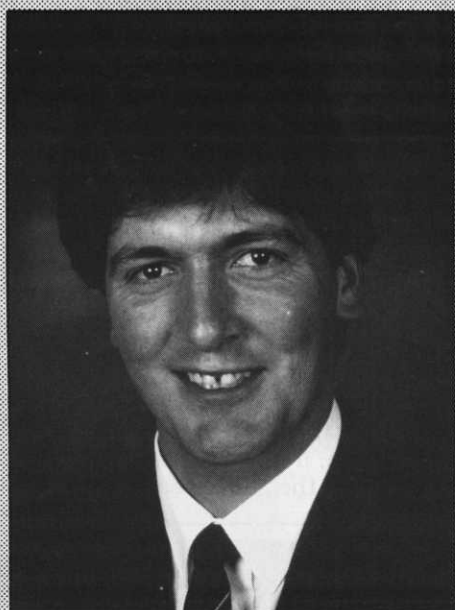
A beady eye is also kept on possible obstructions to the line of play, so surplus golf course furniture, seats, rubbish bins, signs and all other tee markers are removed, except when the pro-am is in progress and on these days the amateurs and professionals have separate tee positions. By the time the tournament commences, the officials will have toured the course several times. All are in direct radio communication throughout the set-up and through the event and this radio link also includes the course manager and the duty greenstaff.

Although the tour organisers direct the pin positions, this is done in liaison with the greenkeeper. They are not set in the impossible positions that some host clubs would like, accordingly to Mike Tate's colleague, David Garland. Understandably, the club, looking ahead

to the return of their course for member's play are anxious to preserve the best positions on the green. The set-up presentation raised some lively discussion and points for consideration came from Chris Kennedy at Wentworth, who suggested that the size of the hole can vary according to the weather conditions.

George Brown, course manager at Turnberry said he would like to see some standardisation of paint for the insides of the cup. Should it be gloss oil-bound paint, emulsion or perhaps there is something better that could be uniformly used.

Mr Jaime Ortiz-Patino, President of Valderrama said he has the cups painted weeks ahead of the tournament so the staff have adequate practice.



Mike Tate

to be advised to cut putting surfaces to 1/8". This is now recognized as sometimes impracticable. The aim is now to produce an average greenspeed of between 9 1/2 - 10 1/2 feet, on the stimpmeter throughout the tournament. How this is achieved is the responsibility of the Course Manager, whether it be by cultural practice, the latest technology such as groomer units, fine cutting or a combination of all these elements, is the decision of the man in charge of the course.

The European Tour, starts in Portugal, moves to the United Arab Emirates, then progresses northwards through the season, until in June they reach their most northerly event in Stockholm for the Scandinavian Open. Within a little over four months, the Tour have played courses as far apart as Alaska to Mexico!

The variation in climatic conditions is

vast, the techniques involved in bringing a course to its peak so different. No document can lay down a tablet of stone to be followed. The finished product can be the only criteria and that is down to the man on the spot. In Dubai, for the first staging of the Desert Classic, the Course Manager, Barry Carter frightened not only the players, but himself when he achieved a greenspeed of 13 feet, so fast that if the wind had blown in from the Gulf, the ball would not have held on the putting surface. These surfaces, faster even than Augusta, were only possible by putting the grass under extreme stress and cutting to 1.25mm.

A cut in cool season climates at this height would put such stress on the grass it could not recover.

Jean Pierre Leboucher, from the French Golf Federation, summed up course preparation admirably - "Grass is a living thing. It needs cossetting,

feeding, encouraging, nurturing. Preparation grass for a tournament is like training an Olympic athlete. It must be fit, healthy, well fed and strong. Brought to its peak before it is put under stress and cut to a competitive length".

A presentation of the building of the Emirates Club by Golf Director, Terry Duffy and its subsequent maintenance programme, fascinated all at the conference. A detailed report will be published in a future issue of The Golf Course, but it can be recorded that the course hosted a Tour Event in less than three years of the arrival of the first bull-dozer on the barren desert sands.

By harnessing surplus water from the nearby de-salination plant, which in turn was powered from energy created from an industrial smelting plant, grass was growing on greens and fairways within days of planting. Two huge fish

filled lakes act as reservoirs, to supply up to 2 million gallons a day through the irrigation system. All this for less than £2 and half million pounds, half the cost of the clubhouse!

Course management and maintenance on any course with a high through put of golfers, and this applies to all the courses used by the European Tour, requires a sound, well organised work programme over 12 months of the year.

Course Manager, Derek Ganning in charge of The Belfry, had two tournaments in 1989, the English Open in June, followed by the Ryder Cup in September. He told the conference how the greenstaff's work plan has to dovetail with the host of other supporting bodies from TV, Tented Village, Hospitality Units, Telephones and even the refuse and toilets.

His philosophy is to be firm yet friendly, knowing where structures are to be sited and who is responsible. Minimum course damage is the main consideration.

Bruce Jamieson sees the main aim is to provide a fair competitive arena for the player. Providing equal consistent conditions on the day, for those with a late tee off as far those who play earlier.

He is looking for commitment from the course managers, something he is certain to obtain from such a highly dedicated band of greensmen who are proud to put their hallowed acres under examination, if only for a few days at the height of the golf season.

Are our greens approaching the end of a lifespan?

As the majority of golf courses in Britain approach their centenary, the greens could be reaching the end of their natural life, Jack McMillan told the Greenkeepers Conference at Penina.

Jack, the Course Manager at Sunningdale, host club to the European Open next September, suggested that increased play over many of Britain's courses built around the turn of the century has created so much compaction on impervious greens, it has created almost insurmountable maintenance problems. Only by continuing costly aeration programmes was it possible to keep greens in play.

He believed that the time was fast approaching when some courses

should give serious consideration to an 18-hole green re-building programme to the USGA specification, which proved to be the best method of green construction, which should guarantee, with correct upkeep a 100 year lifespan.

Popular courses now experience something in the region of 50,000 rounds of golf a year and the wear is further increased if every member of a four-ball has a caddy.

A bent/poa mix produced the best putting surface at his course, according to Jack McMillan. Talk of bent/fescue mixes were somewhat of a myth, he added, as fescues cannot stand up to heavy traffic and only at St Andrews or some links and downland courses had he seen the fescues in real abundance.

The creeping bent grasses produce the best putting surfaces, but he had some misgivings on how well they will withstand long term wear in a climate with a seven month long dormant period. Experience of creeping bent in Britain has so far not been good as it has quickly succumb to the incursion of annual meadow grass. Managing creeping bent is a technique still very much experimental.

At his course 700 tons of top dressing is used annually, spread lightly and often. To produce his green speeds the Sunningdale policy is to take the grass out not off, by verticutting and grooming.



Jack McMillan

