

BRUCE JAMIESON is the Director of Agronomy for the PGA European Tour

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In an interview
with John
Lelean on the
Algarve he
discusses the
Tour's plans for
tournament
courses

QUESTION...What is your role as the PGA European Tour Director of Agronomy?

ANSWER...It is rather a hard question to answer. Part of my role is to co-ordinate the direction of the tour, relating to the presentation of golf courses. Apart from organising and co-ordinating this conference, my role is to visit clubs involved with tournament events where there is a need to raise the standards over and above what they can normally achieve, not that I am the only person able to do that. Richard Stillwell our greenkeeping consultant is probably the best person to do that on a short term basis.

We used to look for a height of cut, but this is now recognised as totally impracticable as certain grasses will not survive the strain of being cut below 3mm. The height of cut has very little relevance to the speed of the green. (As Barry Carter told the conference he cut to 1.25mm and produced a stipmeter reading of 13 feet.) At Valderama for the Volvo Masters, the cut was 3.25mm to achieve a reading of 11.1 on the first day of practice of the tournament, to 11.2 on the final day. Weather conditions, fertilizer applications, underlying thatch, verticutting, the new machinery and cultural practices all play a significant part in the production of green speeds for the three days of a tournament.

QUESTION...How many staff do you have as Director of Agronomy?

ANSWER...That's easy, there is Richard and Roger Stillwell as consultant greenkeepers, Lesley Kilpin, my secretary and me. Through the season, we visit most tournament courses to give advice when necessary.

QUESTION...This is a relatively new appointment for you Bruce, what was your previous position?

ANSWER...I was a Tournament Administrator, concentrating on the rules exclusively for six months and now could discuss the rules of golf with anybody. The rules are laid down by the R & A, but they are subject to interpretation.

Later I became interested in banner-ing, sighting of TV camera points and the many other aspects involved in presenting a tournament and from there, with my experience in greenkeeping, became involved in the course presentation document, issued as a guide to greenstaff. The guide has been in existence for many years, though it has been updated on numerous occasions. I am now re-writing it.

QUESTION...How much in advance of a tournament would you make the initial visit to a course?

ANSWER...Let's take for example Las Brisas where they will be staging the Mediterranean Open in March this year. We have used the course before for the World Cup, but I will be going in January, because they had eight and a half inches of rain in one day, which turned a lovely golf course with a river running through, to a river the width of the course. It was so bad that our scoreboard Volvo truck is still stuck up to its axles on the side of the practice ground.

QUESTION...Have you found a shortage of equipment on tournament courses?

ANSWER...Certainly not on the Continent, where the equipment is very up to date and at a high standard and they have the people to use it. All tournament courses are well equipped with all the necessary grass cutting machinery, they appreciate the need for the correct maintenance. I usually inspect machinery as part and parcel of the advisory visit.

QUESTION...What involvement do you have with pre-tournament maintenance programmes?

ANSWER...Well I have worked out long and short term programmes for golf courses for the past eight years prior to joining the Tour.

If a course is in good conditions it can be brought to tournament standard within four weeks.

QUESTION...Returning to the course presentation document you mentioned you were updating, what are the major changes you may be contemplating?

ANSWER...One of the big changes will relate to the previous stipulated height of cut. Now we will be recommending a stipmeter greenspeed of between 9 1/2 to 10 1/2 feet. We will be aiming for a similar speed from the practice round to the final day.

Fertiliser applications a week or so prior to the event can lead to a growth flush, particularly if it rains. This can lead to a much slower greenspeed during the afternoon.

On the final day, the best players go out last in the afternoon and they are entitled to an examination paper at least equal to those who tee off earlier. We will now recommend that fertilisers should not be applied less than four weeks before a tournament.

QUESTION...What sort of complaints do you receive from tournament golfers?

PROFILE



Bruce Jamieson is the Director of Agronomy for the PGA European Tour. The son of the professional at Turnberry, his life has been dominated by the game of golf since he first caddied at the age of 12. He worked on the course as a part time greenkeeper until leaving school at 17, with not unreasonable academic qualifications and then decided that the life he wanted was a career in turf management, with a leaning towards golf.

Taking the art of greenkeeping seriously, he obtained the three stage levels of his City and Guild Certificate at Elmwood College, most with distinctions.

In October 1979 he joined the greenstaff at Sunningdale for seven months, before returning to Turnberry as second assistant, moving on to Powfoot as Head Greenkeeper in November 1980.

With a desire to broaden his horizons still further, Bruce "emigrated" to South Wales in January 1983 to take the position of Course Manager at Royal Porthcawl, where his thirst for knowledge motivated him into further studies of turf culture as well as Employment Law and Industrial Relations, through the Institute of Industrial Management.

During this time he also became an examiner for the NPTC in the use of Pesticides on golf courses.

The Welsh club recognizing his drive to gain experience also allowed him the scope to expand his knowledge through project work with other courses in South Wales, an opportunity for which he holds Royal Porthcawl in high regard. At the end of June 1988 he joined the administration staff of the PGA Tour, after preparing his course for the Amateur Championships. Last July he was appointed to his present position of Director of Agronomy.

Aged 32, married for eight years, he lives near Basingstoke, but spends much of his working life away from home, flying, driving and putting in up to 14 hours a day during the three days of a tournament.

ANSWER...They make exactly the same complaints as any golfer, amateur or professional. If we have a specific complaint from a number of players then obviously we will take the matter up.

QUESTION...What new courses will be played this year?

ANSWER...Well, one will be St. Mellion, the championship course designed by Jack Nicklaus, where I have already been and met David Webb, Roy Battishall and the course owners Hermon and Martin Bond.

At a 9.30am general discussion with the staging manager Richard Brown, we talked about crowd movement from the 7th to the 9th fairway round the back of the eighth green and the need for a path construction.

"You want it", said Martin Bond "and you shall have it". By 2.00pm, two JCB's operated by real experts, were on the course digging out the pathway. This is the sort of commitment that the PGA European Tour appreciate. It does not affect the design or playability of the course.

We also have the Catalan Open in Catalonia this year which although just in France straddles the border with Spain.

Other new venues are likely to be announced shortly, though we are reluctant to take on any new venues which do not come up to scratch, which is one of the reasons for this gathering at Penina.

QUESTION...Do you insist on the closure of a course prior to the start of an event?

ANSWER...Not at all. It is up to the course management how they organise their tournament preparation. We know some like Woburn, Valderrama, Turnberry and Quinto do Lago where they close the course prior to the event. Quinto do Lago has 3 sets of 9 holes, and this enables them to close down 9 holes at a time for maintenance.

QUESTION...Is there a likelihood of the PGA Tour building their own courses similar to the development in the USA by the USPGA Tour?

ANSWER...Yes, we have plans afoot for developments in England and Spain. We hope to develop European Tour Clubs in each of the countries where the Tour visits. We envisage that these will be designed and constructed with our members, sponsors and spectators in mind. It is our intention that these new venues become the backbone of Tour venues over the next two decades.