

# The PGA Tournament Play Completes as Lively's Restoration Ramps UP

*Golf Course Superintendents are all about control. Controlling the staff, the growth of plants, and, when possible, the environment. I think that many of us like the feeling of being able to change the playability of a piece of land. You tend to that piece of land. You know that piece of land better than anyone else. It becomes a part of you.*



Tom Lively, CGCS on his nightly tour of the course.



A fairway prepped for sod. During the tournament it was a parking lot.



The big rolls of sod staged and set to go down.

This is part two in my look at Medinah Country Club hosting the 88th PGA Championship. Let me set the stage for you. It is two days before the golf world descends upon your course for the PGA Championship. You have done everything just as the PGA officials have asked. The rough is tough, the fairways are free of divots and the greens are rolling over 12 feet on the Stimp-meter. Medinah No. 3 is tournament ready.

"I don't want you to cut the greens for a couple days," is the comment from PGA officials.

Let us think about this for a second. It has taken double mowing and rolling to get the greens in the condition they are in. The greens show no stress and the Superintendent has an impeccable record for conditions and good judgment when it comes to the maintenance of his courses. Why would a wrench be thrown into his plan?

Beyond this, second-guessing the PGA of America will not happen in this article. The PGA has a lot more experience than any of us at running top-notch golf events, besides, they were paying the bill.

Tom Lively, CGCS at Medinah Country Club did a fantastic job preparing the course for the 88th PGA Championship. It looked perfect in every way. The course caught a lot of heat in the media for being too easy to play a Major on. What doesn't get communicated is that the course was set up exactly as the PGA wanted it. The playing conditions could not have been better. There was talk of the greens being too soft. This was not the case, unless the sand based greens could get saturated with a two-minute hand watering to cool the turf. That is all the irrigation the greens received for the week, a two-minute hand watering on Monday and Tuesday. It did rain an inch on the Friday of the tournament, and this could not be controlled, but on Saturday the greens were actually rolling faster than the previous day.

You may remember my first article about preparations for the event. There was a great deal of turf carnage leading up to the event. Areas of the other two courses at Medinah CC had to be 'sacrificed' to prepare for the event.

Look back at my first article for the whole run-down of what was done in the years and months leading up to this event. Also note what had to be done in the weeks and days leading up to the event. The PGA set-up began in

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earnest eight weeks before the tournament, which was hosted the week of August 14th – 20th. Here are some of the highlights of that two-month stretch. Parking lots, driveways, and tent villages were built on areas of Courses No.1 and No. 2. In some areas, this involved hauling in gravel and in others it meant paving areas that had been fairways. Decking was constructed over fairways for tents to sit on. Almost 1000 cubic yards of mulch was brought in, along with thousands of dollars worth of annual plants to dress up the new traffic pattern that would be used for the tournament. Corporate ‘Villas’ and bleachers were constructed on Course No. 3. Finally the fairway divots in landing areas had to be repaired. Not filled in, but repaired. The Medinah CC staff used one of the tees that was taken out of play for harvesting bentgrass swaths. These pieces of turf were then used to fill in the divots.

For the week of the PGA, the Medinah staff was joined by 55 volunteers on the grounds crew. Many MAGCS members volunteered for this duty. These dedicated Superintendents, Assistants, and Interns made things run smoothly. The 80 grounds staff members, along with the volunteers, were able to get the course prepared for play in one hour and 15 minutes each morning: On the course at 5:45 a.m., and off by 7:00 a.m., just like clockwork. This included mowing everything but the rough, which was fluffed. With the assistance of TPEC and Nadler Golf Car Sales, Medinah CC was able to supply the workers with 45 Toro Walking Greens mowers, 14 Toro 3250s to mow fairways and 15 Club Car Carry All IIs. Toro also helped out with 10 additional Workman utility vehicles. A small evening crew came in to mow greens, fill divots, and perform other tasks that could be done in the evening. Tom would like to thank all the volunteers for making his life much easier. Because of their help he didn’t have any great catastrophe stories to share about the week.

The real fun began for Tom once the tournament was over. The course needed to be repaired, but the members needed to play their traditional late summer events. It took 4

*The 80 grounds staff members, along with the volunteers, were able to get the course prepared for play in one hour and 15 minutes each morning.*

weeks to remove all of the temporary tents and buildings from Course No. 3 and surrounding areas. Contractors began removal of parking lots and stone as well.

The good news is that Course No. 3 is in fantastic shape as of October 9th. Some limited sodding will be needed to make things perfect, but seeding was conducted in high traffic areas immediately after the event. I expected mass devastation on my return trip. There was none. I could not discern where the grandstands had sat or where the traffic had crossed over fairways. The course looks great! There are two or three areas left in disrepair from ‘Villas’ or traffic from the trucks used to remove the grandstands, but these areas are out of play. The rough has been returned to a 2.5” mowing height from its tournament ending 8”!!! This was a lengthy process in itself, heights having to be dropped to 5.5, 4.5, and 3.5” in before finally being returned to the preferred height of cut.

The bad news is that course No. 1 and 2 still have a long way to go before they are ready to play. Mother nature has slowed the repair process. Fall rain has made it difficult to work on damaged areas and prep the ground for extensive reconstruction in the highly damaged areas. Beyond that, the sod that needed to be shipped in couldn’t be harvested due to the same rains. Of all the things

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*A customized installer for bigroll bentgrass sod.*



*Above and below: Installation of the bigroll sod still has to be finished by hand.*



*The rough fluffing crew out at night around a green complex.*



*Filling divots in the evening after play had stopped.*



*Early in the week, giving the turf a quick drink.*



*A look down the row of corporate Villas that wound their way around the grounds.*



*A tee on course two that became a source of plugs for divots.*

that we try and control nature is the most difficult. Pennncross Creeping bentgrass sod has been laid on the 11th fairway of Course No. 1 where the PGA Media Tent was resident. Pennncross and L-93 sod and seed will be used to resurface the fairways and tees on Course No.1 and No. 2. The 11th hole is seeing a bunker reconstruction. The 12th fairway of the same course was reseeded and covered with greens covers to speed establishment. Rough areas on this hole have been re-sodded with Kentucky bluegrass. In total, six fairways on Course No. 2 needed to be repaired extensively after the crowds left. As an example, the 18th fairway was 70% dead at the end of the tournament.

It is not known when the back nine of Course No. 1 will be open for normal membership play, but Tom hopes that it will be playable by the end of April 2007, weather providing. What is visible though, is that progress is being made by the contractors on site. The sod from Central Sod Farm is being installed at a rapid rate and a crew from Bird

*“...the 18th fairway was 70% dead at the end of the tournament.”*

Construction is quickly removing gravel from topsoil where temporary parking lots once sat. Asked if he would do it again Tom answered, “Yes,” and adds that he will have the chance in 2012 when the Ryder Cup comes to town. Believe it or not, the Ryder Cup is an even bigger event.



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