

# Ball Rolls out the Carpet for BMW at Conway Farms



Luke Cella, MAGCS

PHOTOS: LUKE CELLA

Congratulations to Chad Ball, CGCS and Connor Healy, Assistant Superintendent, and the rest of the staff at Conway Farms for hosting and holding the BMW Championship this past September.

Thank you for keeping Chicago golf at the top – the course was immaculate and a huge success.

I was able to catch up with Chad and Connor shortly after hosting the BMW Championship and asked them a few questions.

Did you change any of your maintenance practices to prepare for the event? “Not much, we keep our golf course in pretty good shape every day, so the daily routines really didn’t change all that much. It gave us a chance to get things dialed in a little bit, to drive things down for the event and give the staff a little extra focus. We like to keep the course playable, not too tough and that was the same for the tournament. Golf is a spectator sport, people like to see good golf.” Chad told me.

The PGA Tour wants to make the best players in the world shine, and that they did. I asked Chad what he thought of Furyk’s 59 and he responded, “I think it was great, no one can buy that kind of recognition. There’ve only been six (59s), and it was mentioned on every major news report around the world and Conway Farms was in the same sentence each time.” Chad went on to explain, “it was all Furyk – the next score was a 65 and the overall scoring average that day was over par.” It certainly was Furyk’s day.

Other than the rain on Sunday, I asked Chad what was



*Chad Ball and Paul Vermeulen on Thursday morning of tournament week enjoy a moment of downtime as the players take the course.*

the biggest challenge he faced with the tournament. He explained it was dealing with the build (tents, trucks, media towers, etc.) out and now the clean up they were going through. He explained, “we were wrapping up some projects this spring and we had a lot of play this summer.” He told me the easiest days he’s had the past few months were actually the tournament days – they were much simpler once everything was in place and we only had to take care



of course set up. “Once the Pros were out playing, there was not much to do, just enjoy what everyone accomplished,” Chad told me.

Though there is no contract in place for the 2015 BMW Championship, Chad implied it would be a little bit easier to host if it happened again. Most of the infrastructure they had to add for this year’s event would already be in place, and once you’ve experienced something, the second time is always a little easier.

Chad expressed his thanks to all the staff at Conway, his assistant Connor, and all the volunteers and the sponsors that took care of the hospitality during the week. He was humbled by their willingness to step in and lend a hand throughout the whole event.

**Chad Ball, CGCS Life Experience:**

- Superintendent Meadowbrook Golf Club (Racine, WI), 8 Years
- Superintendent North Hills Country Club, (Menomonee Falls, WI) 5 Years
- Superintendent Conway Farms, 19 Years
- Certified with GCSAA Since 1987
- Michigan State Graduate 1982

Chad’s mentors are other supers that he’s worked with, Wayne Otto, CGCS, Ed Fischer, CGCS, Skip Wilms, Tim Davis and Wally Fuchs. One piece of advice to those starting out in the business: “Work hard, work smart and don’t worry about the money, with success the money will follow.”

Chad is a founding member of the Wee One Foundation, when asked what that meant to him, he explained, “it is great to be a part of something and it is very gratifying to be a part of, to be able to help others in need. It is something







that Wayne (Otto) would be so proud of, he was so passionate about this business and the people in it, it is a great extension of those principles.”

I was also able to catch up with Connor Healy, Assistant Superintendent of Conway Farms.

What did you think the moment that you realized Conway Farms might be hosting the BMW Championship?

“I remember thinking that it would be really interesting to see how the golf course would hold up against the top 70 golfers in the world. I was interested in how they would play a few of our golf holes, we’ve reworked some of the holes and I thought it would make a good venue for an event.”

Conway Farms is an old-fashioned golfing membership club. They take pride in having no tee times, they believe in walking, and playing quickly, and enjoying the fellowship of golf and all its traditions. The course opened for play in 1991, a Tom Fazio links style design on 209 acres of land that was purchased in 1956 with the intent of building a first rank golf club along Conway Road.

From Connor’s perspective the event went really well. He knew there would be a learning curve associated with all the

parties involved with the event, the Western Golf Association, PGA, BMW and of course, Conway Farms. He was happy to be a part of it from the start.

We talked a little about the rain on Sunday, the only hiccup in the event. Connor was very grateful for all the volunteer support that day, at one point he wished he had a few more squeegees for all the available hands, but at the end of the day it wouldn’t have made a difference. “Sunday was an awful day to work outside, but all the volunteers did everything and beyond to keep the course as playable for as long as possible. All of them worked 13 to 14 hour shifts without a break and that says a lot. The Tour wanted to keep trying to get as much of the golf in as possible and we did everything to accommodate them.” Connor was very appreciative of the efforts of the staff and all the volunteers.

There’s so much that goes into a scheduled event, it makes sense to try and complete it if it is possible.

For Connor it was a good experience, “it took a lot of work, but it was good opportunity to try something new at Conway.” Connor has been Chad’s Assistant for ten years and hosting the BMW created some new challenges and offered new opportunities that normally Connor would not have been privy to. “I’ve been here a long time and I was able to get involved in a few aspects at the club that normally not involved with.” Connor told me, “I really liked tournament preparation, it is very exciting to be a part of.”

#### Connor Healy: Life Experience

- Assistant Superintendent Conway Farms last ten years,
- Assistant Superintendent at Olympia Fields Country Club for two years (US Open)
- Experience at BelAir Country Club and Old Elm Club

Connor received his undergraduate horticulture degree from U of I and his MBA from DePaul. He lives in Chicago with his wife Jill and their two children Kaelyn (3) and Emmett (2). @



*I followed Furyk on Thursday for nine holes, he hit the ball well, but who knew the day to follow him would be Friday when he carded his historic 59.*





Chad didn't assign (Above L) Tim Davis and Ed Fischer, CGCS morning tasks – he was just happy they could find their way back to the turf care center each day. (Above R) Scott Vincent hones his supervisory skillset with Troy Tietjens in the foreground.



(Left) Dan Marco, CGCS caught mowing the fairway with a death grip on his machine, and Randy Lusher practicing the Scott Vincent management philosophy. (R) Dave Radaj, CGCS celebrates a missed putt while waiting for the PGA Tour officials to help him pick hole locations.



(Above L) Jeff Frenz, CGCS, enough said. (Above R) Darrick Robbins set pins on the other nine and guarded the flagsticks from anyone who might be thinking about touching them. (Below L) Dr. Nangle posting something while Paul Bastron, CGCS explains the finer art of volunteerism. (Below R) another wanting to stay anonymous superintendent volunteer with a death grip on a triplex...leaning to keeping it straight.

