

# Working On The Fifth Major

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*Nicklaus takes aim.*



*Crews start at daybreak as fishermen try their luck.*

**A**S a golf course superintendent and reporter for *The Florida Green*, I had the opportunity to cover a major P.G.A. golf event in March of this year. As I put on my T.P.C. media badge and loaded my 35mm and the minicam, I was proud to be a part of this event known as the fifth major, the Tournament of Champions.

As I followed the entrance pathways to the events gates, it was a walk down memory lane for me. I remember in years past when volunteering with the North Florida Golf Course Superintendents Chapter, we had prepared these areas for the spectators entering the T.P.C. tournament. The rustic fencing guiding the crowds through the Florida marsh lands to the T.P.C. stadium club was still stand-

ing proudly. I could smell the pine straw lining the edges of the pathways and scattered throughout the spectator areas and flower beds.

As I remembered our involvement in these areas, my camera lens was focusing on the most well known par 3 hole on the P.G.A. tour, number 17 island green at T.P.C. Sawgrass.

As the Shark (Greg Norman) takes his shot at the island green, the ball hit the green surface and backed up. My camera was clicking, the crowd applauded and the Shark moved toward the island of grass surrounded by the moat of water. There would be no confrontation between Shark and an alligator this year. The alligators that had watched along with the spectators on the 17th green had been

removed this year for the safety of the fans and golfers alike.

Alligator removal is just one of the many preparations that are part of this major event. Working with the Florida fish and game department for the proper handling of these Florida species is the law and must be handled through these agencies.

Mr. Fred Klauk, C.G.C.S., is the superintendent for the T.P.C. at Sawgrass. As Fred was responsible for the course preparations for the tournament, I asked if he would afford me an interview. The following is an interview between myself, the media superintendent, and Fred, the course superintendent.

**Don:** How far in advance do you start



*No. 17, the most feared Par 3 on the tour.*

special grounds preparation for the championship?

**Fred:** We start several months ahead in the planning but the actual ground work starts four to five weeks in advance.

**Don:** Do you work directly with the P.G.A. in setting of tees and cups

placements?

**Fred:** Cup placement schedules are set by the P.G.A. staff. My assistants Tim Webb and Bob Clarkson supervise the setting of the tees and cups.

**Don:** I noticed while filming the practice rounds that your staff was moving some netting on the teeing areas.

What was that for?

**Fred:** The netting is put into place to protect our par three's and short par four's teeing areas one month in advance to ensure well maintained turf and level teeing areas during the tournament.

**Don:** What type of greens mowers do you use and what is the height of the cut?

**Fred:** Don, we use walking greens mowers set at one-eighth of an inch to mow our bentgrass greens. During the tournament our greens will stimp at around nine feet.

**Don:** Your greens are excellent for the championship this year. What is part of your successful bentgrass greens program?

**Fred:** I use proper turf cultural practices that include timely aerifications and a proper fertilization program to ensure healthy, strong turf grass.

**Don:** I have heard that the infamous #17 green seems to be a bit easier (when the wind isn't a factor) for the pros. Have you heard of any changes there?

## ONE MAN DRESSING OPERATION



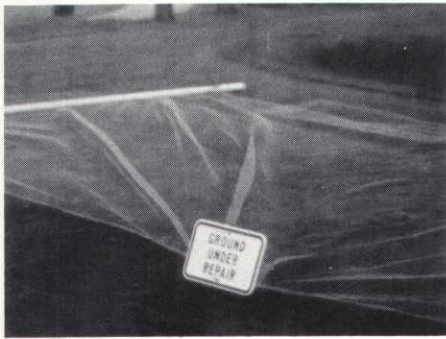
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Netting is put across rear tees to protect them for the tournament.

**Fred:** No, the better turf on the greens are letting the balls hold better. This will let you hit to the spot on the green you want and your ball will work better for you.

**Don:** When the tournament was called because of lightning and rain, who makes the decision to stop play and resume play again?

**Fred:** The P.G.A. rules committee makes the ruling to stop and start the play. During the tournament delay the rules committee stays in constant contact with me as to the condition of the course and we make the decision to cancel or resume play.

**Don:** Do you have a good weather service?

**Fred:** During our tournament I stay in constant communications with the National Weather Service at the Florida Mayport Naval Air Station.

**Don:** Having your course so close to the ocean, is there any resource you can utilize?

**Fred:** We use the natural coquina from St. Augustine in some of our bunkers.

**Don:** Are there any special maintenance practices you use on the palm trees in Florida?

**Fred:** We do special trimming for the protection of the spectators.

**Don:** Do you feel the communications between you and the P.G.A. tournament chairmen are satisfactory?

**Fred:** Yes, communications before and during a major tournament are very important and we have worked well together.

**Don:** What special help is your assistant to you during this event?

**Fred:** I assign the front nine to one assistant and the back nine to the other. Tim and Bob take full charge of their



Fred and crew — pride is a job well done.

respective nine and have done an excellent job. We could not make it work without the outstanding job all of my grounds staff have done this year. I want to make sure to thank them all.

**Don:** When I was taking pictures of the course in the evening I saw spot lights coming down the fairways as I was interviewing a few of the pros on the 18th green. Is this when you perform your maintenance during this tournament?

**Fred:** As the last foursome tees off we wait until they are two or three fairways ahead then we start to prepare the course for the next round, working well into the night.

**Don:** Thanks, Fred, for taking your time

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to talk with me and sharing your thoughts and insights on preparing your course for the Tournament of Champions, and I would like to congratulate you and your staff for having the course in such condition that the professional golfer and media alike consider this Tournament of Champions at Sawgrass the 5th major.

The opinion of the players was unanimously that the course was in excellent playing condition. Commentator Lee Trevino stated that the course had matured into the best condition he has seen.

Even though the course was in outstanding shape there were certain areas that the superintendent could not help, as Haas, Strange and Love discovered. P.G.A. pro Curtis Strange had signed his scorecard, which wasn't correct, for the opening round, resulting in disqualification. Love's disqualification came as a result of using a bent putter, the same error Haas made earlier. Ethics remain high in our profession, as these P.G.A. pros acknowledged they had made mistakes and brought them before the tournament committee.

As play continued, defending champions kept falling on the challenging sta-

dium course. First Jack Nicklaus, then Tom Watson, Steve Ballesteros, Lyle, and on . . .

As the wind picked up the players dug in, with Payne Stewart leading 71-65-136. Mark McCumber 65-72-137, hometown boy on Stewarts' heels. The rest of the pros, Don Pohl, 2 strokes away, Curt Byrum, 3 strokes out, Calvin Peete, past T.P.C. champion chasing the leaders at 3 back, and the Shark, Norman, lurking at just four out. Any one of these champions could jump from the pack, but as the pros have stated, course greens are putting excellently. However, the course can become Mother Nature's own with her swirling and gusting winds off the coastal waters of Florida.

The winds can make a difference of 15-25 yards off the tee, and on the 17th at the T.P.C., this can mean wet or dry. The birdies and pars started dropping to bogies and double bogies, then quadruples. I don't think the 17th has to be changed by man; Mother Nature does a good job all by herself. After She cooled everyone off on Saturday with heavy rains and winds, She displayed Her beauty again on Sunday.

As the pros took to the links for the last

round, Mark McCumber said it takes patience and well executed shots to play the stadium course. Well, Mark's professional golf style and play paid off. As the tournament came to a close, Mark walked off the 18th green showing he is a true Tournament of Champions Champion.

**The superintendents of the North Florida Golf Course Superintendents Chapter congratulate Mark on his victory over the champions.**

**We would also like to commend Fred Klauk, C.G.C.S., and his staff at the Tournament of Players Club at Sawgrass 1988.**

This type of sporting event can only be provided by a complete and professional organization working side by side with professionals of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and our local North Florida Golf Course Superintendents Chapter and the Professional Golfers Association of America. We will provide superb events of this magnitude throughout the golf industry. ■

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