

McBride keeps Muirfield tourney-ready all year

By Peter Blais

Professional tournaments are fine. But a course shouldn't be graded simply on how it looks the one week a year when the Greg Normans and Nick Faldos come calling, according to Muirfield Village Golf Club superintendent Mike McBride.

(See related story on best-conditioned course — page 1)

"We try to peak the course for the Memorial Tournament in May," said McBride of his Dublin, Ohio, facility. "Then we try to maintain it at that level the rest of the year."

After all, that's what McBride would want if he were a local golfer. And he is.

"I try to play the golf course as often as possible. That's how you get the best perspective on maintenance. If you understand the game you get a better idea about playability. That way you can make sure the course is in the best shape as often as possible."

McBride, 36, started playing golf in nearby Worthington at age 11. He carried a 4-handicap while playing on his high school team.

He went on to Bowling Green State University, playing intramurals and local tournaments while pursuing a political science degree. But the seeds of his future profession were being sowed not in the classroom, but back home at Muirfield.

"I worked summers there when it was

being built in 1973 and 1974," McBride remembered. "That's where my interest in construction and maintenance started."

"I gave half serious thought to changing my major and going to a turf school like Ohio State or Michigan State. But I was so far along, I decided to see it through."

After graduation, McBride had several jobs, including selling pet products and marketing computer systems.

"But I decided that's not what I really wanted," he said. "I enjoyed my two summers at Muirfield. I decided to get back in the golf industry, somehow. I was married and it meant starting all over. But I wanted it."

"So I called Ed Etchells (Muirfield superintendent at the time and currently with Jack Nicklaus' architectural business). He recommended I come back to Muirfield."

Which is what he did. Starting as a seasonal laborer in the summer of 1982, he was offered a full-time position that fall. McBride made a commitment "to learn as much as I could." Management noticed and sent him to the Cook College two-year winter turf program in Rutgers, N.J.

McBride graduated in 1984 and was promoted to one of the two assistant superintendent posts. A year later he was made head superintendent.

As superintendent, a major responsibility



M. McBride

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is helping the television crews set up to cover the Memorial.

The installation of underground television cables over the past 15 years — Muirfield is one of the few courses nationally with such a system — keeps unsightly above-ground cables to a minimum.

Muirfield also provides its own camera towers, making scaffolding unnecessary. The 80 acres devoted to parking space during tournament week also falls under his surveillance.

"Basically, anything that comes on or near the course must come through me first," McBride said. "We try to minimize the amount of inconvenience for everyone — players, spectators, workers."

As for the course itself, tees, greens and fairways are planted in bentgrass with bluegrass and fine fescues in the fairways. All thrive in the Midwest climate and came through last December's record-breaking cold in fine shape thanks, in part, to an early

snow cover that helped insulate the turf, McBride said.

"In fact, we opened earlier than ever before last spring," he added.

McBride said his major maintenance headache involves some of the steep-faced bunkers that are susceptible to wash-out during heavy rains.

"Keeping clay out of the bunkers so they all play consistently is a continuous maintenance problem," McBride said.

McBride said he tries to keep abreast of environmental issues that are plaguing many new and existing courses. He keeps up-to-date records of chemical and petroleum use. Muirfield's underground storage tanks were recently inspected. Drainage studies are being conducted to avoid future problems.

"We try to keep up and anticipate where we'll be five to 10 years from now," McBride said.

McBride said he has no plans to leave Muirfield, especially with a new maintenance building and some modifications to the bunkers on the immediate horizon.

"I'm excited about what's going to be happening here over the next few years," he said.

When he's not at the course, McBride likes to jog and work out. He and his wife, Linda, who is in the antique business, collect antiques and wine. They're also busy raising 15-month-old daughter Kelsey.

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