

# An odyssey: groundskeeper to pro to Tour official

*Mickey Bradley has braved hurricanes and other storms in two job conversions*

By Vern Putney

Joyce Kilmer wrote, "Only God can make a tree."

With one furious sweep, Hurricane Camille in August 1969 destroyed 1,375 trees at the Biloxi, Miss., Broadwater Beach Hotel and Golf Club complex where Mickey Bradley was assistant professional and changed his career direction.

The 36 holes and par-3 lighted nine-hole course were closed. On the heels of that disaster, Bradley was given the task of counting and removing tree stumps at \$2.75 a stump.

During that heart-breaking job, Bradley became friendly with course superintendent Bert Newman and received a fresh perspective on course preservation and maintenance. He discovered he preferred outdoor work to the sometimes-confining pro shop.

He began by cutting greens, then branched into course maintenance.

Complete conversion to course care wasn't immediate. When the course was restored, Bradley returned to the pro shop.

In 1972, he became head pro at a nine-hole layout in Ittabena, Miss. There, a farmer, one helper and Bradley handled maintenance with one walk-behind grass mower. Bradley was on the course at dawn to mow the greens, then opened the pro shop.

Fortunately, no travel time was wasted. Bradley lived in a trailer on the course.

A crop-dusting airplane was used to fertilize the course. It and the pilot lacked Stealth fighter accu-

racy. Anything not covered, including the swimming pool and clubhouse, was saturated.

Bradley in 1974 became pro-course super at Ellendale Country Club in Houma, La. During his five-year stint, Golf Digest ranked Ellendale one of the top five courses in the state.

Bradley's bent to the course superintendent field continued strong. He next became superintendent at Sherwood Forest in Baton Rouge, La., and earned his certified golf course superintendent degree that same year, 1980.

Bradley switched to Hickory Hill Country Club in Gautier, Miss., in 1983.

In October 1989, he was hired by the PGA Tour to direct the Ben Hogan tournaments. Tour officials were seeking a person who could communicate with superintendents, one with combined pro and super knowledge. Bradley fit the bill.

It's been a wonderful experience, dealing with all facets of the game, and Bradley feels fortunate to be in such a unique position.

He communicates well with superintendents and pros, though he wasn't wishing the best of luck to Woodlands Country Club host pro Chris McClure on the last of a nine-hole team scramble match at a Tour stop in Falmouth, Maine. Bradley, McClure, tour agronomist Jeff Healey and 45-year Tour pro Fred Haas cased the course with keen eyes to tourney stake placement.

After Haas dunked a chip shot for what seemed a match-winning birdie, McClure canned a tricky 15-



Photo by Dr. Carman Pettapiece

Mickey Bradley at a Hogan Tour stop at The Woodlands in Falmouth, Maine.

*Bradley's itinerary is a heavy one: 32 weeks a year and 22 tournament stops. But it's a long way from removing tree stumps at \$2.75 apiece.*

foot downhill to gain a deadlock. Both teams had two-under-par 34s.

Woodlands, now in its third season, was the toughest of 30 Hogan tracks last year. Only winner Brandel Chamblee broke par, by one stroke. Bradley was called upon for 60 rulings. This year, there were half such knotty questions.

Improved conditions, especially cleared rough, propelled several into red numbers. New course superintendent Jeff Smith had followed up neatly on the two-year spadework of Ken Flisek.

Because of uncertain course situations last year, Bradley was required to be at 28 of 30 tour stops

from a week to a few days in advance. This year, only 22 sites will be visited early.

Other PGA officials usually arrive before tourney time. Bradley considers huddles with them on course setups most informative.

There is a downside to such extensive travel. He's away from home 32 weeks annually. He treasures time spent with wife Julie and daughter Micha, 1.

The Bradleys reside in a home on Gulf Hills Course in Ocean Spring, Miss. Bradley first caddied there at age 15, using near-scratch golfer-father Donald's and grandfather Norm Blessey's clubs.

There have been some scary as well as light moments in Bradley's testing job.

Last year at the Country Club of Louisiana in Baton Rouge, a water moccasin snake held sway over the 9th fairway.

Course superintendent Tolby Strahn appeared to have dispatched the menacing creature with a powerful swing of the stimp meter.

Its stimp measure was 4-1/2 feet, according to Bradley. The snake was lugged to the maintenance building, where it revived and began crawling around, cleaning out the building in a hurry.

Tourney officials try to maintain green speed the same for tournaments as for practice rounds. The 9.5 at Woodlands was considered a good, fair speed.

PGA Class A member Bradley's baptism as a rulesmith came during his tour debut at Bakersfield (Calif.) Country Club. Pea-sized hail rained down during the first round.

Bradley was flooded with player inquiries. "Can I move the ball on the putting green?"

Bradley shot back, "Hail, Yes!"

## This list made a difference

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associated with any misuse.

6. Continuity of Club Officials (5). An important issue that is unmanageable. The constant changing of club officials creates a climate of uncertainty in the superintendent's mind. Lack of short and long-term goals impede the progress of the golf course maintenance program. At times, new club officials have conflicting management priorities, causing disruptive shifts in maintenance strategies.

"Nobody asked, but..." Five year terms for club officials would anchor a sound maintenance program.

7. Equipment (10). It isn't a compliment to our industry to hear that we have to scrounge for workable equipment. When maintenance goals are established, buy the equipment to support those goals.

Too often we "put the cart before the horse" or, in our case, "playability before the equipment."

8. Pesticide Storage and Maintenance Buildings (6). A serious problem for the superintendent burdened with inadequate structures to store pesticides and equipment that fail to meet minimum standards.

Pesticide storage and disposal are regulated fiercely at all levels of government. But these new structures are costly to build and maintain, forcing golf courses to delay construction.

9. Amount of Play (8). Secretly, most superintendents would like to have the course all to themselves, with no play. But we know we must share this beautiful creation with the golfers if we are to continue working. But give us adequate time to insure the golf course is properly maintained.

When cultural practices are missed or delayed, quality is diminished. Blocking sections of time each week or month during the season is critical to survival of the golf course.

10. Tree Management (7). I don't

see this as a top ten problem. Cutting down trees is an environmental issue in most jurisdictions.

As in any listing, nominees left off deserve recognition. The problems that didn't make the top ten include: superintendents unable to read soil tests (it takes a degree in agronomy), poor record keeping (can assistants type), inappropriately-timed maintenance (did you aerify before a member-guest), and taking advice from the wrong people (think about it).

My perspective has changed since I read the article in "Golf Course News."

In the process of preparing this column I began to understand the USGA agronomists' viewpoint, and I am aware of the weak points in my own programs.

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## Rushing to judgment can cause a major crime

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a false conclusion. It made an assumption that violates a fundamental rule in toxicology: The dose makes the poison.

He now agrees with Bruce Ames, head of the University of California Biochemistry Department, who contends that animal tests are fundamentally flawed because the maximum tolerated doses of the chemicals being treated kill cells due to sheer size of the dosage.

"If dioxin is a human carcinogen, it is a rather weak one in the population exposed to high doses ... and is not a carcinogen in the population exposed to lower doses," Houk says.

It's a sham and it's a shame ... but this sort of thing happens too often.

I received a press release awhile ago from a prominent university announcing plans to study pesticide runoff from golf course greens. It contained a headline—itsself unique to press releases—that read: "Pesticide runoff from golf greens may be dangerous." Enough to

scare the most secure reader.

The third paragraph into the story, however, says: "Scientists do not know whether pesticides are present in the runoff from greens or whether pesticides in the runoff pose any risks."

Responsibility for this sort of mistake must start somewhere. Let it start with the individual.

Let's avoid snap judgments. Before acting, let's not just seek but find answers. Let's think before we speak. And let's ponder the consequences of our actions before taking one tiny step.

## Int'l division formed

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has formed a new department to develop and implement programs for its 734 international members.

Tom Akins, GCSAA director of planning, will head the department and assume the new title of director of planning and international programs.