



The PGA Tour comes to Brown Deer GC for the Greater Milwaukee Open this month.

Muni conditions come of age

By JOHN MIELKE

MILWAUKEE — Busting free from its stigma as a lesser golfing product, the municipal golf course is making a name for itself in lofty circles these days.

Most visible are four city- and county-owned courses that play host to PGA Tour events. Brown Deer Golf Course — a public

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track owned and operated by Milwaukee County — is the latest municipal to join the Tour ranks. It's the new site of the Great Milwaukee Open, a PGA Tour event scheduled for Aug. 29 through Sept. 4.

It's a growing trend. The Phoenix Open is played at the city-owned TPC of Scottsdale; the Buick Invitational of California is played at one of the nation's great munis, Torrey Pines in San Diego; and the B.C. Open is played at En-Joie Golf

Course in Endicott, N.Y.

The standard of conditioning and design at these four courses is testimony to the power of public-access golf in the nation today. "Municipal golf" used to be synonymous with phrases like "dirt track" or "cow pasture." But the rising tide of public-access golf — 80 percent of all courses developed during the past five years are open to the public — has lifted all boats.

City-owned golf facilities make money. They make more money and compete more effectively when conditions stack up with nearby upscale daily-fee courses.

Brown Deer superintendent Gene Milota, CGCS, has given golfers in and around Milwaukee the opportunity to play a PGA course under tourney conditions.

Since Brown Deer opened for public play June 24 — after a three-month respite this spring, following last year's renovation — Milota and his crew have had the course set up as it will be for the Tour: Fairways cut at 3/8ths of an inch with Jacobsen LF-100 lightweight fairway mowers; intermediate rough at 1-1/4 inches with Tri-King triplex mowers; and the rough at 3-1/2 inches with out-front rotary Turfcats. The rough will be cut one week before the tournament begins, then allowed to grow to 4 to 5 inches, the height specified by the PGA Tour.

Another slight difference: The public is putting on somewhat slower greens. Milota has left the height of cut at 5/32nds of an inch, allowing some of the newly constructed greens to mature. Come tourney time, the cut will be lowered to 1/8th of an inch, "or less," said Milota, to reach a green speed of 10 to 12 on the Stimpmeter.

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Just after Brown Deer opened for public play in late June, Milota was out surveying the course.

On the 4th hole — a 475-yard par-5 that Milota said is a birdie hole, even for regular golfers — a man waiting to tee off addressed the superintendent.

"How are you guys going to trick this course up for the pros — you know, make it harder?" he asked.

Milota told him the course was already set up the way it would be for the Greater Milwaukee Open.

"Aren't you gonna narrow the fairways?" the golfer persisted.

Milota explained that he couldn't narrow the bentgrass fairways. In fact, he added, the fairways on 16 and 18 had been widened.

The more generous fairway near the green on 18 — a 576-yard, par-5 — was suggested by two-time U.S. Open champion Andy North, who has helped with subtle changes in course design. The wider approach should entice the pros to go for the green with their second shot, North reasoned.



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