

Tour of Duty

PHIL OWEN

Warwick Hills Golf & Country Club
Grand Blanc, Mich.
Buick Open
Aug. 4-7, CBS

Phil Owen, 39, is one of those when-life-hands-you-a-lemon-make-lemonade kind of guys. Laid off from his high school teaching job in the late-1970s because of budget cuts, the Spring Arbor College biology major took a job as assistant superintendent at Goodrich Country Club. He had just been appointed head superintendent at The Southmoor Golf Course in Burton two years later when the school offered him his old job back. Owen weighed his choices for several seconds before deciding to stay with golf. "I just didn't enjoy teaching as much as I did course management," he remembered. "But my teaching skills helped. Being a superintendent or a teacher is basically people management." Owen became assistant superintendent at Warwick Hills in 1988 and was named head superintendent three years ago.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR: The biggest change is the 13th hole. An additional tee has lengthened a short 490-yard, par-5 to a more challenging 535 yards. A pond that formerly lurked yards in front of the green has been enlarged. A new green was built so that the water now laps up against the putting surface.

"You still have a bail-out area to the left," Jackson said. "But you'll end up in the pond if you're short of the green or to the right. The pros will probably still go for it in two. But it will take a 2- or 3-iron and be much more challenging." Warwick Hills is also known for its large tee areas, occasionally measuring over 100 yards in length.

MADE-FOR-TV PREPARATIONS: "A lot of praying," answered Owen when asked what he does to prepare for the tournament. "You just hope that the weather cooperates. Most of the things we do are crowd-control rather than course related. We do a lot of fencing and roping to make sure spectators go where they are supposed to. We mow tees and fairways daily rather than every other day. And we roll the greens, which we don't normally do."

MARK JACKSON

Indianwood Golf Club
Lake Orion, Mich.
U.S. Women's Open
July 21-24, ABC

This is the third U.S. Open for Mark Jackson. The 39-year-old was the assistant superintendent at nearby Oakland Hills Country Club when Andy North won the 1985 men's event. Betsy King took the women's tourney held at Indianwood in 1989, two years after Jackson came to the Lake Orion club. During high school, Jackson worked on the grounds crew summers at Twin Beach CC in West Bloomfield. He graduated from Michigan State University in 1977 with an associate's degree in turfgrass management and a bachelor's degree in crop and soil science. He spent four years as head superintendent at Brookwood CC in Rochester and three years as a self-employed landscape contractor before the chance to work his first U.S. Open lured him back to course management at Oakland Hills in 1985.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR: Indianwood's most striking feature, Jackson said, is the tall fescue dominating the rough. The golden brown grass grows as high as 2 feet and provides a channel through which the dark green fairways flow. Some of the 162 bunkers require golfers to use ladders and take Jackson's crew many hours a week to maintain. The 18th hole alone has 31 bunkers and the state's largest green at 22,000 square feet. "It isn't unusual to be left with a 150-foot putt," Jackson noted.

MADE-FOR-TV PREPARATIONS: The major preparation was done last fall. Steep banks and any other potential problem areas were sodded. "The goal is not to have to use any white paint come tournament time," Jackson said. "Otherwise, we don't do any additional things. We just do them more intensely."

STEVEN RENZETTI

Wykagyl Country Club
New Rochelle, N.Y.
LPGA JAL Big Apple Classic
July 14-17, Prime/NBC

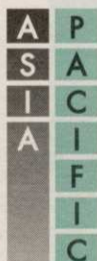
Steven Renzetti, 29, credits his grandfather with setting him on the road toward a superintendent career. The elder Renzetti was a head pro at several New York courses. At age 82 he was honored by then-President Ronald Reagan as the oldest active golf professional in the country while closing out his career at Dellwood Country Club. "He encouraged me to become a superintendent," the Wykagyl course manager said. "He thought it was a more versatile position than head pro because you got to work with Mother Nature rather than giving the same lessons day after day." The younger Renzetti took his grandfather's advice to the University of Rhode Island, where he earned a bachelor's degree in turfgrass management in 1987. He interned and was assistant superintendent for two years at Quaker Ridge CC in Scarsdale, N.Y., under Tony Savone. Renzetti spent three years as course manager at Burning Tree CC in Greenwich, Conn., before coming to Wykagyl.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR: The contrast between the lush, 3-inch rye and bluegrass rough butting up against the close-cropped bentgrass fairways is the most notable feature, Renzetti said. The fairways have turned the corner and are now more bentgrass than poa, he added. The natural setting is enhanced by numerous rock outcroppings that require vast amounts of handwork to keep trimmed. "The women have voted it their favorite course on the Tour," Renzetti said. "The architect [Lawrence Van Etten with refinements by Donald Ross and A.W. Tillinghast] used the natural terrain and did little earthmoving. The players say it's the toughest course they play."

MADE-FOR-TV PREPARATIONS: Trees, many of the spectacular variety, are abundant at Wykagyl. With the removal of Winged Foot's famous 10th-hole Dutch elm, Met Golfer magazine recently voted the 300-year-old oak on Wykagyl's 17th hole the most strategic in the metropolitan area. "We've worked with the television people to prune trees to get the best camera angles," Renzetti said. The course will be coated with four ounces of iron per 1,000 square feet for the greening effect. Beginning a week before the tournament, greens are double cut mornings and double cut and rolled at night.

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