

# Tour advance men push for perfection, tempered with reason

Allan MacCurrach is the senior agronomist for the PGA, Senior PGA and Nike tours. The GCSAA's Distinguished Service Award winner in 1994, he was a superintendent for 12 years before joining the Tour. Terry Buchen, the Savvy Super, recently caught up with one of golf's most influential agronomists. MacCurrach, Dennis Leger and Jeff Haley help superintendents, sponsors and club officials prepare their courses for events on all three tours.



Allan MacCurrach

what can and can not be done in a given situation. It would be wonderful if all tour sites had seven-figure budgets and all events nationwide were played at the ideal time for turfgrass growth. This is not always the case and our experience as superintendents gives us credibility with the players, press and sponsors.

**Terry Buchen:** What are your responsibilities as senior agronomist?

**Allan MacCurrach:** The agronomy staff's main function is to visit all Tour sites well in advance of tournament week. During these visits we review with the golf course superintendent, sponsors and club officials the course preparation program for the upcoming event. In addition to visiting scheduled tournament sites, we are involved in selecting future sites, assisting in tournament scheduling, grass selection for new TPC [Tournament Players Clubs] courses, visits to TPCs, and occasional special assignments.

**TB:** How far in advance do you go to a tournament venue, and how many follow-up visits do you usually accomplish?

**AM:** Many of our tournament sites, especially on the PGA Tour, have hosted events for a number of years. These courses — unless unusual circumstances such as winter damage, course changes, etc. — only require one visit, usually six to eight weeks before the tournament. There is, however, considerable communication by telephone. Both the Senior PGA Tour and the Nike Tour, being relatively new, usually require more visits to allow more time for any adjustments, such as fairway width, green speed, rough height, etc., to be agreed upon and to take place.

**TB:** How do you split up the travel and responsibilities among you, Dennis Leger and Jeff Haley?

**AM:** Travel is assigned geographically. No one is assigned solely the PGA Tour, Senior PGA Tour or Nike Tour. A good example why is the fact that, within 100 miles of Atlanta, we play events on all three tours. It is much more efficient for one person to handle all these courses.

**TB:** Describe your working relationship with golf course superintendents. Has it helped your job being a former superintendent?

**AM:** We have all been superintendents. I feel this is extremely important. It not only gives us instant rapport with the host superintendent, but provides us with a realistic view of

## SAVVY SUPERINTENDENT



**TB:** How have your tournament specifications changed over the years?

**AM:** The term "specifications" is misleading, as it suggests that we have a standard for green speed, rough height, fairway width, etc. This is not the situation at all. What does take place is that each superintendent is given a set of

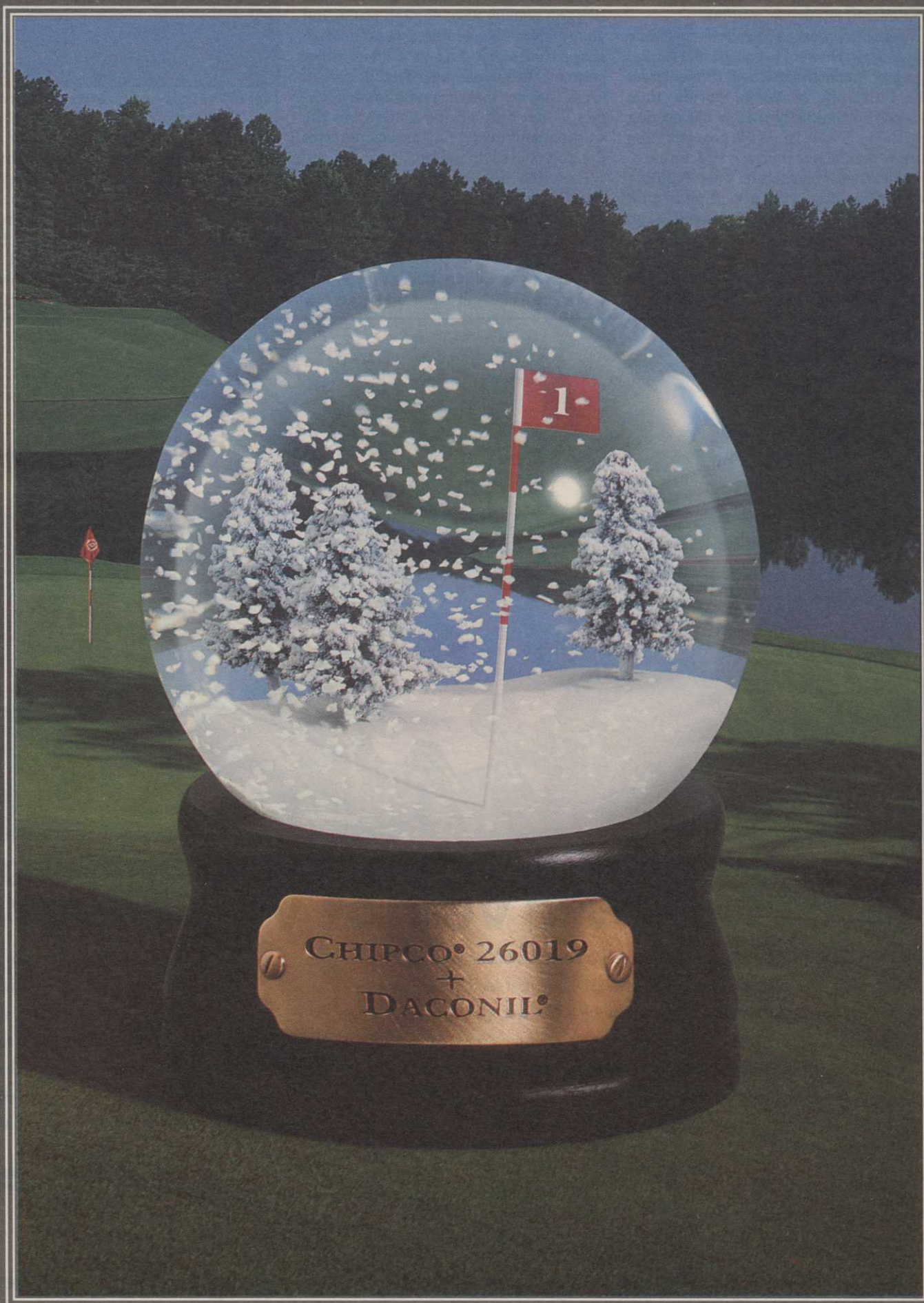
guidelines that cover the general tournament procedures. The specifics, green speed and all, are based on previous experience with that course. For example a course with small undulating greens should not have ultra-fast surfaces. Green speed influences hole locations. Ultra-fast surfaces on small greens could make a good corner hole location unfair. Usually green speed ranges from 10 feet on small greens to 11-1/2 feet on courses with larger, flatter surfaces. The superinten-

dent is asked to have a certain green speed in place one week prior to tournament week. At that time a rules official will arrive on site, and any changes in speed can be made to coincide with his proposed course set-up for the tournament.

**TB:** Tell us about your bunker maintenance philosophy and how it has changed over the past three decades.

**AM:** As in the case of greens, tees, fairways and rough areas,

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## Florida superintendents elect officers of chapters

New officers have been elected by Florida's chapters. They are:

**Central Florida GCSA:** President Kevin Rotti, Vice President Geoff Coggan, Ext Vice President Joe Ondo, Secretary/Treasurer Brian Jenkins.

**Everglades GCSA:** President Dale Walters, Vice President Terry Wood, Ext Vice President Mike Mongoven, Secretary/Treasurer Mike Mongoven.

**North Florida GCSA:** President, Kim Shine, Vice President Bill Plante, Ext Vice president Bill Plante, Secretary/Treasurer David Amirault.

**Palm Beach GCSA:** President Robin Goodell, Vice President Jeff Klontz, Ext Vice President Chip Fowkes, Secretary Joe Hubbard, Treasurer Karl Schmidt.

**Ridge GCSA:** President Alan Puckett, Vice President Roy Wilshire, Ext Vice President Alan Puckett, Secretary/Treasurer Ray Cuzzone.

**Seven Rivers GCSA:** President David Hoggard, Vice President Michael Swinson, Ext Vice President Paul Illgen, Secretary/Treasurer Stuart Bozeman.

**South Florida GCSA:** President Dale Kuehner, Vice President Mark Richard,

Ext Vice President Mark Richard, Secretary/Treasurer Kelly Cragin.

**Suncoast GCSA:** President Troy Futch, Vice President Troy Smith, Ext Vice President Tom Crawford, Secretary/Treasurer Tom Hilferty.

**Treasure Coast GCSA:** President Dick Gray, Vice President Bill Lanthier, Ext Vice President Bill Lanthier, Secretary/Treasurer Craig Weyandt.

**West Coast GCSA:** President Kirk Sowens, Vice President Garth Boline, Ext Vice President Garth Boline, Secretary/Treasurer Steve Cellucci.

## Savvy MacCurrach

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the demand for perfect bunker conditions is also a goal of tournament preparation. I personally compare this to situations I faced as a golf course superintendent and know this takes place very often in the superintendents' profession. I, or a superintendent at his club, may not agree with certain philosophies we are charged with, but we must seek ways and do our best to carry out what is demanded of us. Should bunkers be maintained to a degree that each plays exactly the same, with good, firm sand that prevents buried lies? Should bunkers be constructed so that balls collect in the middle eliminating awkward stances? Should expensive sand be shipped hundreds of miles, or local sand treated with tennis court material to improve the playability of a hazard be used? Is this carrying maintenance too far? Perhaps, but the fact remains that today's professional golfers and most club members in the United States, through the efforts of golf course superintendents everywhere, are playing under conditions that were unimagined 30 years ago. The quest for perfection in all areas of course maintenance will continue whether we like it or not.

**TB:** Tell us about the player comment sheets, and how do you respond to them.

**AM:** At the end of each PGA Tour and Nike Tour event, 10 players at random are asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the conditioning and playability of the golf course. Categories include greens (speed, appearance, firmness), fairways (width, firmness, height of cut, contouring), bunkers (sand depth, texture, definition), roughs (height of cut, density, difficulty), tees (height of cut, footing level) etc. These reports are very valuable as they're a true representation of the players' thoughts on the golf course. They're confidential so they can make their true thoughts known. We use these reports as a basis for improving future conditioning.

**TB:** Tell us a funny story about something that has happened during an advance visit or during a tournament over the years.

**AM:** I'm surprised you asked this question because some of the funniest stories took place when you and I worked together for the PGA Tour. Since I'm not certain of the Statute of Limitations laws in some states, I will pass on this question!

**TB:** Do you have any concerns?

**AM:** I really do not have any major concerns, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the superintendents who host PGA, Senior PGA and Nike tour events. Their contributions to the success of our events are immense. Their achievements and results of their efforts are not only evident to the memberships of their clubs and the viewing public, but are deeply appreciated by the finest players in the world.

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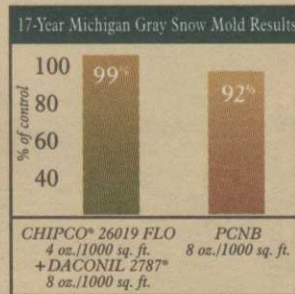
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*Dr. J. M. Vargas, Michigan State University, 1977-1994, (14 trials).*