

Ryder Cup prep a battle of logistics for Spence

By MARK LESLIE

ROCKPORT, Maine — When golf course superintendents prepare their properties for major events, they consider turf-type issues: greens, tees, fairways and bunkers. Bill Spence's day-planner is filled with meetings concerning building roads and parking lots, laying a 10,000-square-foot parking lot and a 40,000-square-foot slab for the caterer and bus terminal, putting down conduits to supply electricity to 57 corporate tents, and devising transportation for 30,000 or so spectators from the subway system of Boston to his property outside the city.

Spence is the superintendent at The Country Club in Brookline (Mass.), which on Sept. 24-26 will host the Ryder Cup, pitting America's greatest golfers against Europe's.

"As I sit at these meetings, so little about it is golf — it's puzzling some-



Bill Spence's crews refurbished all the bunkers at The Country Club in Brookline, including this bunker to the right and front of the 16th green.

times," Spence told an audience at the Maine Turfgrass Conference and Show at the Samoset Resort here.

Spence said his grounds crew "has made my job almost comically easy,"

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The Country Club in Brookline's superintendent, Bill Spence, with one of his irreplaceable crew, Emma, who makes life difficult for any geese intending to visit the course's water holes or fairways.

BRIEFS



IGCSA ANNOUNCES DIRECTORS

AMES, Iowa — The Iowa Golf Course Superintendents Association has elected Dennis Watters, of the Fort Dodge Country Club in Fort Dodge, as president. He will be assisted by new directors Ron Stephan, Joyce Hamilton, John Ausen and Tom Verrips. Superintendent of the Year and Assistant Superintendent of the Year awards presented to two Cedar Rapids superintendents: Jeff Schmidt, of Twin Pines Golf Course, and Corey Shipman, of Ellis Park Golf Course, respectively.

USGA PLANS ST. LOUIS CONFERENCE

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The USGA will be holding a regional conference here March 16 at the Old Warson Country Club. During the morning session, Dr. James Murphy of Rutgers University will speak on "Water Injection Technology" and new uses for the Toro Hydroject. Dr. Erik Ervin of the University of Missouri will also be presenting "Are Your Greens Suffocating?" a seminar on monitoring O₂ and CO₂ in the root zone. The highlight of the afternoon session includes a presentation by Mark Passey, USGA Regional Manager, entitled "What's your golf IQ? Rules you need to know to manage the course." For more information on the conference, contact Mark Passey at 801-265-8620.

Faucher undergoes 'birthing' of another kind in Bellaire



David Faucher

By PETER BLAIS

BELLAIRE, Mich. — Child birth and growing in a golf course. While admitting he has little experience in one of those areas, Shanty Creek Cedar River Golf Club grow-in superintendent David Faucher believes there are parallels between the two experiences.

"Someone said it was like having a baby," said Faucher, who served as Shanty Creek's The Legends course head superintendent for six years and will open the Tom Weiskopf-designed Cedar River layout on June 12.

"It was painful as hell at times, but now I'm ready to have another one. I mostly remember the fun. I've been working on this for two years, and I'm still not doing any of the routine maintenance I was doing at The Legends. It will probably be another year before we're just mowing and going. The work was hard, but the days didn't seem long because you're on your toes making decisions all the time.

"It was fun working with the contractors and the architect. I worked harder than I ever had before. It taxed every resource I had."

Raised in Marine City north of Detroit, Faucher, 47, moved West after completing high school. He worked a variety of jobs, including stints on the grounds crews at courses in Spokane, Wash., and Twin Lakes, Idaho.

At age 35, married with two children, he decided to get back into the golf course business. He returned home and enrolled in Michigan State University's two-year turfgrass management program, accumulating a 3.96 grade point average while earning the school's Outstanding Student Award. While in school, he worked at three Michigan courses — St. Clair Shores, Walnut Hills in

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WEED GENETICS

Getting at the root of weed control

By DOUGLAS PAGE

Science may finally be getting to the root of the weed problem. A group of geneticists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has isolated a plant gene that plays a critical role in the ability of roots to grow properly. The finding suggests that genetics could help scientists save time and money in developing effective, safe herbicides in the future.

As reported in the July 15, 1998 issue of *Gene and Development*, the work at MIT's Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research has succeeded in cloning and characterizing the gene (called Ethylene Insensitive Root 1, or EIR1) in a tiny weed called *Arabidopsis thaliana*. The roots of mutant *A. thaliana* weeds lacking this gene lose their ability to respond to gravity and are thus unable to grow downward into the soil — hence they perish.

"These findings provide important new insights into age-old mysteries about root growth," said Gerald R. Fink, director of the Whitehead Institute. "And they also may have tremendous implications for the agricultural and pharmaceutical industries. Currently, most herbicides are developed by trial and error. Compounds first are tested for their ability to kill weeds, and then later tested — often for years — to ensure their safety in animals. Often the most effective ones turn out, in hindsight, to be the compounds that act against genes present only in plants but not in animals."

The Whitehead findings suggest that scientists can design new classes of compounds targeted at plant-specific genes like EIR1, so that they would automatically be harmful to plants but have no adverse effects on worms and soil micro-organisms, bees, birds or game animals.

The war against weeds never ends for golf course superintendents, especially as demands increase for perfect turfgrass. Aggressive competitors for sunlight, moisture and nutrients, and prolific multipliers even under adverse conditions, weeds such as dandelion, buckthorn plantain, and broadleaf plantain present a challenge for even the most experienced turfgrass managers. Just one dandelion plant generates up to 15,000 seeds, each of which can survive six years in the soil — each one capable of creating 15,000 more seeds when it sprouts and matures.

Broadleaf weeds grow in all turfgrass areas. Many weeds in turfgrass are controlled by mowing, fertilizing and irrigating, but herbicides are the primary method of broadleaf weed control for superintendents. Turfgrass specialists advise that the best deterrent to weeds is a vigorously growing turf that is adapted to the site. However, perennial weeds, once established, usually require a herbicide treatment for effective control.

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singling out assistants Jeff Baker, who coordinates the 22-person staff and day-to-day operations on the course; Greg Barker, who is specializing in Ryder Cup projects and basically any maintenance work not directly associated with day-to-day operations; and Scott Lagana, who will be his

liaison with all the vendors they have to deal with beginning in June.

"I'm sort of the 'front' guy," Spence said. "These people have applied themselves and are the nicest group of people and most competent I've ever worked with."

But this "front" guy has his hands full with meetings of the Ryder Cup Executive Committee, the Golf Committee,

Grounds Committee and Landscape Committee as well as having to answer to people like Ryder Cup American captain Ben Crenshaw, on-site tournament director Dan Baker, and Kerry Haigh, senior director of tournaments for the PGA of America.

Spence, who saw The Country Club through a Rees Jones renovation and preparation for the 1988 U.S. Open, is

facing new challenges this time around.

Transportation, for instance, is "the single biggest problem," he said. "We have no parking, yet we have 40,000-plus people who will be on site at some times."

With Ryder Cup tickets in hand (obtained through a PGA of America national drawing), the general public will have to park outside Boston, then take

a commuter rail or subway to either Cleveland Circle or Forest Hill station, where they will be bussed the five-minute ride to The Country Club when the gates open at 6 a.m.

Meanwhile, spectators affiliated with corporate tents or vendors will park 7,000 to 8,000 cars at either a neighboring golf course, a farm The Country Club is reconditioning, or town-owned Larz Andersen Park.

Ryder Cup play begins at about 7:45 a.m. "and everybody leaves at 5 o'clock when the event is over," Spence said. "We have all these people coming in at once and leaving together, which stresses our abilities to get them in and out, or if we had to evacuate the golf course, or if we have a hurricane ... or lightning. So this is a very serious part of the program, and again not relating much to turf."

To deal with the crowds, he said: "We've had to open up roads that haven't been used since Francis Ouimet was 5 years old. We also have a crew clearing out gallery and entrance areas through the woods."

In addition to parking and transportation, the event incorporates "a huge amount of infrastructure," Spence said. "The U.S. Open gallery winds around a golf course. That is not what we are dealing with this time. The preparation, as a result, is more construction-oriented to support this infrastructure."

Thus the conduits, corporate tents, Tables of Ten which will be set up inside the facility's tennis courts, and spectator areas.

"I spend a lot of time pretending I'm a spectator in order to find places for people to walk and watch the event," Spence said.

Also, Spence learned a lesson from superintendent Bob Alonzi at Winged Foot, who last year had to undergo a last-minute major tree-pruning to meet insurance demands before the PGA Championship.

"To move the gallery around, we have to put people in places we normally don't do anything, including tree pruning," he said. "Insurance is important today, and we entered a safety pruning program beginning last summer that will cost more than \$100,000. We're going into all the gallery, tent and entrance areas to make sure deadwood is removed."



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REGARDING MAINTENANCE

While dealing with infrastructure issues, however, maintenance conditions do

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weigh heavily on Spence's mind.

"Whether we acknowledge it or not, golfers always aspire to [have their course] be another Augusta National," Spence said, referring to the Georgia course's "perfect" conditioning. "But, you can play great golf and do a lot less manipulation than what we

do now [for tournaments]."

"The nicest thing that has happened to us," he added, "has been Ben Crenshaw's selection as captain... Ben will be the first to tell you that you don't need hand-mowed fairways, or greens rolling 13 on the Stimpmeter and rough that is 6 inches tall in order to identify the winning team of the Ryder Cup.

"So, we're trying to keep it moderate."

Spence's crews have undertaken a bunker sand replacement program, restoring some bunkers that "had gotten pretty ornery" or had "lost their old character."

But they will not hand-mow the fairways. Greens will roll 10-1/2 to 11 on the Stimpmeter, which is typical for a member-guest tournament at the club. Fairways will be cut a little lower than normal, but not much, perhaps 3/8 inch.

Tees will be cut about the same as usual. And the rough will be cut to 2-1/2 to 3 inches.

"The three of us [Crenshaw, Haigh and Spence] feel it will be best for everyone if we have a fair test, one that is not tricked up, and that no one feels we tricked up," Spence said. "Moreso for the spectators, who don't really want to see a great player in rough where he can't even see the golf ball just chop

it back onto the fairway.

"The Country Club is a second-shot golf course with long par-4s. The second shot is the essence of the game—how close you get to the hole on our small greens, which average only 2,800 square feet. And, if we don't give a player a chance, from a spectating point of view, that's going to take some of the fun out of the Ryder Cup."

Whereas, Seve Ballesteros in Spain and Lanny Wadkins in America have in the past tried to create conditions for their teams to win, Spence said: "We feel that in the Ryder Cup, the site can't be a factor. It can't be any less neutral a site than a Final Four [in college basketball], or a Super Bowl. In the U.S. Open it's a big factor; the golf course is right in the middle of it all. In the Ryder Cup, you don't want to be able to say the course affected the outcome, because this is team against team."

While corporate tents are lifted up and fewer members of the general public than at other events cheer for their respective teams, Spence said that in one way the Ryder Cup will epitomize all that is right with golf.

"With all the money we have coming into this event," he said, "these players don't get anything. This is all about spirit, pride and winning."

Leslie comment

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associations have seized on something that can have a substantial impact."

Elsewhere, in an engaging session by members of the American Society of Golf Course Architects:

- In a friendly debate with design partner Dana Fry about \$1 million versus \$10 million golf courses, Mike Hurdzan asked: "For every \$1 million invested, you need to charge \$10 in greens fees. Which is better for golf: 10 \$1 million courses with \$15 greens fees, or one \$10 million course with \$150 greens fees?"

- Ed Seay, president of Arnold Palmer Golf Design, told the world who are the most important people in golf development, and it is none of any of the above names. Nor is it any of the great players, nor of anyone you and I know by name. Who is it?

"The person who decides permits," Seay said.

- Course designer Damian Pascuzzo added: "Sometimes it costs hundreds of thousands of dollars just to find out if you have a viable project. That's what environmental activism has done."

But the clincher came from the ever-succinct Seay, who said that if you're building in Arkansas "just lie about it and you'll get away with it."

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