

## High-level volunteers get down and dirty for comrades

By MARK LESLIE

PINEHURST, N.C. — Instead of a high schooler or college student tending bunkers during the U.S. Open at Pinehurst No. 2, there stood Augusta National Senior Director of Golf Course Operations Marsh Benson and Pebble Beach Golf Links superintendent Mark Michaud with rakes in hand.

The brotherhood of keepers of the green reaches new heights during major events when one of their members needs help, say superintendents whose courses hosted the four Majors this year.

"We were blessed to have a lot of volunteers," said Pinehurst Resort Director of Golf Course Maintenance Brad Kocher. "We



A Pinehurst No. 2 grounds crew member prepares turf for restoration in a typical area that was beneath a grandstand during the 1999 U.S. Open.

had between 50 and 55 every day of the tournament. So we were able to do everything to the 'nth' degree."

Benson was "instrumental in showing us how he staffs for the Masters and we used a lot of his program as a template for what we did," Kocher said.

"I learned a lot, too," Benson said of his volunteer work at

Pinehurst No. 2.

And Benson said he also received major help for his Major. One hundred seven individuals worked on Augusta National during the Masters, including 62 volunteers who did a wide variety of jobs, he said.

Superintendent Danny Quast, whose Medinah (Ill.) No. 3 Course in Medinah, hosted the

## Post-traumatic stress syndrome at the Majors

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fic during the tournament and the subsequent vehicles to remove it, the fairway is pretty bereft of grass. We'll have to do some serious aerification and overseeding to recover it. That's all part and parcel of hosting an Open."

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After dealing with dozens of tents and other structures foreign to golf courses, turfgrass is a world apart and normally easier to deal with, according to the superintendents.

"Very few Opens have been played on Bermudagrass," said Pinehurst's Kocher. "It's easier to rut things up in heavier soils and cool-season grasses. But here we have Bermuda on a sand base, so the damage to it, even if we get some rain, is minimal."

Jett said his biggest challenge at Pinehurst was "getting everything mowed back out and grown back in for our regular member and resort play."

His crews started widening the fairways on Tuesday after the Open, he said.

No. 2's fairways had to go from 28 to 32 yards wide back out to 35 to 40 yards.

"A lot of areas at 3 inches are now down under 1/2 inch," Jett said. "We took rotary mowers out, set them as low as they could go and scalped it down, then used fairways mowers to cut to regular height. Then we let them green up again and started from scratch just like they were coming out of dormancy from the winter. That took about three weeks until when we mowed it, it didn't turn brown again."

For the Open the greens were cut at 0.135 inch and some were mowed three or even four times

*"The rough was quite powerful this year and that has stood us in good stead for all the traffic."*

— John Philp, super  
Carnoustie Golf Links

in the morning until they reached the Stimpmeter speed for the day — 11.6 on Sunday. The slopes and tees were mowed at 0.225 inch; the fairways at 0.375 inch; intermediate rough at 1-1/4 inch; and primary rough at 3 inches.

Today, the greens are cut at 0.130 inch, but mowed only once a day. The fairways are at 0.400 inch, intermediate rough at 0.875, primary rough at 1.5, and slopes and tees at 0.275.

At Augusta National, whose tees and fairways are Bermudagrass overseeded with rye and whose greens are bentgrass, the grounds crew relieves the turf from compaction by various means of aerification. In the sites that are in sunshine and open to air movement, the Bermudagrass underneath will repair itself for next year's overseeding, Benson said. In more shady and isolated locations, ryegrass seed is applied for the rest of the season. After the club closes, those areas are re-sodded.

Benson and Owen are developing a process that allows the agronomic staff to move sod from sunny areas to shady locations. The weak Bermuda in the shady sites is ground up, then spread in the sunny locations, Benson said, adding that this is positive environmentally because it re-uses topsoil and does not move other dirt from its original location.

Dealing with bentgrass and far different conditions outside Chicago, Medinah's Quast compared his experience hosting the Open in June and this year's PGA Championship in August.

"After the Open, you had your worst growing period," he said. "After the PGA, you have the best growing period. In Northern grasses the fall is usually your best growing time. After the U.S. Open, it was hot and humid and you got nothing to come up but crabgrass. This time around it should be favorable weather for recovery."

At Carnoustie, Philp is confident of an early return to normalcy. "The rough was quite powerful this year and that has stood us in good stead for all the traffic," he said. "Where all the public walked, it's padded it all down. The turf was so strong to start with, it's going to help with recovery. The players might not have liked it [the rough], but it's beneficial here with the recovery. There will be bits and pieces, no doubt. The 1st fairway and the [Barry] Burn will not be back to normal until next year. That was quite intense traffic. The public putting green on Links Parade had the physiotherapy unit on it and the BBC studios. It will not be a putting green again until at least next year."

Philp, too, has made changes for non-professional golfers to enjoy Carnoustie.

"A lot of the rough has disappeared now," he said. "A normal golfer could not get around in less than six hours. One of our first jobs was to cut down the rough to enable normal traffic to get round, but the fairways are just the same."

PGA Championship in August, said he had 16 superintendent volunteers — a lot of them assistants, some from Florida.

He noted that August is "crunch time for all the superintendents in the area, so it's understandable if others don't volunteer." And he added: "There is not one [local] superintendent who wouldn't help, if asked."

But since Quast has crews for Medinah's three golf courses, "we're in pretty good shape," he said.

Meanwhile, at British Open host Carnoustie Golf Links, in addition to volunteering superintendents, John Philp had "180 local schoolchildren working in shifts through the tournament to collect litter. They have been down since."

Kocher summed up the feelings of all four for future hosts of Major tournaments. "Anything we have here we would be glad to share," he said. "It improves the learning curve of anyone who is going to host a tournament."

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