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PROVIDE THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE

Todd Raisch, CGCS, at Ridgewood Country Club in Paramus, N.J., hosted the 2008 Barclays Championship in August. Here's what he had to say about preparing for it.

Q Todd, you learned Ridgewood would host the Barclays Championship in January this year. How did this impact your plans and maintenance schedule?

A Ridgewood officials had been talking with PGA Tour officials and felt there was a good chance we would host the event, so we had a preliminary plan about what would be required. When we were given the official notice in mid-January, the club began meeting the requirements for the golf course, which included:

- Determining the best 18-hole routing from the existing 27 holes. Criteria included a layout that would challenge the competitors and allow proper flow throughout the golf course for play and spectators.
- Placing corporate tents, parking lots, concession stands, clubhouse requirements, trailers and perimeter security.
- Working with the PGA Tour to evaluate and determine potential course design changes to test the players. The PGA Tour's John Mutch began making regular visits to discuss these options. Advance visits included a discussion about the number of trees that needed to be removed and new tees to be constructed for length, angle and location.
- Getting board approval for on-course changes that also had to be reviewed with Gil Hanse, consulting architect. Once approved, the golf course builder was scheduled for immediate work in the spring.

With new tees, I was concerned about the impact of shade from the surrounding trees on turf health. I contacted a local tree company to reschedule the original planned work.

The purpose of the new tees was to meet the PGA Tour's needs for the tournament,

but Ridgewood's investment needed to satisfy our membership, too.

Q Being new to the tournament scene, what was your greatest concern, and what were the items that affected you and the club most?

A The greatest concern was hosting an event in mid-August. We were trying to keep two types of turfgrass agronomics and playing conditions for the putting greens: one to keep membership satisfied and the other to prepare for the world's best players. New Jersey experienced an unusual August – it was relatively cool and mild – which helped our plans. However, our low-handicap club members felt they should have Tour-like conditions, not understanding this level of conditioning is created for one-week stints. My goal for appeasing our membership was to attempt, without sacrificing turf, to provide a low-handicap challenge by:

- Establishing a height of cut close to what the Tour agronomists expected to see during the event, which was 0.11. Weather allowed us to maintain this level throughout the summer and into the event.
- Implementing regular fertility, sufficient topdressing depth within the canopy and limited surface grooming methods.
- Applying preventive fungicides and growth regulators properly to help battle anthracnose and help maintain the lower height of cut.
- Single-cutting greens regularly using pedestrian mowers with solid rollers.
- Rolling the greens to reduce surface stress to the plant.
- Enhancing our golf course set-up practices, focusing on hole locations. We used a more difficult but fair location to raise the competitive bar and create a fun atmosphere.

Q Your demeanor and patience never faltered the entire week. What's your secret?

A I tried to remain low-key and calm. Operational impacts that damage the fine turf outside the ropes happen. I have little control over those. We tried to minimize what occurred outside the ropes by assigning an associate superintendent to attend operation meetings to keep us informed of what was coming. We had regular vendor meetings to communicate what, where and how they could get their equipment, vehicles and staff to the appropriate locations on the course without bumping into us or other contractors. By meeting with vendors, we kept the damage to a minimum until about 10 days out where activities increase and large truck ruts can cause broken irrigation lines, power outages, broken cart paths and curbing.

One suggestion to create a relaxed and communicative atmosphere within the volunteer ranks is to appoint a volunteer chairman. I used a local turf supply vendor and good friend, Ken Kubik of Grass Roots Turf Supply. Ken:

- Organized all the volunteer forms and assigning people to their requested shifts.
- Created and organized directions to the course and parking areas for each shift.
- Provided sign-in and greeting areas where volunteers picked up the tournament packet, received their assignment and answered various routine questions.
- Provided everyone with a locker and key for personal effects, ushered people to the meetings and made sure breakfast was served on time.
- Coordinated the Jacobsen/Textron tournament support trailer that assists superintendents and their mechanics with additional workload and provides the volunteers with an area to relax and learn.
- Made sure everyone met those they didn't know.

Each morning when the volunteers checked in, they received a raffle ticket for a small prize Ken auctioned off before the morning staff and assignment meeting. This is a good idea to wake up, organize and relax people. This friendly atmosphere allowed for a meet-and-greet scene for an exchange of agronomic ideas, and it reduced my personal workload, keeping me relaxed. **GCI**