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## VIEWS FROM DOWN UNDER

In July, I attended the 24th Australian Turfgrass Conference and Show. I visited the golf courses and spoke with the superintendents who will host Australia's major championships: John Odell, superintendent of Royal Sydney Golf Club; Gary Dempsey, superintendent of The New South Wales Golf Club; and Jim Porter, superintendent of Royal Melbourne Golf Club.

This year, the Open Championship of Australia will be played at the 27-hole Royal Sydney. Odell emphasizes the golf course should be played and remembered for the right reasons – honoring the membership and the club's history. This means:

- Odell works closely with Australian Golf Union officials during visits to review any golf course changes and set-up requests.
- During daily golf course setup, Odell will change hole locations himself to prevent any location mishaps.
- Odell coordinates all off-course issues to reduce operational confusion and non-golfer impact on the golf course.
- To ensure there's minimal damage to the golf course and turf equipment, he takes construction photos and uses metal detectors to locate any damaging material during the cleanup process.

Because the championship will be contested in early summer, Odell deals with the following agronomic concerns:

- There's no overseeding, so all cultural processes to reduce organic matter buildup and produce a tight surface and firm-and-fast playing conditions are implemented as the Couch grass is about to break dormancy. Scarifying processes remove an excessive amount of chaff that can't be deposited on property because of city permitting and disposal concerns. It must be placed into containers and hauled away.
- Odell uses only his staff of 40 for the advance preparation, as well as for maintenance during championship week. He believes his staff did the prework and should be praised and recognized during the week as the people who accomplished the task.

• Rain is the biggest worry. Royal Sydney is located near the harbor and only 4 feet above sea level. The golf course serves as a drainage passageway for upstream communities, so drainage installation during past years has been a priority. Fortunately, the golf course soil profile is rapidly draining dune sand. But, the inconvenience of repairing and pumping bunkers is challenging.

Dempsey is preparing to host his first Open Championship – the 2009 Australian Open Championship. Requirements for hosting a championship change when a golf course is located in a national park. Operational setup issues regarding facility location, brush removal for structures and tree removal for new features must be presented to appropriate government agencies well in advance.

Before any setup begins, Dempsey has to allow a minimum of eight weeks for the smallest permit to be granted. Also, all species that might be removed or trimmed must be identified clearly, the amount to be removed specified and revegetation considered after the event has ended.

The biggest project for Dempsey and his staff is bunker renovation. The standard bunkering will be changed to a riveted-style seen in the British Isles. This includes:

- Acquiring the necessary permits to do earthwork within the national park.
- Removing the steep-sloped faces and installing the traditional stacked sod walls.
- Reshaping the floors of the bunkers so there are no buried lies in the faces or floors.
- Factoring in wind velocity that will shift sand or blow it out of the bunker.
- Establishing a raking philosophy to match the new design.

Putting surfaces will be a challenge to Dempsey and competitors, considering:

- Strong winds will require the AGU to determine a proper green speed and maintain it during the week.
- Extra time is needed to choose hole locations to avoid the possibility of a player's ball from blowing off the putting surface.

• Aerification will require proper timing to allow the  $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch holes to heal well in advance of the event.

• The usual stress-related impacts, such as anthracnose and nematodes, are a concern because of increased championship maintenance.

• The collars are cool-season turf and will be susceptible to wear from player and trolley traffic.

The Couch grass, which will be dormant going into championship season, is Dempsey's No. 1 concern for golf course preparation and setup because it's a challenging stand of primary rough grass. Sandy soils and little water available for the roughs will limit its density. There will be an increase in fertility and irrigation heading into the championship week to produce the density needed.

When preparing for the 2011 President's Cup at Royal Melbourne, Porter manages 36 holes, each course with a different maintenance challenge. Porter's goal is to return the golf course to proper shape for the membership after the event. Water use is his biggest challenge. As water usage and drought pattern developed, such as during the 2006-07 season when turf went into drought-stressed dormancy and didn't recover, Porter recognized the need to supply Royal Melbourne with a proper water supply for its future. This led to:

- Years of examining numerous options, undertaking feasibility studies and creating a solution for the water supply.
- The decision to construct a new multi-acre storage lake on the property next to the maintenance facility that will be linked to a one-mile-long stormwater pipe linked to a stormwater diversion structure.
- A dam built to block and store one-third of the water supply that Royal Melbourne never had before.
- Added water along with the increase of wetting agents and more organic, long-lasting fertilizers that won't require watering in have aided the turf management plan.
- Inclusion of an acid injection system and increase of calcium-based fertilizers to move sodium through the soils. **GC**