



**Tim Moraghan** is principal of Aspire Golf Consulting in Long Valley, N.J. He can be reached at [tmoraghan11@comcast.net](mailto:tmoraghan11@comcast.net) or 908-635-7978.

## TRIPLE PLAY Q&A

Jay Ervine, the director of golf and grounds for The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club, Dove Mountain in Marana, Ariz., recently accomplished the golf course maintenance triple play – the construction, grow-in and preparation for a major golf event: The Accenture Match Play Championship. Not only were his schedules tight, Tiger Woods decided to return to competitive golf during the week of his event. No pressure, right Jay?

### Q What was your timetable for completion as you undertook this project?

Construction began on the first non-tournament holes in the fall of 2006 so the builders, equipment and staff were already in place and work was progressing. The Ritz-Carlton's goal was to be open for resort play by Jan. 16, 2009, and present mature course conditions at that time.

Our pre-event issues were grass selections and planting the playing features with sufficient time for the turf to be established and appear mature. Once the primary turf species were selected, our next effort was focused on the perennial ryegrass overseeding of teeing grounds, fairways and roughs, again with the January opening date looming. The seeding rate was 800 pounds to the acre.

The turf establishment went exceptionally well and the golf course presented itself as though it had always been there. From this point we focused on the off-course detail work, which included shoring up our native desert vegetation and perimeter landscaping.

One concern was the monsoon rain season, which affected us with 10 inches of rainfall washing out numerous areas within the golf course, along with the recently established native and desert areas. The rains impacted the golf course's drainage system, too. Dove Mountain installed 6,500 linear feet of tile to reduce wet spots and to move water away from primary playing surfaces.

To aid in drying, firming and smooth-

ing the playing features we began a sand topdressing process for the fairways and teeing grounds. This was completed before overseeding to assist in filling sod seams for smoothness and to eliminate any uneven fairway areas so not to affect the overseed distribution pattern.

For overseeding, our irrigation water pH needed to be between 5.5 and 6.0 to provide better water quality for ryegrass seed germination. We also helped germination with wetting agents applied through our fertigation system.

### Q What concerns did the PGA Tour staff have with the golf course?

First, I had a great team of outside personnel assisting me. I give credit to Tom Brown of the PGA Tour's agronomy staff, as well as Jon Scott of Nicklaus Design. One issue was the humidity of the monsoon rains. The moisture caused some puffiness within the perimeter putting surface, resulting in turf scalping from mowing. This required an additional 7,000 square feet of sod replacement for the greens. To smooth this sod we sand topdressed regularly.

A few factors impacted my preparation agenda. My staff was "green." Only 24 of my 65 staff members had ever worked on a golf course. The remainder worked with us less than six months. Proper and concise training was vital to our success.

Putting green density was a concern. We placed a huge emphasis on rapidly establishing putting surface quality to highlight Mr. Nicklaus' design efforts.

The PGA Tour requested a green speed of 10.5. To highlight that request, surface firmness became a concern. Our irrigation team relied on moisture-sensing devices to ensure uniform moisture for the entire green surface, whether on a flat section or a sloped portion. From a fertility standpoint, we backed off on nutrient levels four weeks prior to the first day of the event. Jack wanted the putting surfaces to test the players and make them think their way around his design.

As always, sand bunker preparation was a high priority. The new sand presented an occasional fluffy ball lie. We intensified our surface work to accommodate the sand selected by our agronomic team.

### Q Did the match play format create any unusual situations or dilemmas for your preparation efforts?

As you know, in match play there's the potential for an extra hole play-off situation. We were instructed not to begin any maintenance until all matches were concluded. For example if we started mowing fairways or greens and a match came to extra holes, there would be a problem if one player had cut turf to play from and his opponent did not.

The weekend schedule allowed us to recheck and rake bunkers between matches. Our green speed remained constant so there was no need to mow. With the moisture sensors we easily monitored irrigation needs and luckily, our greens held and no watering was necessary.

The growth regulator Primo was applied as indicated to control the clipping yields from fairways. Residual grass clippings lying on the fairways can adhere to the golf ball, possibly causing a Rules infraction.

And with the match play format, the staff must always know the position of each match so maintenance does not interfere with play until the match is completed.

### Q What was it like having Tiger Woods come to Dove Mountain?

We had a blast. The whole world was watching our event and golf course. Tiger made the event – and more importantly Dove Mountain – the No. 1 news story of the week.

Despite our lagging economy, Tiger's return was the front page news story above all else. He certainly gave our sport and industry a huge boost. **GCI**