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ONE YEAR, THREE MAJORS

Jon Maddern, golf operations manager and deputy director of the city of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department, hosted two PGA Tour events and a U.S. Open Championship between February 2008 and February 2009. I asked him about the similarities and differences preparing golf courses for the PGA Tour and USGA.

Q What allowed you and your staff to navigate three events within a year?

A We needed to separate the two organizations' philosophies about set-up and preparation. Once we understood what each tournament required, we established a team concept for our staff to undertake the enormity of the upcoming year. Teamwork is essential.

We increased our meeting schedule and interaction with the associations' reps, exchanged set-up outlines and held frequent course walk-about with each organization so we didn't overlook any details. We reviewed video of past U.S. Opens we attended at Pinehurst, Winged Foot and Oakmont for golf course preparation, staffing and efficient use of volunteers. Each operational area had its own team of volunteers. We began this during the 2008 PGA Tour event as a practice round, then transitioned the same crew leaders and their staffs to the U.S. Open. It saved training time for the U.S. Open.

Q What were the conditioning differences between the two?

A The PGA Tour event includes a Pro-Am; the USGA doesn't. Because amateur players couldn't handle U.S. Open conditioning, we geared it down in February and increased the difficulty

for June. Green speeds weren't extremely quick for the amateur player. There was a one-foot difference in green speed requirements between the organizations. Each requested smooth, consistent and true surfaces regardless of speed.

The USGA focused on spot tweaking firmness and green speed, so our irrigation became more precise. Our rolling procedures for the two events varied because of attempts to maintain a higher and more consistent green speed for the U.S. Open.

Kikuyugrass can be mown between 3/8 inch and 4 inches. We monitored nitrogen amounts with slow-release fertilizers to avoid disease and puffiness on fairways. Irrigation was tricky, but converting to the turf was a home run.

The PGA Tour had two levels within the primary rough: an intermediate cut 6-feet wide and a primary rough at 3 inches. The USGA had three levels of rough: an intermediate, a second cut and the primary rough at 3 inches and higher.

Bunkers were more penal for the U.S. Open, and the PGA Tour had shot options included in its preparation instructions.

The fairways were kikuyugrass for both events, although there was more perennial ryegrass overseeding for the PGA Tour event than the U.S. Open. As the temperatures climbed, the rye transitioned out. We've kept the U.S. Open fairway widths for the PGA Tour in 2009. The only difference is the height of cut, which was lower for the U.S. Open.

The PGA Tour has a long history with Torrey Pines and had an established set-up in mind. Being the first U.S. Open at Torrey, the USGA had more input, opinions, questions and suggestions for us to reach its set-up goals.

Q Do you have any tips to ease superintendents' set-up issues during a busy tournament season?

A Grass can tolerate less water than we believed. This was established by using moisture-sensing devices and checking for water deficiencies during the day. We determined a watering range and wilting potential with the devices. To accomplish watering effectively, we employed two staffs – one to check moisture and one to irrigate where needed.

There should be transportation and support vehicles for yourself, management staff, mechanics, irrigation staff, golf course set-up folks, association staff, vendors, first-aid staff, food-and-beverage staff and volunteers.

Have a daily meeting with your staff and the staffs of those who will be working, checking and moving throughout the property. We met with our staff, the PGA Tour/USGA staff, security, city staff, vendor representatives and media.

Involve local and state industry vendors to provide a daily uniform and meal for the staff and volunteers. We had a vendor day during the seven days of the U.S. Open to support the staff and volunteers, as well as provide business opportunities for vendors. Most importantly, this daily meeting provided each person an opportunity to exchange ideas, look for solutions for their own golf course concerns and make new friends.

Have an accurate and locally knowledgeable weather service. We prepared for two distinctly different seasons with opposite weather conditions, so daily and weekly weather updates from professionals was key to our course work.

The media attention provided an opportunity to promote the message of our game and its values as it relates to the environment, community, family and economy. **GCI**