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THE ORIGINAL HOME OF FIRM AND FAST

We are in the midst of championship golf season with my favorite – The Open Championship – to be contested at the home of golf, the Old Course at St. Andrews. To visit, walk and play this mystical place is a must for any student of the game.

From Tom Morris Senior to the current director of greenkeeping, Gordon Moir, many special people have cared for the birthplace of the game. Gordon is entering his 20th year working at St. Andrews, beginning in 1991 as the course manager for the Eden Course and has been in overall charge of all seven courses including the Old Course since 2000, managing more than 100 staff. Between bites of his lunchtime sandwich I caught up with Gordon as he readied for his fifth Open Championship.

Q With world politics and courses being open to the public, are there any special needs and requirements that are unusual to The Open?

A We try to keep things as normal as possible, but as you would understand, security issues are always at the forefront. With 50,000 spectators arriving daily, the security screening is intense. This year The Royal and Ancient (R&A), who run the tournament, have employed the x-ray devices used at the major European airports to see through and detect any non-conforming devices. Mobile phones, PDA's, computers and the like will be removed from guests as they arrive and returned when they leave. Past Champions Day (Wednesday), will be busy as it is still an official practice day, therefore cameras will be allowed. It is a small field and 30,000 spectators are all trying to watch in a limited space. The Old Course is difficult for fans because golf is only viewable from

outside edges because the holes run parallel and there are double greens. We have accommodated spectators with 22,000 grandstand seats.

Q For the U.S. Open the host golf course superintendent usually receives thousands of requests from people wishing to volunteer. Does this hold true for you and The Open?

A It does and it is tough to turn people down, but we do not use any volunteers. We have a staff of

“Our speed goal is 10.5 feet. Any faster, with the normal wind blowing, and balls begin to move and will roll off the greens.”

— Gordon Moir, director of green keeping, St. Andrews

around 100 who work hard for us all year long and working on The Open at the Old Course is their reward. This crew performs the various chores needed for daily preparation and management of the championship. I have five past employees coming to volunteer – that's all.

Q How much influence and guidance do R&A have with you, your staff and the course?

A Peter Dawson, R&A chief executive, is involved with every aspect of the Open Championship. He will spend an inordinate amount of time on the course walking and reviewing the notes made from the previous event's de-briefing. Grant Moir (no relation) is the golf course set-up man who works with Gordon McKie,

my course manager on the Old, for on-course preparation and set up. The turfgrass work is reviewed by Richard Windows of the Sports Turf Research Institute for additional turfgrass support. The annual Dunhill Cup serves as a barometer to monitor the players' abilities and how they affect the golf course. Between the five of us, we should get most things correct!

Q With the putting greens so vital to the golf course what should those of us watching on television look for?

A There are several items that make our greens special:

- They will be firm due to wind, climate and rolling practices that will make it tough for players to spin and stop their golf balls, especially out of the rough grass;
- We will closely monitor any irrigation so the firmness remains stable for all 18 surfaces. This will allow players to bounce, run and roll the ball to the hole rather than fly into a soft surface;
- With a slower green speed due to anticipated winds The R&A will be able to choose a more challenging hole location, bringing rough and bunkers more into play. Watch our par three, 11th hole during The Open; and
- The wind, if it blows 15 to 20 mph, will place a premium on shot accuracy and force players to think more.

Q Any words of advice for those who have an event?

A For us preparation is the key. We are lucky to have The Dunhill Cup as a practice run. Even with the extra tournament activity we still execute our “dummy run” prior to the championship to be 100 percent on cue. We must be organized with our maintenance so there is no criticism of the golf course and do the best we can in our preparations. After that it is up to the player. **GCI**