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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**

Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 38-year, life member of the GCSAA. He can be reached at terrybuchen@earthlink.net.



EQUIPMENT IDEAS

Protect the hole

John Kois, golf course superintendent at the Hanover Country Club in Ashland, Va., modified a Standard Golf Co. model number 30100 cup setter to protect the hole from damage when using the Smithco X-Press greens roller. Kois also uses the protector when the greens are rolled.

Kois removed the handle and surrounds from the cup setter, leaving just the 4.25-inch-diameter portion that fits on top of the Standard Golf model number ST 2000 plastic cup. Kois drilled 5/16-inch-diameter holes on either side of the cup and glued a 1/4-inch-diameter aluminum handle in place using J-B Weld epoxy.

The materials cost less than \$100, and the labor involved took one hour.



Travels With Terry

Globetrotting consulting agronomist Terry Buchen visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in hand. He will share helpful ideas relating to maintenance equipment from the golf course superintendents he visits – as well as a few ideas of his own – with timely photos and captions that explore the changing world of golf course management.

Have fan, will travel

At the Hanover Country Club in Ashland, Va., two creeping bentgrass greens have restricted air movement. And because of budget limitations, golf course superintendent John Kois doesn't have enough fans to put one on each green. So, he devised a portable system for moving fans to wherever he needs them.

Kois welded a 2-inch-diameter mounting pipe base to the bottom plate of a dolly so it can be moved to any location around the green. The fan is operated by a portable generator. Kois places a synthetic turf mat over the top of the generator to keep it dry from rainfall and irrigation. A 10-foot-long power cord leading from the generator to the fan makes the fan easier to move.

The fans and generators were in the club's inventory, Kois bought the dolly at a local hardware store and the welding materials cost about \$100. The mechanic's labor took about an hour and a half. **GCI**



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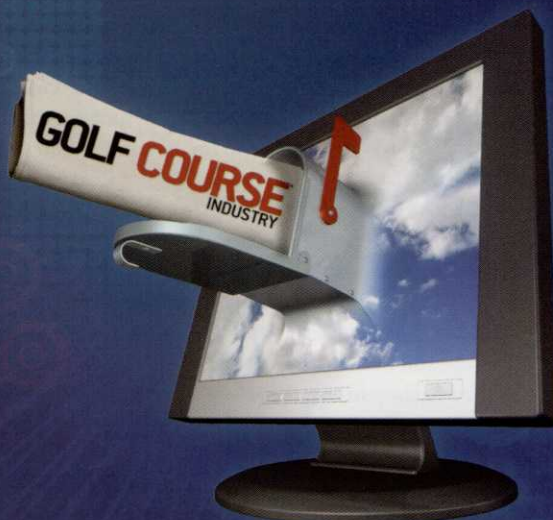
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BUMMED OUT?

For most of my adult life, it's been my habit to wake up early, make a pot of coffee, fire up a Marlboro and read the morning paper from front to back. But lately, it's gotten to the point where I pretty much just read the comics page and the sports section because the rest of the thing just bums me out.

As I write this in late September, we're in the midst of a global financial free fall. Major banks, investment firms and insurance companies are collapsing more dramatically than Greg Norman at the 1996 Masters. The stock market resembles the flight path of a Duncan yo-yo. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are going away, and, as Springsteen sang, they won't be comin' back.

Pump prices are still ludicrous, and who knows what natural gas will cost this winter. An unprecedented number of people face the prospect of losing their homes to foreclosure. Many more of us are discovering the equity we thought we had in our homes just went bye-bye.

We're in the midst of a presidential election that held early promise for rationality but has degenerated into yet another slimy and slanderous exercise focused more on trivial crap (remember "lipstick on a pig" and "sex ed for kindergartners"?) than on the serious, urgent issues we face.

And then, of course, there's the war. Almost 200,000 young men and women are doing their duty in the midst of a godforsaken desert hoping against hope they'll make it through the day without getting blown up by some lunatic.

Finally – at the risk of being trivial myself – there's the state of our humble little industry. Rounds are down or flat. Club memberships are dwindling. Nongolf revenue, such as food-and-beverage and events, are falling, and nobody these days is rushing to the pro shop to buy the latest, greatest \$800 driver.

An unprecedented number of facilities are for sale, in receivership or simply closing up and hoping to sell off the land.

Municipalities are bailing out of golf because they can't justify losing hundreds of thousands of dollars annually on an enterprise-based recreational activity. A ton of courses under management company umbrellas ultimately are owned by the aforementioned investment firms (e.g., Goldman Sachs), and who the hell knows what will happen to them.

To top things off, Tiger's making babies instead of birdies and – sans fist pumping and red shirts on Sunday – the glamour part of our game that engages and attracts many players is as bland as day-old tapioca pudding.

In short, it's easy to be bummed out about our nation and our industry right now.

By gradually reducing the number of ill-thought-out facilities ... the market will emerge stronger than before.

As a citizen of this nation, I have my opinions about the economy, politics, the election and the war. I won't bore you with those. But, as a citizen of the golf business, I feel compelled to share my opinions about our situation ... and why, just maybe, there are many reasons not to be too bummed out. So, here's the good news:

- Real estate will bounce back. It's a nearly immutable law that land values and housing prices might wane for a year or two, but eventually they will start to climb again. As goes real estate, so goes real-estate-driven golf.

- A shocking number of people still are playing regularly. The weather is still a far bigger factor in rounds played data than the economy or anything else. Golf is a lifestyle for a huge number of people, and they might be buying used Pro-V1s at Target

instead of new ones at the shop, but they're still playing.

- Check out the October issue of *Golf Digest* for an article that argues there's never been a better time to join a club. It's true. People who've always wanted to join are seeing ground-floor opportunities to become private club members. Smart clubs sense this and are starting to market more aggressively.

- The overall market is slowly correcting itself. By gradually reducing the number of ill-thought-out facilities and poorly operated courses, the market will emerge stronger than before. There's no reason to believe there's a "crash-and-burn" event on the horizon (or, conversely, any huge upswing awaiting us). Even if demand is flat, supply is gradually falling, and we'll eventually get back to par, economically speaking.


- Smart operators will view this climate as an opportunity instead of a problem. As I've said before, when the going gets tough, the tough steal market share. Look for simple opportunities to add value to the golf experience. Get aggressive about direct marketing and media relations within 45 miles of your facility. Create a world-class corporate outing package. Make yourself the premier league location in your area. Emphasize service with your staff. Quit bemoaning the situation, get off your butt and take business away from the competition.

- No Tiger? No problem. Did you see the Ryder Cup? Think the dynamic duo of Anthony Kim and Boo Weekly didn't help us with a couple of important demographics? Anytime we can appeal to Generation Y and the Skoal-chewing fans of the Blue Collar Comedy Tour in one event is a big win for the industry.

We're incredibly fortunate to be in a business that combines the beauty of the outdoors with a compelling and addictive game. We're equally fortunate our business model – even if imperfect at times – is inherently solid. Those who hunker down and wait for things to turn around will survive. Those who take the bull by the horns and manage for growth will thrive. Which path will you take? **GCI**

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