

From THE FEED

The Lighter Side of Turf is an online Twitter gathering of golf course superintendents who both talk turf and have fun. Greg Shaffer, superintendent at Elcona Country Club, took home an Innovative Use of Twitter award from GCI's 2012 Social Media Awards – but Andrew Hardy of Pheasant Run Golf Course is curious who all should get a piece of that prize.

Andrew Hardy @pheasantturf
Hey @gtshaffer you better rip that @GCIMagazine award and send it to @TWRyanHoward. He's a co-founder.



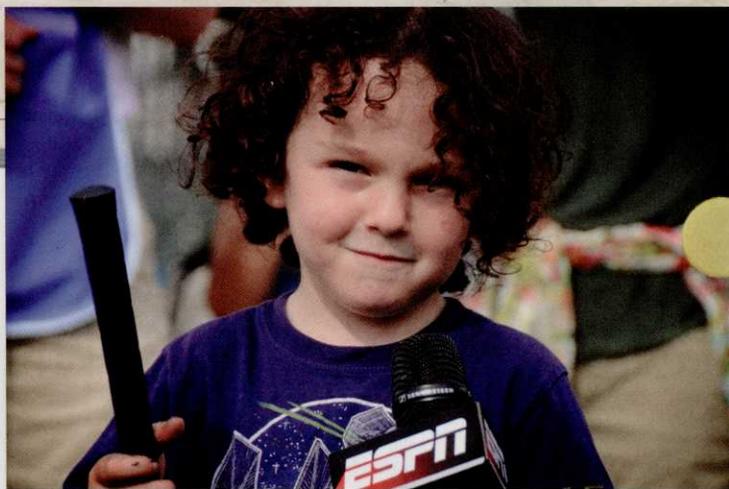
MAO @spartygrad95
Umm, I may not have FOUNDED it but let's all be honest... I AM THE AWARD.



Greg Shaffer @gtshaffer
Award was created to simply build your self esteem. Looks like it worked. #champ



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on Twitter @GCIMagazine!



Instant champions

Superintendents know – there's nothing like the scene of a major golf championship to bring out the best in a course and its players. Improv Everywhere, a New York "prank collective" that performs odd scenes to get people to laugh and play along, proved that the same holds true even when that course is a mini one.

Improv Everywhere is known for pulling off huge productions, and they're not afraid to get bigger names in on the fun: take, for instance, the spontaneous "Best Game Ever" experiment with sportcaster Jim Gray commentating a local Little League game, complete with Jumbotron and an instant cheering crowd.

Senior IE "agent" Charlie Todd received an e-mail from ESPN offering use of the Claret Jug from The Open Championship (you know the one, it comes with its own security guard?) as it passed through New York on a publicity tour.

"Ever since our 'Best Game Ever' mission, I've thought about doing a sequel with golf," says Todd. "Since it would be entirely too dangerous to have a gallery show up on an actual golf course where amateurs have way less control over the ball than professionals, a mini-golf course would work perfectly."

ESPN loved the idea, and worked with the Royal & Ancient Golf Association to provide caddy bibs, "Quiet" signs and a flag. The new Pier 25 Mini-Golf course gave the go-ahead, and the scene was set.

Five times throughout the day, a gallery, caddies, commentators and officials swooped in on an unsuspecting group of players, transforming the mini-golf site into a major golf event experience, with kids taking the starring roles.

Todd and another agent provided the commentary, with ESPN personality Jorge Andres for on-the-course interviews from the players. The caddies helped the kids line up their shots, and the gallery cheered them on. Each time, a winner was crowned, and the presentation of the Claret Jug was made, with the winner's "wife and son" coming in for a quick hug for the cameras.

"The biggest challenge for this stunt was the element of surprise," says Todd. "We worked hard to stay out of view of the players on the course, so we could swoop in all together and turn a normal hole into a major championship in a matter of seconds."

If only it was that quick to get a full-sized course ready for a tournament – maybe some IE agents could volunteer?



See footage from
the Mini-Golf
Open at [bit.ly/
ImprovEMini](http://bit.ly/ImprovEMini).





GREENS SPEED? SLOW IT DOWN!

Trying to make your greens faster? Think twice before listening to those members who have a need for speed. Their desire could be your demise. What is it about fast greens that is directly related to manhood?

Nearly everywhere I go, no matter the geographic region, I meet supers who have been tasked by members to make the putting greens faster.

But the non-agronomic individual, typically a low-handicap player, doesn't understand what he is asking of his superintendent, of himself, or of his golf course. Saying he wants the greens a foot faster, does he understand what it will mean to his game, let alone to lesser-skilled golfers? I doubt it.

And by trying to comply with this request, the superintendent could very well be his own worst enemy. Of course, you want to keep your job and please the members. But where do you draw the line?

I'm tired of seeing superintendents playing green-speed chicken, trying to outdo one another, with or without the resources and at the risk of losing turf. You know who you are. You're not doing the rest of us any favors by swinging for the fences all the time.

Compare the superintendent who lives at the edge with the one who has been around for a while – and wants to stay around – who wants his customers/members to come back, play again, and enjoy themselves, and who doesn't want to put any unnecessary stress on his course, especially in the hot summer months. Who do you want to be?

DESIGN. Green size, surface contours, pitch and slope – these design features affect green speed and the ability to set hole locations. Any pre-1960 golf course, built when green speed was not an issue, presents challenges due

to undulations and the era's construction methods.

There's a big difference as to where holes can be placed on the green – depending on pitch and slope – when you go from 10.5 to 11.5 on the Stimpmeter.

Speeding up greens takes away good-quality hole locations. That makes the game easier for the better player since most holes will eventually end up near the middle of the green.

And while we're talking about the Stimpmeter, just who is taking the

courses. Even private clubs will notice slower rounds on busy days. Consider investing in some lights for night golf.

FIRMNESS AND MOISTURE. Maintaining firm, smooth conditions is definitely the healthier choice for turfgrass than keeping it wet and soft. But firm and fast requires patience and resources, and the firmer and faster you want it, the more time, material, and manpower you need.

Furthermore, the practices necessary to achieve and maintain these conditions are invasive – cultivation,

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readings? Does this person really know what he's doing? I can speak with authority on this subject...as can my knees.

PLAYER ABILITY. Here's something you've probably noticed about golfers: They think they're much better than they really are. That self-delusion leads to an interesting fallacy about greens, that a "fast green" is more challenging. I don't believe it.

On fast greens, you hardly need to tap the ball to get it moving, so you're usually putting defensively. Slower greens require determining how hard to stroke the ball, how far will it roll, how much affect break will have – in short, the skills of putting. I don't know about you, but I like to be responsible for my putting success (or failure), rather than be at the mercy of super-slick greens.

PACE OF PLAY. Faster greens mean slower rounds and a snail's pace of play, particularly at daily-fee and resort

coring, sand top dressing, regular heavy rolling – all need to be conducted when the turf is healthy and growing. So, the faster the greens, the longer and more often the course will be taken out of play. How will your low-handicappers like that?

One more point about resources: Maintaining firm, fast turf requires labor, equipment, and resources means more money. Enough said.

STRESSED SURFACES. Speedy surfaces are stressed surfaces, and it's when turfgrass is stressed that some of the most common issues rear their ugly heads: nematodes, bacterial wilt/etiolation, and anthracnose. And don't forget the other effects of stress: hair loss, lack of sleep, and unhappy families.

There was a popular expression when I was growing up that sums it all: Speed Kills. In our industry, it can get you fired.

So slow down your greens for healthier turf – and your sanity. **GCI**

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TO HOST OR NOT TO HOST?

by Tim Moraghan



GCI's Tim Moraghan breaks down the pros and cons of whether your club should host a big tournament.

“The downside to all this feel-good emotional outpouring is you now must open your gates to the world.”

Every golf course owner, club member, and golf professional who has watched a big golf event on TV or hiked the grounds during a Tour event or major championship has asked himself: “Can our club do this? What would it take? How do we get one?”

I worked at the USGA in tournament preparation for 21 years, during which time I helped review hundreds of golf courses as potential venues. Not surprisingly, I was frequently asked for my recommendations or insights on how to be selected to host a national championship, from the U.S. Women’s Mid-Am to the U.S. Open. Today, as an independent consultant, I’m still assessing golf courses and providing direction to clubs thinking of pursuing an event.

What’s the single most important lesson I’ve learned: Be careful what you wish for. Hosting a significant tournament is a very generous act and can be a terrific experience. However, it can also be a nightmare for everyone involved.

There is no definitive book or website on the subject, no magic formula to help you decide if hosting is a smart or stupid decision for your club/course. But let’s pretend we met at a cocktail party and you, Mr. or Mrs. Club Member, asked me if I thought it was a good idea for Immaculate Conception Country Club to throw its hat into the ring to host a USGA or PGA, LPGA, Nationwide, or other professional event. How would I respond?

I’d grab another Grey Goose and run down a list of questions that everyone at the club must ask themselves, the literal who, what, where, how, when, and most important, why! Answering “no” to one or more of the following indicates areas of potential concern or probable issues with your club, course, or membership/staff.

Is a majority of the membership in agreement with the “sub-committee” that advocates hosting an event?

Will you allow the host organization’s

to alter your course or club facilities?

Are you willing to open your property to the public?

Is the club able to stand the intense scrutiny of media, social organizations, environmental agencies, and community politics? Do you want to?

Does the club have the financial resources to make design and structural changes to the golf course and property, and then keep them in place after the tournament is gone?

Will the membership be willing to give up use of its golf course and facilities for one to six months during the preparation, execution, and post-event clean-up?

If your club has another course, will the membership accept its probable destruction as it becomes parking lots, television compounds, tents, trailers, roadways, and vendor storage?

Does the club have the community reach and resources to attract enough volunteers to assist in holding the event?

Are there enough competent, capable,

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COVER STORY

“If I’ve seen it once, I’ve seen it a thousand times: Clubs see hosting as a chance to reap a windfall that will keep them solvent for years to come.”

and dedicated members to give up their personal time for two to four years? If not, are you willing to hire those people?

Will your members/staff give up their family and personal time for countless meetings, site trips, and managing the event?

Is your staff professional enough, capable enough, and able to withstand the pressures and stresses of hosting an event? More on this later.

Is the membership willing to engage in a few years of tactical butt-kissing – of association higher-ups, association not-so-higher-ups, on-site staff, outside consultants, vendors, volunteers, and eventually even the players?

Those are just the questions I’d think of while chatting over hors d’oeuvres. I’m sure you can come up with others, many specific to your club, resort, or facility.

Now let’s say you’re leaning toward hosting. Good for you! Or is it? I’m not trying to dissuade you, but strongly suggest that you consider pros and cons in the following arenas.

Recognition and Visibility

PRO Hosting a national event brings with it prestige and many other positives for your club, its members, and guests. Hosting a major places your facility at the center of the golf universe from the moment its selection is announced until the last putt drops on the final day of play. Then there is the glow of international television and other media exposure. The club will gain the support of local businesses and emergency services departments. Everyone associated with the club will gain hundreds of new best friends, especially if they want tickets. If you’re in a small market without other major sports franchises, your event will become the center of community attention and economic impact, a rallying point for local businesses from bagel shops to country inns. Neighboring towns will want to be part of the action, as well. It’s all pretty heady stuff.

CON The downside to all this feel-good emotional outpouring is you now must open your gates to the world. The media will look into your membership policies and financial solvency. Even small, local events should expect to draw investigation and inspection. Clubs that used to host big events have taken themselves out of contention, preferring to be left alone: Cases in point include Cypress Point, Butler National, and Shoal Creek. I sometimes wonder why Augusta National continues to put up with the scrutiny.



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COVER STORY

Golf Course Improvements

PRO Collaborating with a major golf organization can lead to terrific enhancements to your course. They may engage a world-famous architect to review your property, study its history, and make long-overdue and desired changes to its infrastructure. Club committees and staff likely will work side-by-side with experts in rules, set-up, operations, and agronomy who will raise the profile of your club and unearth the hidden gem that is your course.

CON It's often the case that great things happen to the host club but without anyone from the club having any real input. Disagreements can surface about what is architecturally correct or the original architect's intent. Outside staff moves in and takes over, ordering where to place tents, parking lots, and TV compounds, while issuing decrees on the expected agronomic conditioning—often without regard to local practices, environmental sensitivity, or the weather. (The staff is focused on one week; the rest of you have to think about the other 51.) Everything is fair game for change, from the front entrance to the type of turf on your greens.

Money

PRO If I've seen it once, I've seen it a thousand times: Clubs see hosting as a chance to reap a windfall that will keep them solvent for years to come. As a result, the shared sacrifice can inspire teamwork and harmony among a membership. The expected profits are earmarked for necessary repairs and upgrading, relieve pressure on members for dues increases and assessments.

CON Don't start spending too quickly: From signing a contract to seeing dime one can take years. And, if the event does make the club money, members may want to do it again as a way of making even more, which can become a dangerous – and not always prosperous – cycle. Furthermore, in this weak economy promised gains don't always materialize. Budgets shrink, sponsors don't buy in, attendance is weak... Your club may make a much smaller profit than anticipated, even if the host organization pays for requested changes and improvements. Can you afford the worst-case scenario?

(continued on page 52)

