

If It's Tournament Time, It's Cleanup

It takes a lot of blood, sweat, tears *and* planning to prep your course for the member-guest, the club championship and other events

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEO MICHAEL



BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

Remember when you were a kid and guests were coming to your house? Maybe it was only your Uncle Arnie, your Aunt Janet and your cousin Jack. But your parents toiled like a couple of carpenter ants to tidy up the place. And it wasn't just the normal Saturday morning quick chores to do before lunch. *This* was a Clean Fest that lasted nearly all day. Geez, it was like your parents were readying the house for the president.

Superintendents readying their golf courses for member-guest tournaments and other events can now empathize with their parents' plights to ready their homes for visitors. Back then, they might not have understood why their parents created such a fuss. But they do now.

That's because the prez *is* coming over — as in the club president. And he's bringing a throng of important people with him — the members. These are the people who judge you for what you do, so you'd better have your house, err golf course, in order.

"You want your course to look so good that even the members are surprised how good it looks," says Steve

Time

Numbers, superintendent of Westfield Group CC in Westfield Center, Ohio, who has hosted his share of tournaments, from the Junior PGA Championship to the club championship to the member-guest.

Yes, in this case, you *do* judge a book by its cover. Aesthetics are indispensable when it comes to tournaments, superintendents agree. “You try and put your best foot forward for all of your tournaments, especially your in-house tournaments, because you want to impress your own clients,” says Christopher Ayers, certified golf course superintendent of Lakewood CC in Rockville, Md.

But, like your parents hustling to clean the castle, it’s not easy to get the course sparkling and ready to play. It takes a lot of blood, sweat and, yes, maybe even some tears. It also takes a lot of time and patience. And it takes planning ... make that PLANNING.

Sunday best

It’s time to edge the bunkers, weed the flowerbeds, paint the benches, trim the trees, dye the ponds, cut new cups, and bring out the special tee markers and pin flags.

Welcome to your course’s member-guest tournament.



Courses host myriad events — including outings, club championships, amateur events and professional tournaments — but the member-guest is the biggest of them all for private clubs, unless you’re Augusta in April. The member-guest is the tournament where superintendents want their courses looking their absolute best.

“I look at the member-guest as a separate golf tournament,” says Keith Ihms, certified superintendent of Bent Tree CC in Dallas. “The member-guest is a little more about showing off the facility than it is about playability.”

It’s about doing all the little things, such as striping the fairways and edging the bunkers, to get a course looking as good as Joe Millionaire in a \$1,000 suit.

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"You're often judged on the playability of your golf course," Ayers says. "But this time it's about aesthetics."

Ihms says he makes it a point to spend more time on the course during the practice round of a member-guest so he can talk with members and meet their guests. "The members like to introduce me as their superintendent," he says.

While the member-guest showcases a golf course's beauty, it's not the only tournament for which superintendents dress their courses for success. Numbers has Westfield looking its best for the Junior PGA Championship, which the club will host for the third time this summer.

To prepare for the event, Numbers organizes a cleaning party among members to spruce up the course. Members pay \$25 to clean it and party afterward.

"We have an adopt-the-hole party the Friday before the tournament begins," Numbers says.

"We assign groups of members to clean up different holes. We have a contest to see which group brings in the most pine cones, sticks and paper.

These people drag in a ton of stuff."

The members feel good about what they've done, Numbers says. They're proud to host the tournament, even though they lose the course for a week, he adds.

The playability factor

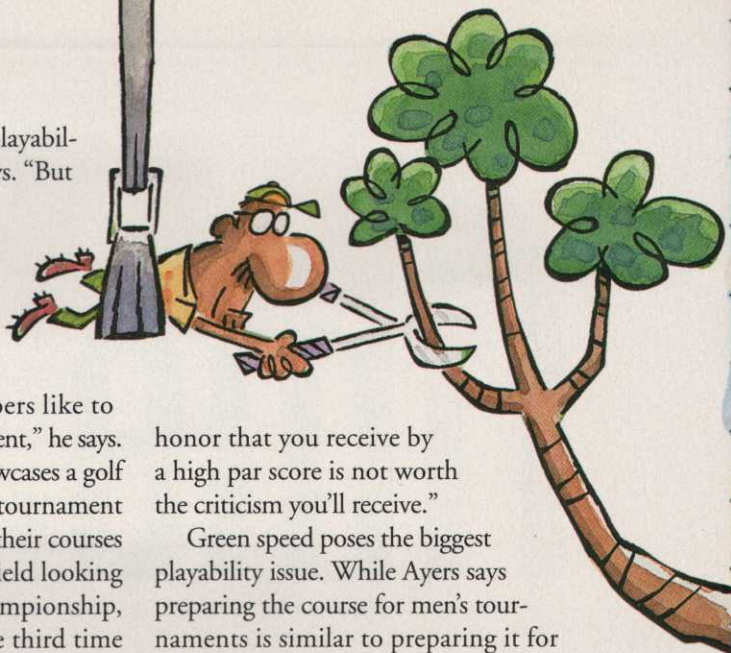
For competitive tournaments, professional or amateur, a course should be judged on how it plays, states John Miller, certified superintendent of the Golf Club at Yankee Trace

GC in Beaver Creek, Ohio. A superintendent's goal

should not be to set up the course to compete with

g o l f e r s , Miller adds "Let golfers compete with themselves," he

says. "Don't try to trick up the course. The



honor that you receive by a high par score is not worth the criticism you'll receive."

Green speed poses the biggest playability issue. While Ayers says preparing the course for men's tournaments is similar to preparing it for women's events, the big difference between the two is green speed.

"You try not to do anything too dramatically different for the men that you would do for the women and vice versa," Ayers says. "But the women don't want lightning-fast greens."

Green speed will be different for different events. But speed, ball roll and consistency on greens are vital to the success of any tournament, Ayers adds.

The bottom line, says Ayers, who has hosted junior tournaments and local amateur events in addition to in-house tournaments, is that a superintendent must present proper course playability in accordance with the caliber of players.

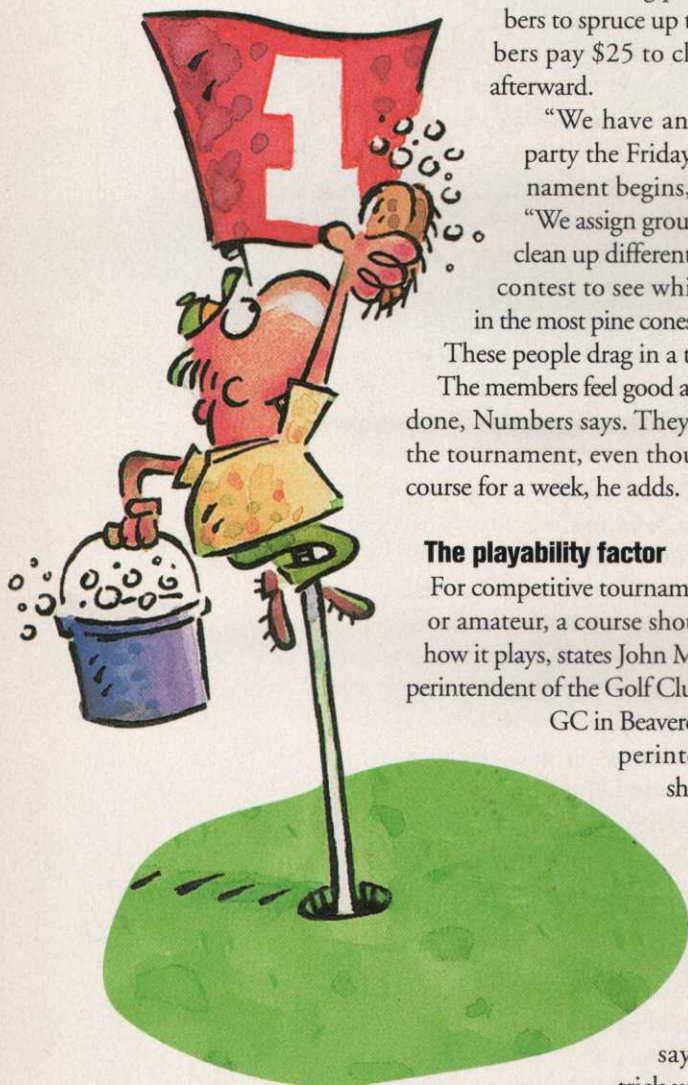
"You don't want greens stimping at 12 feet for 13- or 14-year-old junior golfers," he says. "You tailor the golf course to the clientele of the tournament."

Bent Tree holds its club championship at the end of the season. The key to preparing the course for the event is to ensure its playability is consistent to what it has been throughout the season, Ihms says. That way the players can use the skills they've honed.

"If they were playing greens that ran 9 feet all summer, we don't want to go to a speed of 11 feet just for those three days of the tournament," Ihms says. "We don't try and alter the playability of the course too much for the club championship."

Getting the rough ready for tournaments is another tricky component of the process.

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The rough should be a tad higher than normal for local professional tournaments, but not too high.

"You don't want to go so high that you end up affecting the daily play of your members immediately following the tournament," Ayers warns.

A happy medium is what Ayers calls a "happy height."

"The happy height is the height when I don't hear golfers complain about not being able to find their balls," he says. "But there are differences between the various heights of cut



from fairways to the intermediate rough to the rough."

For fairways, mowing height can simply be adjusted in accordance to the type of tournament, Ayers notes.

"If you want the golf course to play shorter, you might cut it tighter," he says. "If you want it to play longer, you simply bump up the height of cut."

Tips from a Tournament Prep Vet

John Miller, certified superintendent of the Golf Club at Yankee Trace GC in Beavercreek, Ohio, is a veteran when it comes to preparing for tournaments. Last December at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference & Show in Columbus, Ohio, Miller presented the seminar, "Preparing Your Golf Course for Tournaments."

Below, Miller shares some of his philosophy about preparing for a tournament. His advice is taken from a manual he handed out during his presentation.

Green speed — How will you get to your target speed? Will you topdress, roll, use growth regulators, lower the height of cut or use a combination of these practices? How much water will you put on before the event and during the event? What practices and what schedule will you use to maintain that speed?

Green height — You must determine a green height that will allow you to keep healthy greens while achieving the desired green speed. Many factors enter into the decision of selecting a green height. Species and grass variety will give you a range of heights you can achieve. Disease resistance and recoverability of the grass will also affect how low you can go.

Tee, fairway and rough heights — You need to take into consideration two things: the health of the turf and the type of golfer playing in the tournament. If the turf is weak, keep the cutting heights up. If it's healthy, cut the turf to the golfers' abilities.

Topdressing — If possible, put your last application of topdressing on seven to 10 days before the tournament. This will allow time for the sand to work into the putting surface so the greens are rolling as smooth as possible.

Marking the golf course — Make sure you have an adequate knowledge of the Rules of Golf and look for problem areas in advance of the event. Have plenty of yellow and red hazard stakes on hand, and have out-of-bounds areas defined by white stakes prior to the event.



Challenges abound

As soon as you find out you're having a tournament, you need to start preparing for it, Miller says. That means upgrading your planning and communications skills, he stresses.

"You need to set goals for your event, and those will vary from course to course," Miller says. "It might just be an overall look you want to establish for your course. But once you establish your goals, make sure to share them with your staff, and let them know what you expect from them."

Ayers' advice is to plan, prioritize and schedule. In essence, it's vital to get ahead.

"We start some maintenance practices as much as 30 days prior to an in-house event," Ayers says. "We start with little things, like landscaping certain areas. The fewer things you have to do the week of the event, the less last-minute details you'll have and the better."

A few tricks of the trade, Ayers notes, as the tournament nears:

- Make an iron application to the fairways a few days before the event to enhance their color.
- Use a plant growth regulator on some areas shortly before the event so the entire course doesn't need to be mowed during the event.

Come tournament time, it's also time to utilize the good relationships you have with other superintendents and equipment distributors, Ayers says. Don't be shy to ask them for favors.

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“Let golfers compete with themselves. Don't try to trick up the course.”

JOHN MILLER
CERTIFIED SUPERINTENDENT
GOLF CLUB AT YANKEE TRACE
BEAVERCREEK, OHIO

PGA Tour's Scott on Proper Planning and Executing

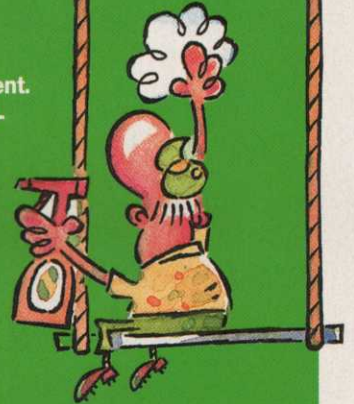
Jon Scott, vice president of agronomy for the PGA Tour, knows a few things about getting ready for a big tournament. But tournament size doesn't matter when it comes to planning and execution, Scott stresses.

“Whether you're talking about the PGA Tour or the member-guest tournament, there's a planning process to go through,” Scott says. “You need to follow that process step by step. If you do that, you'll have a successful event. If you don't do that, there's going to be [trouble]. The planning stage is the most important part!”

Scott warns superintendents not to implement decisions if there are no concrete plans to support them.

“The most important part of what you're going to do is planning, not executing,” he says. “If you're executing without a plan, you're reacting. If you're reacting, you're behind the ball. If you're behind the ball, you never catch up.”

— Larry Aylward, Editor



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“You might borrow a piece of equipment from a fellow superintendent so you have a backup,” Ayers says. “You might try to borrow a greens mower to help you double-cut the greens. You should certainly arrange to use back-up equipment from distributors. They tend to help superintendents whenever they can.”

Getting ready for a tournament is never easy, especially for a member-guest. Not only are workers sprucing up the course for the big

event, they're often taking care of the regular maintenance that comes with daily play. And, no, there are no additional workers or more hours in the day for the usual employees to get the work done.

But preparation does get easier after you've experienced it a few times, Ayers says.

“After you do it for a few years, you get a feel for what members and golfers want,” he says. “You also get an idea of how long it takes for you to accomplish certain things.”

Gettin' pumped

Ayers feels the pressure that comes with tournament time. But it's healthy pressure, and it pumps him up to do his best. Ayers knows what's expected of him, and he strives to deliver.

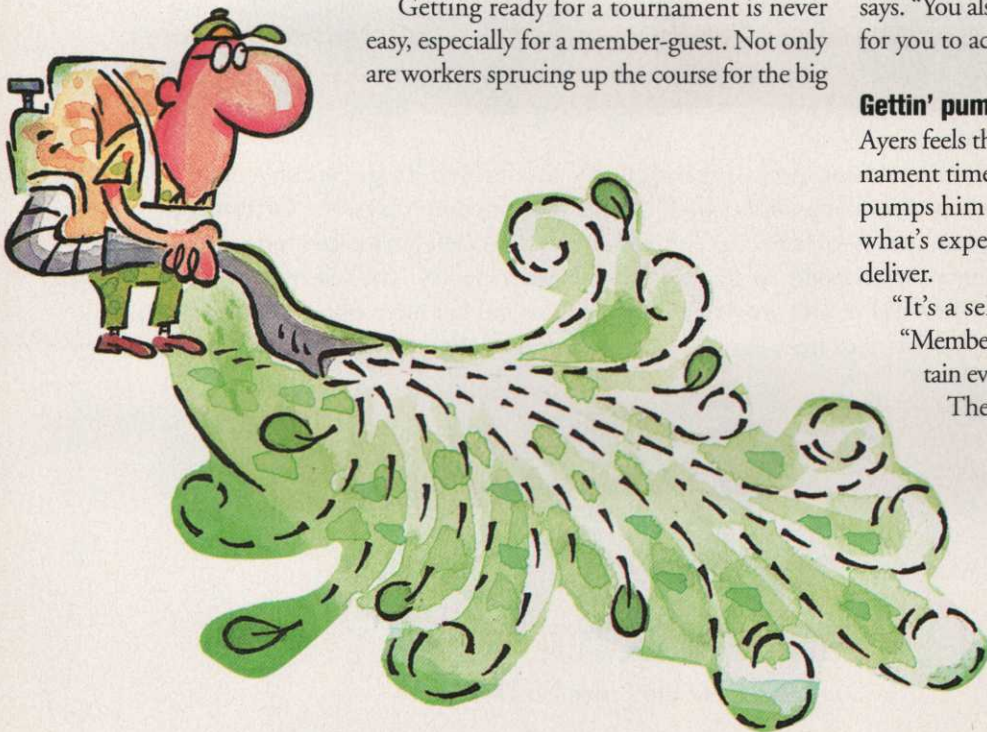
“It's a self-imposed pressure,” he says.

“Members want the course to peak for certain events, especially the member-guest.

They want the facility to shine.

“A superintendent is often judged by his ability to peak the golf course for a tournament,” Ayers continues. “That's the nature of the beast, but it's a motivator.”

While Ayers places pressure on himself, he doesn't place pressure on his crew members. Ayers realizes that his



crew members extend themselves during tournaments by working extra hours, and he wants them to be relaxed.

But Ayers does want crew members to be fired up for tournaments, and he hopes they channel their positive energy into motivation to do the best jobs they can.

“We enjoy getting the course to peak, even though it’s difficult, time-consuming and a mental strain,” Ayers says, “It’s like a game. We definitely turn it up a notch for the tournaments.”

To get the point across to crew members that they need to be at their best, Ihms doesn’t give a Knute Rockne-type speech — he throws a party. “We let them know that we appreciate their work and that we’re asking them for a little extra effort for the next 10 to 14 days,” Ihms says.

Ihms says he employs a bunch of go-getters. Most crew members have been with Bent Tree for about seven years, and it doesn’t take much to motivate them. “They have a lot of pride and take a lot of personal satisfaction



in the work they do,” Ihms says.

In fact, Bent Tree is divided into three sections with separate leaders and crews. The groups compete against each other to see who can maintain their sections best. “They really get carried away come tournament time,” Ihms says.

His crew members are the key to a tournament’s success, Ihms adds.

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It's Cleanup Time

"You want your course to look so good that even the members are surprised how good it looks."

STEVE NUMBERS
SUPERINTENDENT
WESTFIELD GROUP CC
WESTFIELD CENTER, OHIO



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"They're out there doing the work and making it happen," he says. "If they don't take pride in what they're doing, [the course] is not going to turn out like we want."

At Westfield, Numbers says crew workers are a bit pampered for the Junior PGA — and deservedly so. They receive two new golf shirts to wear during the tournament and to keep afterward. They also get free meals and are allowed to work overtime, something Westfield usually doesn't permit its workers.

"They know the tournament is important," Numbers states. "We ask them to step up and be at their best for the entire week. And they tend to step up — and it's fun to see it happen."

Do look back

After the tournament, go back and sit down with your staff and talk about the things you did right, Miller says. Also look for the areas you need to improve.

"You need to get input from everyone who was involved in the event," Miller says. "Your crew members will give you the most input because they'll be the most critical of your course and themselves. They will tell you what they think they did right and wrong."

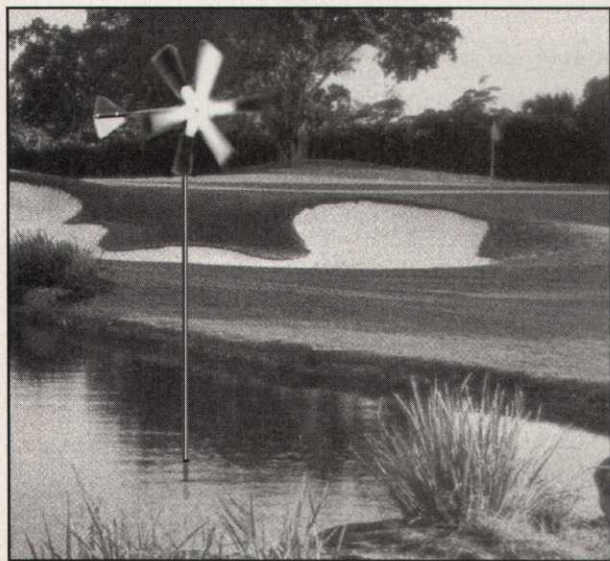
After getting input from the pro, tournament director and others involved, make sure to share that feedback with the crew, Miller says. And don't just share the bad information.

"If you've got a number of bad things to tell them, tell them the bad things first and leave them with something good at the end," he adds. ■

You can reach Aylward, the author of this article, at laylward@advanstar.com.

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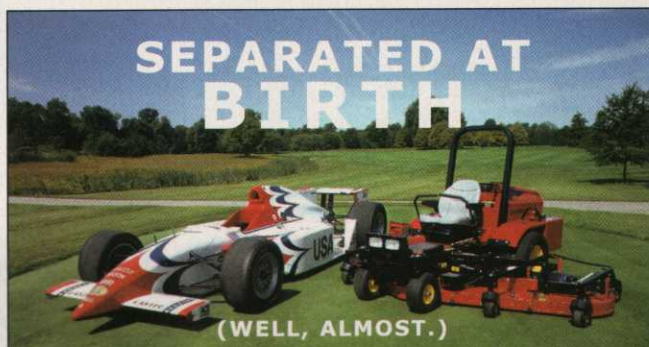
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