

## Off The Fringe

# Genuine Jim

NICOL HOSTS A SECOND PGA CHAMPIONSHIP, BUT, NO, HE'S NOT MORE RELAXED ABOUT IT



Times have changed, and Nicol might not head South every winter, but he's enjoying life as a superintendent. *Golfdom* caught up with him recently to talk about hosting his second PGA Championship.

**I**t seems like just yesterday we profiled Jim Nicol in *Golfdom* as a preview for the 84th PGA Championship at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn. But it was seven years ago! The 57-year-old Nicol and Hazeltine are back this year to host another PGA Championship, set for Aug. 10-16, at the Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed track.

Nicol is a Minnesota boy, who grew up in St. Cloud, about 75 miles northwest of the Twin Cities. He began his golf course maintenance career when he was 14, mowing greens part-time at St. Cloud Country Club. Nicol joined the course's maintenance crew full-time soon afterward. He enjoyed the job and loved working outside. He began to entertain thoughts of a career in the field when he graduated from high school.

"Every year [after the season], I watched the [St. Cloud] superintendent get in his car and drive to Florida for the winter," Nicol said. "I thought to myself, 'This guy has it figured out.'"

**Are you a little more relaxed preparing for the tournament this time around?** Not really. There is always some new challenge, and one should never relax under these circumstances.

**What's the key to preparing for a tournament like this?** Surrounding yourself with good people, which I believe I have.

**What's your biggest agronomic challenge on the golf course in getting ready for the tournament?** Making sure the course will be able to handle the intensity for seven days in August.

**Last time the PGA Championship was held here, you had an uncooperative and cold spring to grow grass. How was the spring this year for growing grass?** Not good. We have winter damage that is slow to recover due to the cold, dry spring. We have been too dry as Bethpage was too wet.

**In 2002, the course played 7,350 yards. What will it play this year, and what changes have occurred to the course?** The course

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## **PRIVILEGE** *Continued from page 8*

sions scheduled for this day moved past us and to the gravesite of another American hero. Then we turned on our machines and got back to work, reminded that, on this most hallowed ground, we were united as a team, united as an industry and united as Americans.

The next day, many of us traded our work clothes for coats and ties to visit lawmakers on Capitol Hill. I had meetings with Pennsylvania Congressman Jim Gerlach and with aides for New Jersey Congressmen Rush Holt and Rob Andrews.

I wish I could say I left Washington feeling that our messages concerning pending water legislation, health care for small businesses and immigration labor laws were heard loud and clear. There are obviously some lawmakers who understand the issues and others who just don't get it when it comes to the contributions of our industry and the corresponding need for their support. It was a strong reminder we need to continue the education process, and that the 13<sup>th</sup> Renewal & Remembrance event can't be our last. ■

## **JIM** *Continued from page 10*

will play somewhere around 7,650 yards. There are too many changes to list since 2002. We repositioned 18 bunkers, added 10 bunkers and added length on 12 holes.

**In 50 words or less, describe how the course's greens will play for the tournament?** They will be at championship speeds and fairly firm. They are bentgrass/*Poa* (until next summer), and our main goal is have them smooth. There are subtle breaks, which make them a little tricky when the speed is up.

**Has Jim Nicol changed at all since the last PGA Championship?**

My hair is a lighter color, and I might have mellowed some.

**How do you handle the pressure that comes with staging a tournament like this?** Stay focused and remain true to what the mission is.

Get some sleep and take a little time for family and friends.

You also need to depend on the lead crew members.

**Who's your favorite player on the PGA Tour and why?** Tim Herron is a great guy who I have followed since his high school days. He calls me "Jimmy" and gives me a cigar once in while when he is out here. Tom Lehman is also very kind but no cigars.

**What will you do Sunday night after the tournament?** Have a short celebration with the crew and get ready for the outing on Monday morning. I'm going to take the following weekend off (I hope) to fish and ... ■



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