

New York, New York

If you watched the 2009 U.S. Open, you know it was one hellish week for everyone involved. Miserable rains leading up to the event returned Thursday morning to wreak havoc on Bethpage State Park.

Has there ever been a more brutal set of tournament circumstances for a superintendent and crew to deal with? Doubtful.

Yet Craig Currier, his 60-person staff and the 100-plus volunteers somehow held the Black Course together, squeegeeing enough to prevent a Tuesday finish. Inside-the-ropers could only marvel at the firmness of the non-USGA greens and shudder at the thought of so little sleep working those oddball hours — even by golf course maintenance standards.

For the second time in seven years, the folks at Bethpage presented a state-owned course worthy of a national championship. And though the rain-delayed event finished a day late, Bethpage produced a quality winner in Lucas Glover. He captured the Open trophy with grace, humility and eyes sore from finishing four books in a week.

I spent the week traveling to the Black Course via the incredibly efficient Long Island Railroad from New York City while most of my colleagues languished out on the island at a hotel that dared to run out of certain wines and beers. My experience proved eye-opening.

The city that never sleeps never really changes either. It's gritty, loud, funny, overwhelming and energizing. Yet the infrastructure is grimy at best, dilapidated at worst. Yet it all man-

GOLF CAN LEARN FROM THIS GRITTY, LOUD, FUNNY, OVERWHELMING AND ENERGIZING CITY THAT HOSTED THE 2009 U.S. OPEN AT BETHPAGE BLACK

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



ages to work and everyone marches on like extras in some sort of strange little movie set, oblivious to its faults as long as they get from point A to B.

Talking to the golf fans attending the Open, I was impressed by the sense that they aren't ashamed of the city's stuck-in-time, Gotham aesthetic. In many cases they are downright proud that the place is so unpolished.

And here's the unvarnished truth: golf needs to learn from New York City.

A lot less polish and varnish will not kill the game. Even in these tough times, golf's still too popular and too good to be undermined by a few rough edges. Of course this doesn't mean that golfers will accept all-out lousy course conditions, it just means that the combination of a massive recession and a greater demand for environmental sensitivity means we are seeing fewer golfers panic over a little bit of scruffiness.

That said — massive segue here — I've spent time at some run-down muni's lately and I'm sad to say that not all of our subways are running on time despite a golf industry swelling with knowledge and expertise.

It was heartening to find out about local superintendents who loan equip-

ment, supplies and expertise to golf's less fortunate. Couple that with the incredible volunteer spirit at Bethpage and there is not enough recognition of the efforts many are making to help out the public game.

While golf has no shortage of slick, feel-good, over-marketed outreach programs, I've never seen a press release about superintendents at clubs helping out their less fortunate neighbors.

While I know it's not the superintendent's nature to brag, if you don't mind, nominations and tips would be appreciated. Tell me about golf industry folks who are helping out, whether it's donating some sod or sharing a sprayer. You can e-mail me at geoffshac@me.com.

Maybe we can find a way to share this information online and inspire even more of this vital outreach. Because if golf wants to survive this recession, it needs to make sure that the game is functioning at the most basic level.

We need to keep our subways running.

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