

Dumb and Dumber

I learned a valuable lesson while attending this year's Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.: Tour professionals have absolutely no clue about what goes into preparing a golf course for a tournament.

I know, I know — the exclusives you read like this in the pages of *Golfdom* can be downright shocking. Many of you are saying right now: Geoff, how can you say that? Golf pros are some of the smartest people on the planet. They make a lot of money batting a ball around and wearing an unusually high number of logos, so they *must* know what they're talking about — especially when the topic is golf course maintenance.

Nope. Listen to this story.

They had a miserable winter in Ponte Vedra Beach. It was cold, nasty and pretty much unprecedented. TPC Sawgrass no longer overseeds, so it can present an all warm-season grass course for the tournament's May date. Problem was, the bermudagrass had 15 weeks of dormancy this year. Normally, there's none.

Online rumors and the occasional viral photo circulated online showing a virtually unrecognizable course. As much as some of us would love to see the TPC return to its original medieval Pete Dye aesthetics — complete with massive pine-scrub areas, rough sandy waste and an overall vital environmental statement from the PGA Tour — this was not the kind of rustic anyone wanted to see.

Golf course superintendent Tom Vlach and TPC course supervisor Clay Breazeale had to rally their crew

PGA TOUR PLAYERS JUST DON'T GET IT WHEN IT COMES TO AGRONOMICS. WHAT HAPPENED AT THE PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP IS EVIDENCE OF THAT

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



and pull off a maintenance miracle to get the heavily played course ready. With help from PGA Tour agronomists Cal Roth and Paul Vermeulen and a crew of 75, the remedies included everything from black sand, tarping and, most glaring of all, a last-minute resodding of the famous island green 17th that would probably impact one of the tournament's traditional hole locations, not to mention show up on television.

Miraculously, they pulled it off. The course was in sensational condition for the tournament. Most media noted it in preview stories, and the PGA Tour's communications department even offered up Vlach and others beforehand to tell this miracle story. A few articles were written and the tour's Florida residents were well aware of what the TPC faced in preparing for the Players Championship.

While early-week comments were mildly effusive in praise, there were plenty of grumblings about the course being a bit spotty. I, having not seen the course when I first read these comments, was shocked to arrive on Wednesday and find it in immaculate condition.

Some nice rains on Tuesday and Wednesday softened the course, lead-

ing to a scoring onslaught. So players suggested the course be firmer, apparently unaware that rain and high humidity make it difficult to firm up turf.

I know, I know, this is complicated stuff.

But things turned downright hilarious when, after a week of intense mowing and rolling, a forecasted cold front blew through and delivered dryness that finally helped bring the firm Sunday greens everyone wanted. And what did players do Sunday night? They complained!

Most media defended Vlach et. al, but one outlet irresponsibly floated stupid theories about the PGA Tour's intentions or inability to present a more consistent test.

Never have we hit such a low point of professional golfing ignorance. The game has apparently reached a point where the PGA Tour player is so spoiled, so ignorant and so downright dim that the slightest bit of information is out of his reach.

It's a cryin' shame for all of those who work in the golf course maintenance profession.

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