

Off The Fringe

Greens Damage Drama at PGA Championship

BY SETH JONES

Wednesday night damage steals headlines at otherwise pristine Atlanta Athletic Club.

JOHNS CREEK, GA. — All week the players had been raving about the conditions at the 93rd PGA Championship, especially the perfection of the new Diamond zoysia fairways, at the Atlanta Athletic Club. But a Wednesday night mishap suddenly stole the headlines, and the maintenance crew found themselves on the Golf Channel at a moment they'd rather not have been seen.

Two greens mowing mishaps gouged two different spots on the No. 14 green. Yes, two different mowers, within moments of each other, both had mishaps. Another mishap strangely happened a short while later when the crew had moved on to the No. 17 green.

"Something occurred that I've never seen before and I can only speculate on what happened," Ken Man-

gum, director of golf course and grounds, told the world via a Thursday press conference broadcast live on the Golf Channel. "Nothing mechanical. No operator error... and we've checked the mowers, we've checked the people, we've checked everything."

The only answer Mangum could think of was that a spike in humidity Wednesday evening caused the mower brush to grab and dig into the green.

When Mangum arrived at the 14th green to survey the damage on Wednesday at approximately 7 p.m., the look on his face was sheer terror.

He didn't scream or shout, though — he went into damage control mode and looked for a way to fix it.

The crew quickly went to the driving range with a sod cutter and took some of a target green to replace the damaged areas. Within an hour the areas were fixed with new turf.

"We got some sod. Sod it,

water it, tamp it down, go home. You won't even be able to tell it happened," Kasey Kauff, superintendent of the Highlands Course at Atlanta Athletic Club, told *Golfdom*

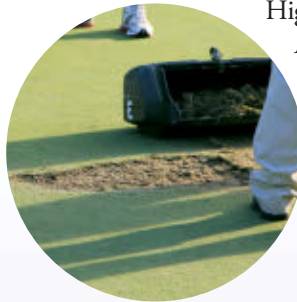
that evening. The damaged areas were played as "ground under repair" (Rule 25-1) for the entire championship.

Overall, players raved about the course condition.

"I don't think we've played a course in this good of shape all year," Jim Furyk told *Golfdom* on Tuesday before the championship. "You have to stand on a fairway to see. They're like carpets.... It's as good of fairways as I've ever played on, ever."

Mangum was proactive against further incidents by removing the brushes from the greens mowers.

"It's a little bit like cutting yourself with a razor on your wedding day," Mangum said. "But it'll be fine, and our team did a great job of repairing it." ■



Ken Mangum, CGCS (left) answers a reporter's question during a press conference while the PGA's Kelly Elbin watches.

