

Major professional golf tournaments are to golf course management what Grand Prix racing is to Detroit. PGA Tour events and major USGA championships provide superintendents with a chance to push the envelope in turf management.

The intensity required to create the desired conditions for professional tournaments is not normally found in daily course management, just like driving a Formula 1 race car at 200 mph is different from a morning work commute.

But by rising to the challenge that golf tournaments bring, we can improve our normal daily management activities.

Over the years I have observed several tournament preparations in Ohio and surrounding states. I live in Columbus, Ohio, home to Muirfield Village Golf Club and The Scarlet Course at The Ohio State University. Respectively, those courses host the Memorial Tournament and the Nationwide Children's Hospital event. That means every year I get a bird's eye view of tournament preparations.

By observing, following and listening to agronomists and superintendents over the years — most recently superintendents Paul B. Latshaw at Muirfield Village and Dennis Bowser at The Ohio State University — I have watched what it takes to have tournament-condition turf.

I thought I might share a few key observations from my “tournament experience.”

1 Course conditions change daily. At first glance “conditions change” seems obvious. However, the change I am talking about is subtle, occurring, for example, on putting greens during the course of the tournament. Based on measurements done by PGA Tour agronomists with the help of Latshaw and Bowser, green firmness is either increasing or decreasing. Rarely does it remain constant.

2 The idea that my greens are X firm on Monday and will remain so throughout the week doesn't happen, although many pro golfers and officials may think so. Thus, how firm and fast your greens are on Monday or Tuesday needs to be

Prepping for the Professionals

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



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considered in light of what the firmness will be tournament weekend. Tournament superintendents often ask themselves, “Am I on schedule for meeting Sunday's desired green speed?”

3 Communication is different. PGA Tour events are slightly different from USGA and R&A events. One difference is, the players run the PGA Tour and pay Tour officials. Therefore, the PGA Tour wants the focus of tournament week to be on the golfers, not on golf course conditions.

Successful host superintendents communicate constantly with Tour officials, conveying course conditions and how they might influence course setup. In addition, comments from touring pros are always sought and considered.

4 Successful tournament superintendents are good teachers. They are able to communicate with staff and volunteers regarding job assignments. From Monday, “Training Day,” through the end of the tournament, superintendents take the time to explain and show their crews what to do.

5 How superintendents motivate staff is not a simple formula. It appears to me that most successful Tour superintendents share a keen interest in their staffs and volunteers and keep them fully engaged during the week. That may be through simple things, such as asking for their thoughts on course conditions, providing a word of encouragement or just acknowledging their work. The superintendents I have observed often lead by example.

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