

Valderrama Golf Club and the 1999 World Golf Championship



By **Charles Ocepek**, Grounds Superintendent, GE/Marquette Medical Systems

Editor's Note: This feature should be entitled "From Across the Atlantic" since Charlie Ocepek's story took place in Spain. Charlie experienced a dream come true, as this interesting article demonstrates. A self-described golf nut, Charlie, a 1972 Penn State grad, recently has worked part-time for Wayne Otto for the privilege of playing golf at Ozaukee on Mondays. He was Wayne's assistant for couple of years in the late 1960s. Danny Quast got Charlie to roll Medina's greens for the PGA last summer. That led to a trip to Spain you will want to read about here.

Thanks to Charlie for writing it. And special thanks to Jake Renner for suggesting that he do so! It closely resembles a journal of tourney activities from the golf course shop.

In addition to Ozaukee, Charlie has worked at The Springs and at Scotland Golf Course, in both cases as the golf course superintendent.

In August, I had the chance to roll the greens at Medina Country Club for Danny Quast during the PGA Championship. I used the Salsco Model 09010 gas powered Greens Roller. Mr. Jamie Patino, superintendent and owner of the Valderrama Golf Club in Costa Del Sol, Spain, saw the roller in action and asked me about it. Following a brief discussion, after the PGA tournament, he invited me to come to Spain to demonstrate the roller on his course before and during the World Golf Championship in early November.

The Valderrama golf course has mostly cork oak trees lining the fairways and the greens. Its pumphouse is equipped with three 75-horsepower turbine pumps which feed 3,700 sprinkler heads that water the fair-

ways, green, tees and roughs. The greens and approaches are Penncross. The fairways and tees are Bermuda. The bunkers were filled with white crushed marble.

On Monday, October 25th, at 5:30 a.m. Mr. Patino held a meeting with all of the course maintenance crew members to discuss the plans for the day's activities and to lay out the schedule of activities leading up to and during the tournament. Green cutting was scheduled for 5:30 a.m., well before dawn. Lights had been installed in the trees surrounding the greens. The cutting heights for the tournament were 0.145 inches for the greens, 9 millimeters for the fairways and 8 millimeters for the tees. The plan was to cut the greens and approaches with the Toro 1000 machines. The fairways were to be cut with the Toro 3200D machines in a double cut pattern. The temperature was from 70 to 75 degrees F. It rained over five inches during the first three days after my arrival.

Mr. Patino followed this routine each day, starting with the 5:30 a.m. meeting and then going out to the number 10 green to whip the dew off the grass as his way of checking the condition of the course, before it was

mowed. He had banned all golf carts from the course after October 4th, and all play after the 21st. On day 1, October 25th, we were unable to roll the greens because of the excessive moisture. Due to the rain, we had to edge and shovel up all 98 bunkers.

When the rain stopped, the greens began to dry out. We began cutting the greens with the Toro 1000 machines in a double cut pattern. This was followed with a cleanup cut with the Toro 500 mower. The greens were checked with a stimp-meter. They read from 10.0 to 10.8 feet before we started rolling. The mowing crews cut twice around the perimeter of the fairways and then double cut the fairways to avoid taking the mowers into the rough. All clippings were dumped into containers placed on patios, strategically located alongside the cart paths to prevent any traffic in the rough by the equipment. The early shift ended without the roller being used.

Mr. Patino asked me to bring out the roller and to roll the practice green during the afternoon shift. Everybody was very curious about the roller and its performance.

On day 3, October 27th, we followed the previously set routine of



This photo was taken at the 8th green.



The author, on the right, with Valderrama Golf Club owner Jamie Patino.

cutting the fairways, approaches, greens and tees. We did no rolling on the greens during the morning shift because of the recent rains. The sun came out after lunch and Mr. Patino asked me to bring out the roller. We rolled four of the greens at random. According to the stimpmeter, the green speed increased by eight to 12 inches. Mr. Patino appeared to be pleased with the results.

On day 4, October 28th, the morning shift ran the same routine with the fairways, approaches, greens and tees being cut in the same patterns. Mr. Patino requested that I roll greens two, three, four and five. Though the assistant superintendents appeared somewhat hesitant about the roller, there were

some hints of approval after the day's performance.

On day 5, October 29th, the morning shift carried out the usual routine of cutting the fairways, approaches, greens and tees in the same patterns. Mr. Patino asked me to roll the greens on the front nine during the morning shift and the greens on the back nine during the afternoon shift. He said he wanted to have the greens up to 11.6 to 12.0 feet on the stimpmeter by the start of the tournament. During the afternoon shift, Mr. Patino decided to cut all the greens to the same height with groomers. He felt this action would reduce the amount of grass on the greens and minimize the spiking by the players. Each day, the mechanics backlapped the reels on all the greens mowers at the end of the morning shift.

On day 6, October 30th, the crews followed the usual routine of morning cuttings. After all the sand traps had been raked, it was decided they should be watered. I was asked to double roll all the greens except numbers one and six. The first green was tucked in the trees and its grass was thinner due to the lack of morning sun. The sixth green was left out because it was a newer green. On the afternoon shift, the crews single cut

the greens. There was no rain in the forecast, but no irrigation was needed. Following the raking of the bunkers, the surface was smoothed with a push broom.

On day 7, October 31st, the crews followed the usual routine of morning cuttings. I met Dr. Joe Duich and Mr. Bill Bengeyfield. They were there as consultants to Mr. Patino. The afternoon shift followed the usual routine. The course was ready for the players to practice on Monday morning.

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On day 8, Monday, November 1st, the crews followed the usual routine of morning cuttings. There was no rolling during the morning shift. Mr. Patino asked me to roll all the greens except one and six after play was concluded for the day. Numbers 17, 18 and the practice green were rolled in the dark since the lights were not scheduled to be on at night. I followed my line in the dew on the green.

On day 9, November 2nd, the usual routine was followed on the morning shift. The greens began to approach the speed sought by Mr. Patino. The stimpmeter readings came out from 11.5 to 12.4. The players let us know that the greens were plenty fast. Mr. Patino decided to refrain from rolling the greens today. Discoloration of the greens had led to the decision to spray iron on them to bring back some of their color.

On day 10, November 3rd, I was able to stimp the greens with Juan, the superintendent/pro. The speed was getting very close to that sought for the tournament. On the fifth tee, I talked with Tiger Woods about the speed of the greens. He asked me about the roller we were using. Wow!

On day 11, November 4th, the tournament began. We followed the usual cutting routine. Mr. Patino appeared to be happy with the speed of the greens. I only rolled the practice green and the fifth green. During the afternoon shift I single cut the greens.

On day 12, November 5th, I rolled the greens according to the stimpmeter readings. If they read less than 11.5 feet, then I rolled them. Only a few needed rolling. The afternoon shift was spent single cutting the greens. Mr. Patino asked me to roll the entire slope between the water and the 17th green so that any shots hit short would feed into the water.

On day 13, November 6th, I rolled seven greens that were less than 11.5 on the stimpmeter. The winds switched around to the southeast and blew warmer and drier. As the day progressed, the greens sped up

and the scores showed it. We experienced no rain but there was still no watering of the greens.

Day 14, November 7th, was the final round of the tournament. There was no rolling of the greens. Mr. Patino decided to triple cut all the greens during the morning shift. All the greens rolled from 12.0 to 12.5 on the stimpmeter. The roller

seemed to please the management of the course since its use made it possible to tailor the green speed to allow the scores to fall within the desired range.

On day 15, November 8th - a Monday - a party was held. Everyone acknowledged that the roller had contributed to the success of the tournament. ♣

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