



# Two Majors in One Year - Too Much!

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

It was the kind of thing one only dreams of - attending one of the four major golf tournaments in the world. And I had the unbelievable good fortune to attend two of them - in one year!

The WSGA Masters trip was first on the agenda for me, and in mid-June I drove to Olympia Fields to soak up the atmosphere of the U.S. Open, the USGA's 103rd Open. Dreams do come true.

GCSAA Class A members are allowed a complimentary pass to this championship. A good friend of mine shared extra passes with two turf student interns and our course assistant, Chad Grimm. OFCC is a little over 200 miles from Madison and nearly all interstate driving, so proximity was with us.

And the weather cooperated. It was 60 degrees F. the day we went; no watering decisions had to be made and there were no chances for any kind of disease problem. The circumstances were perfect to drive to Chicago. Quite frankly, a good bit of the appeal for attending this Open was the fact that Dave Ward is the golf course superintendent at Olympia Fields. Many of the WGCSA members know him from his Kenosha CC days and we are proud one of "our guys" was preparing for one of golf's major championships.

We were at the USGA parking lot three and a half hours after we left at 5:00 A.M.

It might have been a hundred acre lot, but the walk to the shuttle buses was short. I can't imagine how many buses were working, but there was no waiting, either going to the course or coming back to the lot before heading north to Wisconsin.



My partners to the Open trip were UW-River Falls turf student Mike Bremmer, assistant superintendent Chad Grimm, and UW-Madison turf student Charles Schenck. Coats and hats tell of the 60°F temperature.

The unloading point for the shuttle buses was, well, underwhelming. But as soon as you were through the gate and onto the golf course, the emotion was "Wow!"

The OFCC course was perfection - greens, tees, fairways, bunkers - you name it. It reminded me of courses I like best - older with no housing, mature trees, smallish greens and narrow fairways. The north course was where the tournament was played and it



Tiger Woods and his friend Mark O'Meara.



David Duval spent a fair amount of time in the clubhouse area signing autographs, contrary to his unfriendly reputation.



Chris Berman drew as much attention as many of the players.



Masters champ Mike Weir tried for a win in the Open.

was designed by Willie Park, Jr., a great Scottish golfer in his own right and son of a championship player as well. The course was built in 1922 and opened for play in 1923. Clearly it has stood the test of time.

We toured the course, watching players as we walked and seeing some spectacular golf shots. The day provided great rubber necking opportunities - from players like Tiger Woods and Tom Watson to the

likes of Chris Berman and other well known broadcasters. We made sure to see Wisconsin players J.P. Hayes and Jerry Kelly, too.

The person I wanted to see, obviously, was busy - Dave Ward. So I left my business card for him and enjoyed a brief conversation with Kevin West, Dave's able assistant. The guys were stunned at the equipment inventory, forgetting that it is a 36-hole golf course and that this was the U.S. Open. We didn't

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Dave Ward wasn't lacking equipment for preparing the course for the U.S. Open.

count machines, but the numbers were huge and mostly John Deere. Later in the week there were some spectacular TV shots of mowing equipment moving into place to go to work, giving viewers an impressive notion of what is involved in preparing the field of play for such a tournament.

The day was down right cold. The entire spring was cool in Chicago, too, with ample rain. It was damp that week, at least until Saturday and Sunday, and it had to have challenged the staff to get the greens rolling at Open speed. The lack of sunshine and warmth probably impacted growing conditions for the famous Open rough, too.

There were, in fact, comments about that in the press and on TV, sometimes by thoughtless and ignorant people talking about a subject where their knowledge approached zero. The worst was commentator Johnny Miller. He's an ego maniac and I have noticed that over the years. But I didn't know that he was a world renown golf turf expert. Somebody should take him behind the pro shop and administer some severe education to the man. I don't like him anyway, having seen him reacting to a golf fan in another tournament. No class.

The pass for the 103rd Open features an old photograph, not of players or the clubhouse, but of the 1927 OFCC grounds staff. It will be the best souvenir because of that picture!

The clubhouse is prominent and famous, looming in view from many places and offering the time from clocks on all four sides of the tower. And the train station from downtown Chicago stops, literally, at the clubhouse, creating truly unique circumstances. The golf fans were enthusiastic and polite from what I could see. We also looked for Dr. David Cookson, a man who has been active in Wisconsin golf for over 30



The clubhouse clocktower identifies OFCC just about anywhere golf is played.

years. He was a rule judge here, his 20th U.S. Open with that responsibility.

All in all, the trip to the Open held up to our very high expectations. Next year we will see more major league golf, closer to home in Kohler. I can hardly wait! ♣

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