



“SUPER” Event at Barton Creek

By **Mike Werth**, Golf Course Superintendent, Monroe Country Club

The moment my wife Angie and I arrived in Austin, Texas we knew that the “People vs. The Pros” Tournament was more than just having the opportunity to win \$100,000. We realized this early on into our trip when we met Rafael Martinez, a golf course superintendent from California, and his wife Maria at the Hertz Rent-a-Car desk. We immediately bonded, like most superintendents and their wives do. This bond, along with many others we made during our six-day trip to Barton Creek, was the recurring theme that BASF wanted and did achieve for all 20 participants in the superintendent field of the event. I cannot say enough about what BASF and Dave Oberle did for us!

After picking up our car and driving to the resort, Angie and I also realized that we were in for an extraordinary stay. The accommodations were comparable with those at the American Club in Kohler. When we reached our room, we had a view overlooking the 18th hole of the Fazio Foothills course and the beautiful canyons surrounding the west end of Austin.

After regaining composure, the surprises continued. I made my way down to the tournament registration table and was given a PvP embroidered Nike duffel bag full of all sorts of golf gifts - a dozen Pro-V golf balls, five golf shirts (color-coded for each day) and my wife's schedule of events. We were scheduled for a practice round on Wednesday and Thursday, but Rafael and I arrived too late for our first practice round so we hit balls on the range just before sunset. That night the golf course superin-



9th Hole Barton Creek (Fazio Foothills)

tendents and their wives, our BASF regional representatives, BASF managers and BASF's tournament coordinator — Winnercomm and their representatives — gathered for a “meet and greet” session. This is where we started to meet and hear everyone's stories on how they arrived at Barton Creek.

Thursday arrived and I played a practice round with two other amateurs on the Fazio course. Fortunately, we were able to take carts throughout the regular tournament because it was 95 degrees with 100% humidity all week. I happened to play with an over-50 participant and an under-50 participant. The under-50 golfer, Mario Lopez, was from the panhandle of Texas and was here because he won a sweepstakes that his wife entered him into without his knowledge.

I birdied the first hole, but that was the only highlight I can remember for that day. It took some time for me to get used to the Bermuda grass greens. All the par-



Mike and Angie at superintendent's dinner.

ticipants gathered that night for a mandatory rules meeting. Andy Batkin, the tournament chairman, made it clear that the rules officials and the handicap committee would make adjustments and review scores to ensure fair play for this competition. They kept their promise; a number of participants were disqualified before and during the tournament due to incorrect handicaps. In fact, the leader of the over-50 field going into the final round was disqualified that morning.



9th Hole Bartton Creek (Fazio Foothills)



Mike, Rafael, Maria and Angie.

I was fortunate enough to sit at the same table with the golf course superintendent of Barton Creek, Ken Gorzychi. It was interesting to hear how he prepared for a tournament and also how he ended up at Barton Creek. He said his biggest challenge is the rocky terrain the resort sits on. The west end of Austin is all

canyons and rock ledges, and the east end is flat with beautiful rich soil, which is why they built the Austin CC on the east end of town a few years ago.

On Friday I played my first tournament round on the Fazio Foothills course. I didn't fare too well again. I shot a 95 with an 11 handicap (net 84). All handicaps



Larry Awlward (Golfdom) and Mike (Caddie)

were adjusted 80% for the tournament. I played with three amateurs who all paid an entry fee to enter the event. Two were from Texas and one was from Arizona. I did happen to win a closest to the pin contest on the 9th hole that day, which helped salvage my round a little bit.

Again, Angie had a better day. She attended a cooking class with the executive chef of the resort and lounged by the pool. BASF treated us to an exclusive "superintendents and wives only" five-course meal at Barton Creek's Governors' Ballroom that night. The Governors' Ballroom was named for the former governors of Texas who initially built the resort. It was sold to ClubCorp. a few years ago.

I played my second round on the Crenshaw course on Saturday. Crenshaw's fairways were a little wider than Fazio's, but the greens had much more undulation in them. I played with a member from Austin CC and an Airbus salesman from Virginia. I played much better and shot an 85 (net 74). I was tied

for third in the superintendent division and tied for 12th in the under-50 division after two rounds. I was pretty optimistic going into the final round on Sunday. We were on our own Saturday night, so we took a shuttle into downtown Austin with Mario and his wife. We ate dinner at a nice Italian restaurant and then went to a few bars during the Texas/Ohio State football game! The atmosphere reminded me of Madison.

Sunday morning arrived, literally, with a bang. We woke to thunder and lightning and waited for the storm, which came from the southeast off the Gulf Coast, to subside. Unfortunately, it never did. After 2.5 inches of rain, they called the event and the tournament ended with only two rounds played instead of three. The "50 and over" and the "49 and under" amateurs were decided, but the Superintendent's Cup wasn't that simple. There was only one first place winner, but two players were tied for second after two days. Greg Wiles of Ohio finished in first place. Matt Curl of Illinois and Rafael Martinez of California tied for second place. It was decided that there would be a three-hole playoff on Monday morning before the finals.

With golf cancelled for the day, Rafael, Maria, Angie and I decided to take advantage of the free use of the VW vehicles that were provided to the participants. We drove down to a Mexican restaurant for lunch and went to a mall for souvenirs. That night all the participants were privileged enough to be accompanied by Ben Crenshaw and Justin Leonard for dinner at the Governors' Ballroom. Both spoke on what an honor it was to be involved in this event and that they appreciated all the hard work every golf course superintendent does for golf. To top it off, all the players were given a placard autographed by both Justin and Ben.

After all the anticipation leading up to the final round, Monday did not disappoint anyone. Angie and I watched Rafael win the three-hole playoff to start the day. You knew it was his to win when he chipped in a 25-yard shot on the first playoff hole (the 16th). We then thought our trip had finally ended because our flight was set for 12:30 p.m. As we were zipping up our luggage bags, the phone rang in our hotel room. Rafael was on the other end, asking me to caddy for him in a half an hour! After BASF pushed back our flight and a quick call was made to the in-laws and parents who were watching our two daughters, I made my way to the first tee on the Fazio Foothills course to meet Rafael. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity I couldn't pass up.

The first match-play event was between Rafael and Greg Wiles, with the Crenshaw and Leonard matches following right behind. I just cleaned clubs, figured yardages and lugged Rafael's golf bag after he drained a 40-foot putt that I read the opposite way for him.

Rafael was on fire. He shot a 37 on the front and finished his opponent out on the 15th hole with a four-stroke win.

I think I lost five pounds over that 15-hole stretch. It was blazing hot with no breeze to speak of. Fortunately, we did get some rest when we had to wait for the ESPN camera crews to set up on some holes. You couldn't have asked for a better ending than that. Rafael took home a beautiful glass trophy, \$10,000 in cash and \$10,000 in BASF products for his home course of Via Verde Country Club in San Dimas, California. Rafael was kind enough to give me a tip, but it wasn't the Pro Tour percentage that we discussed before the match!

I just want to again thank Dave Oberle and BASF, along with our regional event host Marc Davison of Green Bay Country Club. They gave Angie and me the opportunity and trip of a lifetime. BASF also donated \$2,000 to our Wisconsin chapter for hosting this event, and will continue to do so next year when Eric Jasin and Lake Arrowhead will host the 2006 PvP regional. I hope my experience will inspire many more of you to participate next summer.

Have a great winter! 🌿

163 Yard Par 3 eighth hole at the Refuge Golf Club in Oak Grove, Minnesota.



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