

Mj&C

2008 UNITED STATES OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP An Interns Perspective

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Editors Note: Shane was one of three participants selected by Toro based on work experience and an essay about future goals. Shane is entering his senior year at University of Wisconsin-Madison, and has experience at Beaver Dam Country Club, Blackhawk Country Club and is currently interning at Whistling Straits.

The editor and readers of the Grass Roots appreciate and welcome all turf students to contribute articles.

The 2008 United States Open was a tournament that will long be remembered by every faithful and casual golf fan. At the end of the week I heard numerous fans and sportscasters claiming that the excitement we witnessed on the shores of the Pacific Ocean at Torrey Pines, made for perhaps the greatest Open ever played. Through the TORO Championship Tournament Training Program, I was fortunate enough to be right in the middle of that excitement all week long.

The program sponsored by TORO and backed by the GCSAA aims at giving aspiring golf course superintendents the chance to volunteer on the maintenance crew for the week of the tournament. To apply I needed to fill out a short application and write an essay about where I see my professional career heading in the next ten years. I never expected that essay to place me on the 18th fairway of Torrey Pines, witnessing Tiger Woods knocking down a birdie putt to force an eighteen-hole playoff on Sunday of the Open.

For me and the other 100 volunteers on the maintenance staff, our day started at 4 a.m. when we caught a shuttle from the nearby University of San Diego to the course. We would have a morning meeting and then begin our assigned duties until they were complete. The rest of the day was ours to watch golf and get swept up in the excitement. At 4 pm, we would again meet at the maintenance shop and then head out onto the course to complete our afternoon assignments. Our day would end at approximately 9 p.m. when we would once again catch a shuttle back to the University of San Diego. This schedule kept us at the course for nearly 17 hours every day for a week. As you can imagine, sleep came quick and easy when we arrived back at the University.

My intern position allowed me to rotate through many of the different jobs that needed completing for tournament preparation. Most days I mowed tees or helped set cups. I also participated in various other duties including; mowing greens, hand watering, raking bunkers, fluffing rough, and filling divots. For me, the



Torrey Pines maintenance staff prepares to head out for afternoon course work.



A line of fairway mowers on hole 5 at Torrey Pines.

most intriguing job was assisting in the cup setting process. We would meet with a USGA agronomist and rules official who would pace off the green and communicate to us the exact position of each pin. Then, we would go to work trying to get the pin to stand as straight and proud as we could. While we were doing this, other USGA agronomists would be on the green taking measurements. The speed of the greens was measured with a stimpmeter and as we were directed to tell those who asked, the greens were rolling "championship speed." The moisture content of the upper soil

profile was measured with a TDR probe and the firmness was measured with the "Thumper." Of course, none of this would matter if it were not for the final measurement that was made, playability. This was measured the old fashioned way, with a putter, golf ball, and steady stroke.


Some other interesting characteristics about the south course at Torrey Pines and the maintenance operation include the various grasses used at the course. The greens are Poa and were able to withstand the low height of cut, .100 in. while retaining excellent playability and consistency from day to day. Because sprinkler head irrigation was eliminated from the greens for the week of the Open, many dry spots were noticeable through the week. At one point, we used 16-ounce water bottles to treat the driest areas of the greens with the greatest accuracy possible (an amusing process).

One of the reasons the greens were able to withstand the immense stress applied to them was because of the 22 aerifications that were performed on them in the two years leading up to the Open. The fairways at Torrey pines are Kikuyugrass along with a little Poa mixed in. Because of Kikuyugrass's dense and rigid growth, golf balls sit on top the grass as if the ball were placed on a

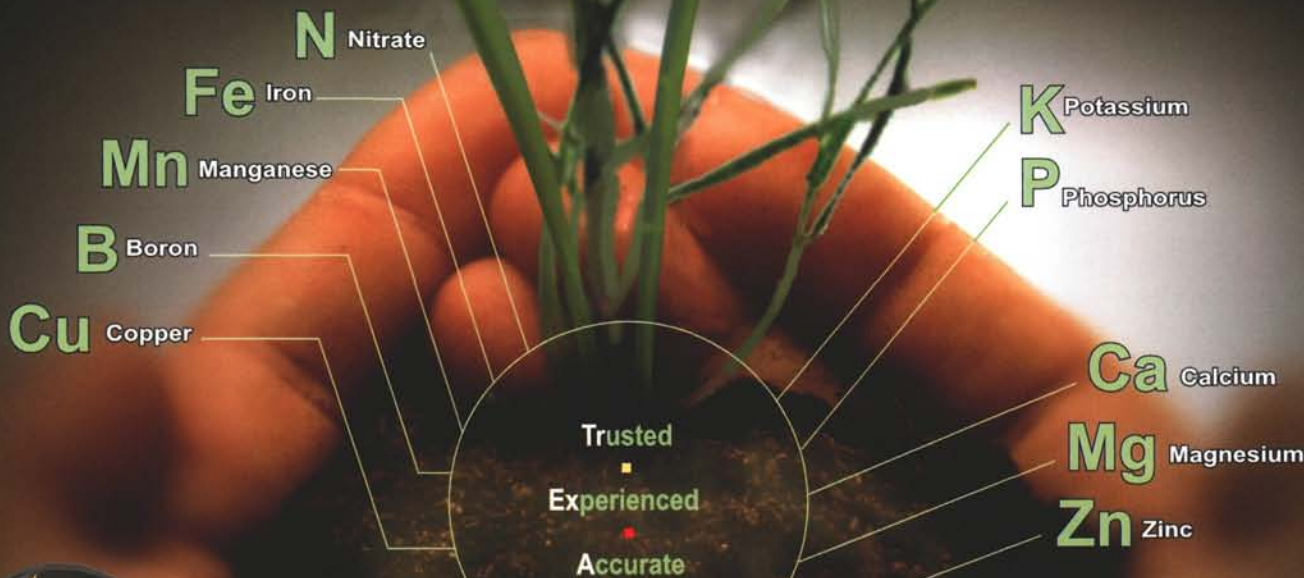
tee. This dense growth habit also makes for very difficult rough as the world's best golfers found out all week long.

Surprising to me was that since the Buick Open occurred at the course in February, the rough and greens have received only very small amounts of fertilization while the fairways have received none. The TORO Championship Tournament Training Program allowed me to see the massive amount of work that goes into hosting a major tournament by all the parties involved. Before this, I did not have nearly the appreciation for the extent of the work necessary.

This truly was a great experience that I will remember for the rest of my life. I would like to thank the TORO Corporation for setting me up with this opportunity. I would also like to extend thanks to Mark Woodward, Jon Maddern, the rest of the Torrey Pines staff, and all the sponsors who provided great meals for us throughout the week.

Now that the tournament is complete, it is back to work at Whistling Straits for me with a new excitement for the upcoming 2010 PGA Championship that will be hosted there. I can only hope it lives up to the thrill of the 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines. 

Elements of Successful Turf Management



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