



Teamwork at Blackwolf Run to Prepare For The Wisconsin State Open

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

Ron Bierwirth a 13 year WGCSA member is charged with preparing the Blackwolf Run Golf Course for the 89th Wisconsin State Open August 17, 18, 19. Normally the superintendent of the 36 hole facilities Meadow-Valley 18, Ron will host the State Open on the Meadows holes 1-9 and the Rivers holes 5-13. This change is because while Ron and his staff will be hosting Wisconsin's best professional and amateur players, Rivers Course Superintendent Jeff Wilson will be re-grassing the Championship Course that the US Women's Open will be played on in 2012.

Wilson and his staff have no easy task as the greens were fumigated and reseeded to A4 Bentgrass while the fairways were fumigated and seeded to Memorial Bentgrass. Tees were stripped of sod and also seeded to Memorial. While the grass fills in the staff is removing the sand and redoing the drainage in all the bunkers on the affected holes.

Ron was quick to point out the work is not a revision of Pete Dyes original design but a opportunity to incorporate new grass technology while maintaining Dyes original design. The areas we examined on our tour showed the new grasses were coming in great without a poa plant in site.

In 2010 the holes being re-grassed now will be open to play, and the holes open for play now will be re-grassed. I enjoyed the opportunity to tour both courses with Ron, who in some ways is hosting the State Open as a new superintendent for 9 of the holes he is responsible for.

Ron started in golf as a caddie at Pine Hills Country Club in



Hole 11 for the State Open plays 402 yards to elevated green



Hole 1 for the State Open plays 427 from the back tees.

Sheboygan which is still today one of his favorite courses. He received his degree in Math Education and entered the restaurant business

working his way up from dishwasher to general manager in a number of states. Bierwirth found the restaurant business to be fun, but often to



Hole 9 will play 231 yards through this narrow gap for the State Open.



Hole 17 for the State Open plays 240 yards from the back tee.

much fun and felt burned out with the lifestyle that comes with operating a nighttime business.

Looking for a change Ron moved home to visit his parents and answered an ad for help at Blackwolf Run as a laborer and

equipment operator in 1990. Ron put his people skills to use and moved up to an assistant superintendent and then superintendent of the Meadows Valley 18.

Ron lives in the Kohler area and he and his wife Jody a Guidance

Counselor at a local school have one son who is 10 years old. Golf has taken a back seat to other activities but he still enjoys playing.

As we toured the course, Ron pointed out more than once how teamwork is the key to Blackwolf Run's success. He credited the assistant superintendents Bill Schwantes and Chris Deckard whom he works with as well as Rivers Course Superintendent Jeff Wilson for his success. Everything is a team effort. For the State Open and again the US Women's Open both staffs will work together to make the tournament come off without a hitch.

The day I visited, the staff was having a crew picnic with brats and hamburgers with all the fixings with Ron as one of the grill masters. Ron expressed these functions help reward the staff while bringing both course staffs and the landscape crew together for fun and recreation.

One of the challenges of the property is the difficulty in getting from one hole to another without interrupting the players. With mounding, rivers, woods and ravines driving from one area to another is difficult. With the current mix of holes it is a mile drive from the 9th green on the Rivers to the 10th tee of the Meadows course. The staffs have perfected their routes and most jobs are completed long before a golfer reaches that hole. Out of site and out of mind maintenance! A mix of full and part time employees help the facility stay topnotch without having massive overhead.

In preparation for the Open, Bierwirth does not expect to make many changes to the maintenance routine but he will increase the frequency of the routines.

Blackwolf Run was started in 1985 when Pete Dye began his work on the great piece of property. The natural terrain mixes with Dye's trademark pot bunkers

and undulating greens. The course was named after Black Wolf, a chief of the Winnebago Indians (now known as the Ho-Chunk Nation). According to Gustave Buchen's local history, "Historic Sheboygan County," the Chippewa and Menominee Indians joined forces to drive out the Winnebagoes. Their intent was to occupy this splendid, beautiful hunting ground. Several battles were fought, and although the Winnebagoes were outnumbered, Black Wolf led his band up the mouth of the river, waded up the shallow water of the lakeshore and overtook his enemies. Black Wolf was a prominent chief in the history of the Winnebagoes in Wisconsin during the early 1800s.

Opened in June of 1988, the layout featured an 18-hole course, with an additional nine added to the Meadow Valleys course in July 1989 and the fourth nine completed in August of 1990. Both courses have consistently won awards and have been ranked as among the top public courses in the world.

The course hosted the United States Golf Association in 1998 for the Women's Open Championship. The event was won by 20 year old Se Ri Pak in a playoff over Jenny Chuasiriporn.

In 1995, the River Course was selected as site of the Andersen Consulting World Championship of Golf, the precursor to the current WGC events. The U.S. portion of the event was won by Mark McCumber. The following year, the event returned to the River Course, and Greg Norman captured the International section of the Championship. When the Championship returned in 1997, Ernie Els defeated Steve Elkington in the title match of the International bracket.

The Wisconsin Section of the PGA previously held the Open at Blackwolf Run in 1991, 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007.

The State Open is played over 72 holes with 18 holes Monday, 18 holes Tuesday and the low 60 plus ties qualify for the final 36 holes on Wednesday. The event is open to any legal resident of the State of Wisconsin, golf professionals working as such within the state, PGA professionals working as such within the

Wisconsin Section, PGA and all exempt players.

Qualifying for the 2009 Open was held at Wild Ridge GC, Trappers Turn, Trout Lake GC, Thornberry Creek, Geneva National, Pine Hills CC, Tuckaway CC and The Oaks GC.

In 2008 at Eau Claire Golf & Country Club Ryan Helminen of Appleton survived a shaky 15th hole and birdied two of his last three to win the Wisconsin State Open. The assistant pro at Sentry World in Stevens Point went into Wednesday's two rounds with a 2-stroke lead and opened the day with a 1-under 70. In the final round, he hung on for a 72 after salvaging a bogey on the 15th hole.

Helminen's total of 5-under 279 was good enough for a 4-stroke victory over Patrick Stolpe, an Oostburg native now from Scottsdale, Ariz., and Mike Johnston, from Milwaukee.

This year's open will challenge the states best players as only the Dye design can. Spectators are welcome and entry is free so take some time and enjoy a beautiful summer day seeing this gem of a golf course and you might just see some great golf shots along the way! 🌿



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