

The Open Returns To Blackwolf

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

Ron Bierwirth a 15 year WGCSA member is charged with preparing the Blackwolf Run Golf Course for the 91st Wisconsin State Open held August 15, 16, and 17. It seems as though I just wrote this because it was only two years ago Ron the 89th Open. At that time the Meadows Valley course was undergoing a grassing change that worked out great for the club and has been well received by the customers.

With most of the work done in house under the supervision of River Course Superintendent Jeff Wilson the staff was able to shine. The putting 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 new grasses were grown in the bunkers received new drainage and sand. The staff installed wire around the perimeter of greens and fairways so the edges can be maintained over time with a wire locator.

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 course looked terrific and from the players comments during the open played just as well. To keep poa

annua at bay the staff is using a mix of methods including keeping the turf dry. However when you are at the mercy of Mother Nature chemicals are needed to keep the pesky weed grass from taking over again. Different areas are receiving Velocity, Cutless and Legacy while poa spots on greens are dabbed with a non-selective herbicide and plugged out.

Ron started in golf as a caddie at Pine Hills Country Club in 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 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 12 years old. Golf has taken a back seat to other activities such as fishing with his son.



Hole 15 Plays 217 Yards From The Back Tee and is all carry.



Looking Back Over The 423 Yard Par 4 14th Hole you can see how the new grasses shine.

Member 9 With Ron Bierwirth

1. **First Vehicle?** 1969 Ford Fairlane
2. **Favorite Piece of Golf Course Equipment?** John Deere 220 Greens Mower
3. **18 Hole Handicap?** I was about a 10 but have not played in years.
4. **Current Vehicle?** 2001 Toyota 4-Runner
5. **Favorite TV Show?** Anything on the DIY Network.
6. **Favorite Pro Sports Team?** Green Bay Packers
7. **Favorite Main Course Meal?** Chicken Marsala
8. **Pets?** Golden Retriever - Layla
9. **Favorite Thing About Working In Golf Industry?** The ability to work outdoors and everyday brings something new.

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In response to shade and stagnate air the tees on the par 3 third hole were converted to Low Mow Bluegrass. The tee complex is watered manually to ensure the area does not receive too much water from a stuck head.



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.

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. 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 time and "mow and go" 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. The Women's Open returns next year in 2012.

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, 2007 and 2009

COVER STORY

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 2011 Open was held at Geneva National GC, Wild Ridge GC, Wausau CC, Hawks Landing GC, Fire Ridge GC and Branch River G&T.

The 2010 Open was won with a 277 by Eddie Terasa at The Legend at Bristlecone. It was the second win for Terasa who carded a 275 at Maple Bluff Country Club

in 1995. The 2011 event was won by newcomer Jordan Niebrugge an Amateur from Mequon who shot 67 in the fourth round to finish 282 to win by one over Patrick Duffy of Appleton. Niebrugge is 18 years old and a recruit for Oklahoma State. Starting the round three shots behind the 54 hole leader Duffy Niebrugge eagled 11, birdied 12 and 16.

At 18 years and two weeks Jordan is the youngest golfer to win the Wisconsin State Open. Niebrugge will have the opportunity to defend his title next year at The Racine Country Club.



The 550 Yard Par 5 16th Hole. The new turf is kept dry to keep poa annua from establishing in the new bentgrass. Aeration and hand watering is used on the the high spots to reduce dry spots.