

COUNTDOWN TO THE OPEN!

* * * *

Hazeltine Gets Ready for Prestigious June Tournament

By JOHN HARRIS
Editor

(First of two reports)

June of '91 brings the U.S. Open to Hazeltine National Golf Club.

The greens, tees and fairways will be critiqued by every "arm chair" touring pro around the world. Preparation for this event has been years in the making.

The planning and organization, the volunteers, the players, cameras, logistics and many other details come down to four days in June. Certainly a number of people are responsible for bringing this event to Minnesota, but sooner or later everything must funnel through one office.

Chris Hague CGCS and course superintendent at Hazeltine sits in that office. His responsibilities are broad and varied, touching on every aspect involving this prestigious event. However, the number one priority for Chris and his staff is everything inside the gallery ropes.

Course maintenance begins with professional staffing. Chris has had every position filled since last winter. On March 15 his staff increased from seven to twenty personnel.

In December, professional tree trimmers began the task of pruning every tree on the grounds. All dead branches have been taken out for liability reasons. Limbs that could have interfered with a golfer's well-placed shot also have been removed.

The covers on the greens and other turf areas may take up to two weeks to remove as weather patterns may hamper their efforts. The possibility of winter

kill is a threat and was dealt with by overseeding in late March and recovering these areas to warm soil temps and speed germination.

During the month of April, the outside amenities began to arrive. These forward people will need to set up their facilities, which may involve disruption of the upper soil layer.

For this reason, Chris has created his own "Gopher One" service. Before anyone digs on any site within the grounds, the superintendent must be notified. In turn, Chris will send his wire man to the site and all wiring will be located by him before any structures are erected...not just irrigation wire but all wire-power, phone, scoring etc.

To give you an idea of how much underground wiring there is, the communications and scoring system is the equivalent to setting up an entire phone system in a small community of 7,000 people. Needless to say, "Hazeltine Gopher One" will be very busy.

Cutting practices during April were your average Minnesota start-up.

The beginning of May will see a staff increase to 35 if needed. On the first of May some of the cutting techniques will change. Tees will be mowed with hand greens mowers. The same techniques will apply to collars, and the approaches, which will be cut 30 yards out from the green. Along with the additional hand mowing, there will be an increase of greens mowers from eight units to 14. Fairway units will increase from 3-4 units to 7-8, all in preparation for the "Blitz

Krieg" technique during the tournament schedule. (More on this in June issue.)

Fairway leveling should be completed by mid-May along with seeding and sodding. Herbicides will be used mostly in target areas. Dense turf cutting and cultivating practices should keep weed invasion to a minimum with little use of herbicides.

Fairway divot repair will be a daily task. Chris estimates between 80 and 100 yards of seed-soil mix will be needed for fairways alone from the time they open the course of play. A green dye will be added to the mix prior to the Open for Television.

A firm putting surface is the goal and to acquire this, spring aerifying of greens has been eliminated and top dressing will be phased out in mid-May. Concerns over compacted greens should be alleviated by encouraging low play. Carts will not be allowed for the entire season, and outside events have been eliminated.

Bunkers will be raked 100% twice a week by and during May. The goal here is to have a firm front lip to encourage ball roll-down into the central portion of the bunker.

These steps and many more are part of a phenomenal effort to bring one of the most prestigious golf tournaments to Minnesota.

Next month, we will get into the intense mowing and grooming of the greens, rough heights, stepped-up cutting practices, bleachers, corporate tents and more.