

# Teamwork Gets Hazeltine National Golf Club In Shape for A Major Championship

By SCOTT TURPINEN

After a solid summer of dedicated work, the 35 member grounds staff at Hazeltine National Golf Club had the course in pristine condition for the 2002 PGA Championship. Then 55 volunteers for this crew arrived to get all the mowing, rolling, raking, stimpmeter reading and fluffing done for the early morning tee times. Superintendents came from Florida to Montana and, of course, the great state of Minnesota.

The 90-person staff began work on Sunday, August 11th for the start of their practice runs. Volunteers would meet at the maintenance facility around 4:30 a.m. for coffee and some socializing with the other superintendents. At 4:45 Superintendent Jim Nicol, CGCS would gather us around for his daily pep talk. Assistant Superintendent Mark Storby gave us our assignments for the week. Jim wanted us to take our time doing our jobs and get used to the course. Only a handful of players practiced on Sunday. A six-year employee at Hazeltine, Jon Just taught our group the best way to rake a bunker. Jon enjoyed creating a bigger lip on the bunkers and wanted the course to play hard. The staff was finished with the morning work around 8:00 a.m. The afternoon staff started about 5:00 p.m. to mow and fill divots.

The Turf Management Chalet served breakfast at 8:00 a.m. for all the staff. They also provided lunch and dinner every day. Superintendent Nicol was responsible for arranging the tent and finding sponsors for the food and sodas. A special thanks goes to the vendors that sponsored the tent: Hartman; MTI Distributing, Inc.; North Star Turf; Turf Supply; Plaisted Companies; Lesco; Simplot Partners; Precision Turf & Chemical and Griggs Bros.; Syngenta; Griffith LLC, Adventis, and the MGCSA.

**Monday was the start of practice rounds.** Jim gave us our pep talk and some advice on bunkers and fluffing; the mowers were doing just fine. Nicol said "bunkers should have their lines parallel to the fairway on fairway bunkers and the lines should go toward the green on greenside bunkers. Place the rake handles parallel to the fairway and pointing back towards the tee. The Fluffers should not rake too hard, just make the grass stand upright with light raking." The crew was getting better and finished work around 7:30 a.m.

Autographs were available and sought by a few mem-



**GREG HUBBARD, CGCS,** Manitou Ridge GC, volunteered each morning during the PGA to help mow fairways.

bers of the staff. The *main autograph* was playing over at Bearpath on this day.

*The mowers were still going very slowly until Woods was close. They then stopped the mowers and held their hats for autographs. Tiger obliged and signed them all except for the ones that thought they could run to the maintenance facility and get their autograph flags.*

**Tuesday was more of the same,** but Jim started giving us some time goals. The crew now finished around 7:15 a.m. With the gates opening at 7:00 a.m., fans had not yet made their way to the middle of the course where we found Tiger Woods finishing on the third hole. The only spectators at this time were the grounds crew and that was just perfect. We learned that Tiger does not like to give autographs until he is done with his round but this did not deter the fairway mowers on the fifth hole.

Rich Beem was playing by himself and ahead of a group featuring Woods, Mark O'Meara and John Cook. Beem motioned to the mowers to mow through but they declined and let the eventual champ play on. The mowers had something else in mind. They started their final pass, but were going very slowly knowing who was on the tee.

The threesome hit their drives and strolled down the fairway. The mowers were still going very slowly until Woods was close. They then stopped the mowers and held their hats for autographs. Tiger obliged and signed them all

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except for the ones that thought they could run to the maintenance facility and get their autograph flags. By the time they got back Tiger was long gone.



**JIM NICOL, CGCS**  
Hazeltine National GC

**Wednesday and Thursday went by without a hitch.** Jim said there were many good compliments about the course and its condition. By now we were getting fairly good at our jobs.

On Friday, play had to be stopped with some players having 4 or 5 holes to play because of lightning. They would finish their rounds on Saturday.

With over three inches of rain falling Friday night and Saturday morning, the pond on

Number 8 had grown very large. Hole 1 had a new 100-yard pond in front of the green and Number 2 tee also had a similar pond. On this day the grounds crew was energized knowing that they were in the spotlight to get this course in playable shape for the finish of Friday's play and the start of the weekend.

**Scott Austin, CGCS, brought a few pumps** from Midland Hills and they were put to use with Hazeltine's pumps. The Chaska Fire Department with 60 people and two fire trucks pumped 6,000 gallons of water per minute from the pond to the creek on 17 which flowed into the 16th creek and eventually Lake Hazeltine. This took about 2 1/2 hours to get rid of the major water. The crew was still pumping out the bunkers and using the Sand Pro to fix the washouts. Then the staff finished their normal jobs and play went on. PGA Tournament Director, Kerry Haigh spoke to us on Sunday morning and expressed his thanks



**MIKE LIGDAY**, Manitou Ridge, enjoyed his week of volunteer efforts at the 84th PGA Championship at Hazeltine.

for the wonderful job the crew did.

The Championship finished with Rich Beem edging out Tiger Woods. I guess the mowers should have gotten both autographs on Tuesday.

## Major, Major —

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Although the audience didn't witness them, many of the bunkers were washed out and several "new" ponds had developed upon the course. Out came the pumps, shovels and rakes to restore the course back to playing condition. The television also didn't pick up on the mass human effort utilized to make Hazeltine picturesque -- again. Like magic the course was transformed into its previous day's beauty.

"The team work necessary was impressive. Everybody with golf course experience knew what had to be done and did it in a professional manner," said Scott Austin, CGCS, and Superintendent volunteer from Midland Hills. "It was a great pleasure to be a part of the camaraderie."

And so the clean up effort went. Like a well oiled machine, and so very typical of a challenge to be addressed at their own courses, the volunteers completed the monumental task without hesitation. And when guidance or representation was necessary, the very capable Jim Nicol, CGCS, was always available.

Whether giving a pre-conditioning pep talk to the crew, making observations on the course or being available for radio, television or publication interviews, Jim was ever present. According to John Steiner, CGCS, Superintendent at the White Bear Yacht Club, "Jim had more air time than the President!"

But no finer professional of our industry could have been found. Articulate, honest and humble, Jim displayed the finest of Superintendent qualities. Both on and off camera his style of golf course management was very impressive. "It was a pleasure to work with Mr. Nicol during the Championship," said Matt Johnson, Second Assistant Superintendent from North Oaks Golf Club.

Supporting Jim and his army of volunteers and employees, as well as visiting Superintendents and their guests, were the local vendors and the MGCSA who sponsored a large Chalet. The glorified tent contained fruit, snacks and beverages throughout the day as well as wonderful and nourishing meals for the troupe of course maintenance personnel. Thanks to the following companies for the support of this accommodation: Hartman Construction; M T I Distributing, Inc.; North Star Turf; Turf Supply Company; Plaisted Companies; Lesco; Simplot Partners; Precision Turf/Griggs Brothers; Syngenta; Griffith LLC; Adventis, and the members of the MGCSA.

All in all it was a wonderful event. The golfers were delighted as well as the turf masters. According to Buddy Hairston, PGA Professional and event participant, "The greens were perfect, the course beautiful and the playing surfaces were in excellent playing condition." And what more could possibly be said for a major Major.