

South Dakota State Student Learns A Lot As Hazeltine Intern for 2002 PGA

By RALPH TURPINEN

With one and one-half years of studies remaining to earn his turf management degree at South Dakota State University in Brookings, Tom Hoffer (*rhymes with gopher*) obviously is energized to learn as much as he can about the business and to do the best he can....for good reason.

Last summer his long-range goals expanded considerably when he signed on as an intern at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn., site of the 84th annual PGA Championship. Moreover, he already has been accepted for another internship next year at Oak Hill in Rochester, N.Y., where the Rich Beem will defend the PGA title he won by one stroke over Tiger Woods.

Without a doubt, working with Hazeltine Superintendent Jim Nicol, CGCS, was a high point of Hoffer's young career. "Jim and his grounds staff made the summer of 2002 the most exciting time in my life," said Hoffer, who played a lot of football, basketball and baseball -- but no golf -- at Adrian High School in southwestern Minnesota. However, he began getting interested in turf management while working on the grounds crew of Adrian's nine-hole golf course and later at Brookings Country Club. He now carries an 8 handicap.

Hoffer, a Trans-Mississippi Turf Scholar, first became interested in working at Hazeltine when he saw a help wanted advertisement. In September, 2001 he e-mailed Nicol a request to be considered for an internship, was told to send a resume and was welcomed in May. Earlier this past summer Hoffer was involved in mowing greens, raking bunkers, working on construction projects and leveling tee boxes, but, for the week of the Championship his principal duty was to concentrate on the tee boxes on Hazeltine's first nine holes.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for Hoffer as well as Hazeltine's 35-member grounds crew and the 55 persons who volunteered for course keeping chores was coping with the 3+ inches of rain that fell the second night and early morning of the third day. Said Nicol and so many of his staff: "That was fun." Said Hoffer: "I really was impressed how calm everyone was, despite the stress of wanting excellence and handling any problems that arose." Tee times on Saturday were delayed two hours, but, after play began, the players -- who already had raved about course conditions, its fairness and its playability -- doubled their praise for the rapid, efficient refurbishing work that was done efficiently early Saturday.

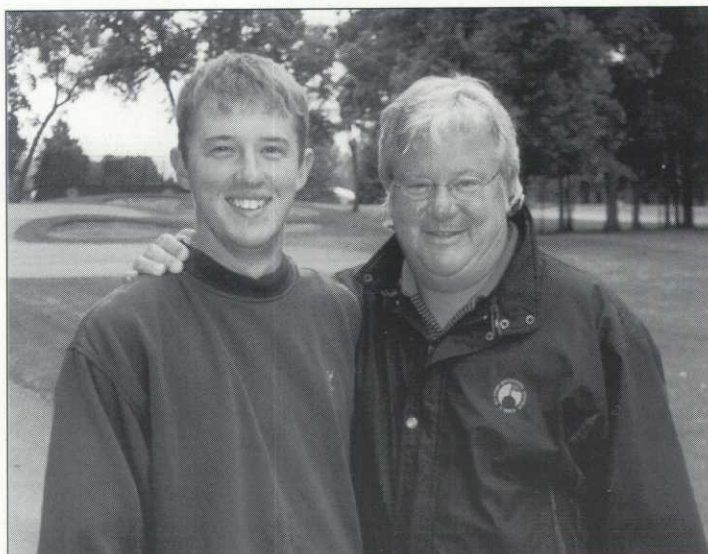
Tiger Woods, when asked if he had had the opportunity to visit the famous Mall of America in nearby Bloomington, smiled and said his Tournament Week life was "Course, home...home, course." It was much the same for Hoffer: Course, apartment in Burnsville, back to the course. Normally Tom would awaken at 5 a.m., report to Hazeltine by 6 and be completed by 2:30. However, Tournament Week duties stretched from daylight to dusk.

"They were long hours but every minute was worth it," said Hoffer. "I really enjoyed the experience."

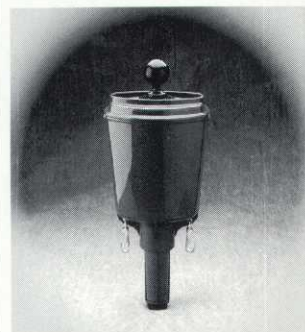
Nicol also praised Tom for the conscientious manner in which he applied himself, said he got along with

Hazeltine's staff and was most reliable. "I really couldn't have asked for anything more."

Before PGA Week, Hoffer also telephoned Paul Latshaw, Jr., CGCS, superintendent at Oak Hill and asked if he could meet with him at Hazeltine and be considered for similar duty during the 2003 PGA Championship at this Rochester, N.Y. course. He did....and was told to heat East next Spring.



TRANS-MISSISSIPPI SCHOLAR TOM HOFFER, left, a third-year student in turf management at South Dakota State University, pictured with Jim Nicol, CGCS, Hazeltine superintendent, who said, "He was a real asset to our crew." Next year he will serve as an intern at the 2003 PGA Championship at Oak Hill in Rochester, New York.



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