

HOSTING THE PGA AT OAKLAND HILLS

by Ted Woehrle, Superintendent

Oakland Hills Country Club, of Birmingham, Michigan, was the site of the 1972 PGA Championship in August. After the membership agreed to host this major event, the services of a well-known golf course architect were sought to make suggested changes. Based on his recommendations, four new bunkers were built in the fall of 1971 and an existing bunker was modified.

When the general condition of the playing turf was under control, we concentrated our efforts on installing the many utility wires required to make the Championship a success. Some of the utilities included underground telephone wires (some 30,000 feet), installed by our own crew to prevent the possibility of damage to the existing water lines, tile lines, and electrical control wires for our automatic irrigation system. Other utility installations included a multitude of electrical wires and television cables. Scoreboards, leaderboards and television towers were installed two weeks before tournament time. Additional towers for still photography, movie cameras and general radio and press coverage were also installed. Over 30 tents and trailers were placed around the course just one week before the Championship. These structures were used by the concession people and other public facilities.

As the Championship drew closer, we had to take into consideration the various heights of cut on the grass. Greens were to be 3/16-inch, fairways 5/8-inch, tees 1/2-inch, intermediate rough about ten feet wide cut at 2 1/2-inches, and the deep rough as tall as nature would permit. Fairways were narrowed to 30 yards in the landing areas. A collar of 30 inches was mowed around each green, followed by five feet of short rough. The remainder of the turf surrounding the green is considered deep rough. All of the features place a premium on accurate shot placement.

Throughout the entire tournament the gallery was of prime concern to the Club, especially the safety of the spectator. The placement of gallery ropes helped to control the crowd, as well as affording them safety. The ropes are placed in such a manner as to give greatest visibility for the gallery. We also cut low-hanging branches on our trees to give an unobstructed view of play and at the same time protect the crowd from accidental eye injuries.

Traffic control on the course during the week of the Championship is perhaps the biggest headache encountered. Strict schedules for delivery trucks which service the concession tents must be enforced. An employee of the grounds crew must accompany each truck. This includes the truck servicing the comfort stations at night. The collection and removal of trash from the premises is a monumental task. The local Boy Scouts gathered up loose trash and placed it in receptacles. The waste

is then bagged for pick-up by the grounds crew and brought to a collection area where it was placed into rubbish trucks and compressed.

Some protection for the anticipated wear on the turf was made just prior to the Championship. We seeded over the existing turf in the obvious wear areas and let the foot traffic of the gallery trample the seed into the ground where it began to germinate a few days after the tournament was over.

Maintenance during the week of the tournament was broken into two distinct categories, routine and abnormal. Routine maintenance consists of mowing tees and greens every morning before play, changing cups and repairing ball bruises, raking traps and night watering if necessary. Abnormal maintenance consists of late afternoon or evening mowing of fairways, divot repairs with seed and soil both on the tees and the fairways. Because we mowed the fairways in the evening, we had to remove the dew from them each morning. This was accomplished by dragging water hose between two vehicles the full length of the fairway with one vehicle on each side of the fairway.

Broken ropes and bent stakes must be repaired and straightened throughout the tournament. This is done during play by roving crews of grounds-men and marshalls. There are 1,800 stakes and some 50,000 feet of rope needed to control the gallery, and at the end of one day much of this equipment is in need of repair or attention.

Parking for the tournament was on our North Course, which is adjacent to the Championship Course. Protection against traffic damage to the automatic irrigation system was of great concern to us. We placed empty 55 gallon drums over all the pop-up sprinklers. If we needed water during the evenings, we simply knocked the barrels over before watering and then set them back over the sprinklers the next morning. The greens and tees on the North Course were fenced off with snow fence and roping, to protect them from car traffic as well as foot traffic. Of course we had to continue mowing these areas during the tournament.

The entrances and exits to the North Course were prepared well in advance. Definite construction specifications were made by the County Road Commission, and these were followed.

The USGA Green Section Agronomist played an important role in guiding the Club in its preparation. Suggestions concerning the general condition of the course and many helpful hints in the conditioning for a major championship were passed on to the staff, and they were deeply appreciated. Some of the suggestions involved proper timing of top-dressing, fertilizing, watering, mowing, spiking and protection measures against the natural problems of weather. From these we were able to put together a well planned program of preparation.

We of the Grounds Department were caught up in the excitement of the Championship, the preparation and execution of duties throughout the tournament made all of it seem worthwhile. The hard work and long hours are soon forgotten, along with the anxieties and frustrations. These all seemed a natural part of a major tournament.

With a little cooperation from nature, the recovery from the Championship was speedy and complete in a very short time.