

I'll Be Home For Christmas . . .and Beyond

By Bob Costa

While most superintendents are taking a breather from the daily pressure and stress of summer, three NorCal Superintendents and their staffs are getting ready to face the biggest challenge of their season — preparing their respective courses for the arrival of touring pros and television cameras, better known as the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am.

Serious thoughts of a winter vacation won't come any time soon for superintendent Mark Michaud (Pebble Beach), Eric Johnson (Spyglass Hill) or Manny Sousa (Poppy Hills). They'll have to wait at least until after the first Sunday in February. Only when the last shot of the Otters bobbing in the Pacific fades from the viewers screen, will they know it's time to relax.

For Poppy Hills superintendent Manny Sousa a veteran of six AT&T Pro-Am's the pressure is already on. "We've already begun our tournament preparation," Sousa said when I cornered him for a few moments in early December. "At this stage we're concentrating on increasing the rough height, which will be maintained at 2.5 inches throughout the tournament. Our focus is to try to get the height as uniform as possible. We're also concentrating on repairing any thin areas that may affect playability. At about the four week mark, we will concentrate on blocking off portions of the tees likely to be used during the tournament."

With Sousa's and his staff's experience, successfully meeting the rigorous PGA Tour standards is all a function of schedul-

ing. "The challenge," Sousa says, "is adjusting to changes in weather." Winter storms can play havoc with even the best laid plans. Last year's event brings back vivid memories of those challenges as Sousa and his fellow superintendents battled weather that eventually resulted in the controversial decision to cancel the tournament. Sousa recalls all the hard work that went into preparing the course that ill fated weekend, only to receive word that the tournament was cancelled. "What frustrated me the most was the effort of so many people — all the planning and preparation, and then just like that, it was over. Sure I was let down, all of us who were a part of the tournament were."

In spite of last year's disappointment Sousa says he looks forward each year to the challenge of being a part of one of the PGA Tours most prestigious events. "I still look forward to each year with the same anticipation," Sousa says. "Each year we try to improve our preparation by noting what we've learned from previous years."

The challenges which face Sousa and his staff each year are not limited exclusively to preparing the course for tournament play. They include handling the nuances of the thousand of spectators that will descend upon the course during the tournament week. Placement of thousand of feet of rope, power, water, restroom facilities and grandstands all have to be coordinated by Sousa and the Poppy Hills staff. "Our goal is to have all those items in place by the end of the advance week, but invariably we're out there pounding stakes and stringing rope

right up until tournament time."

Sousa's Tournament week schedule includes a daily 7:00 a.m. meeting with PGA officials. "We discuss general course conditions and any concerns they may have regarding playability," says Sousa. The Poppy Hills staff under Sousa, and course Assistant Superintendent P.J. Spellman II's direction begin their day at 5:30 a.m. As one would expect, the set up includes, daily mowing of greens, tees, cup changing and bunker raking. After a brief break during the tournament, the staff is back out at 2:00 p.m. often working right up until dark.

With all the planning, preparation and execution required for a tournament of this magnitude, you would think that when it's over it must be quite a let down. "So what does it feel like?" I asked Sousa. "My initial reaction is - Oh my gosh! It's over, we made it. There is no doubt a sense of relief and accomplishment. We're fortunate in the sense that the tournament runs for just three days at Poppy Hills. On Sunday, I usually just relax, enjoy the tournament and visit with friends." For Mark Michaud and his Pebble Beach staff, relaxing will have to wait one more day. ♦

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