

Grooming The Monster

PREPARING "the Monster" for the 54th PGA Championship was the responsibility of Ted Woehrle, Superintendent at the prestigious Oakland Hills Country Club in Birmingham, Michigan.

Oakland Hills' south championship course, ranked among the nation's toughest and dubbed "the monster" by the venerable Ben Hogan, was made even tougher for this year's tournament. Those who viewed the PGA Championship on national TV witnessed "the monster" take a toll of leading money-winners.

Woehrle's preparation of the course had much to do with the success of this \$225,000 golfing challenge, and a great deal more to do with the smooth execution of the entire tournament.

In preparing the course for the July 1 — August 6 PGA assault, Woehrle tried a number of ideas suggested by the experiences of other superintendents, while developing his own overall "game plan". For "instant reply", here are some of the approaches Woehrle took and during the week-long proceedings.

Months ahead of the tournament, telephone and TV people made it known they needed two telephones for each hole. One phone would be located at each green for official scorekeepers, while the second phone, spotted at the 250-yard marker, would be used by broadcasters to relay information about the holes not actually covered by TV cameras.

To set up the phone system, nearly 30,000 feet of telephone wire had to be strung around the course. How to do it was the problem.

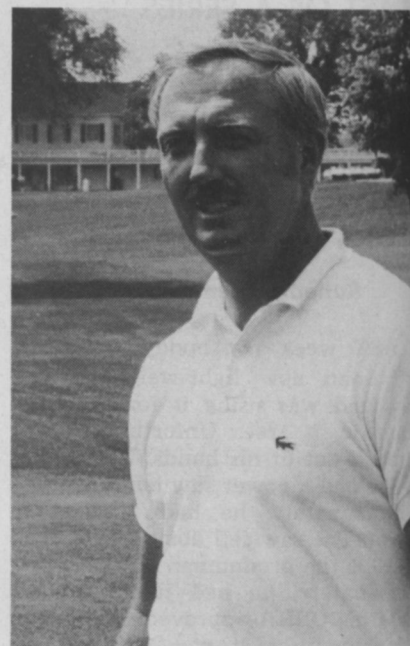
"At first, there was thought of installing phone lines permanently," said Woehrle, "but the cost of trenching and installation was extremely high, and they (telephone engineers) wanted to know if there was a better way."

Woehrle suggested he could take up a piece of sod with a sod cutter, lay the wires about two inches in the ground, and flop the sod back over the wires. "The only thing that bothered me about doing this," Woehrle recalled, "was the large scar sod removal would leave, so I cut off part of the sod cutter to take up a narrower piece and moderately curved the blade to make more of a crease under the sod."

The idea worked perfectly. The wire laying operation was completed five weeks ahead of the tournament, and when play began, nearly all the scars left by the operation had grown over.

After the championship was over, the wires were removed simply by pulling them up by hand, again leaving only a small, fast-healing scar.

Ted Woehrle's "modified" sod cutter was the method used to lay nearly 30,000 feet of telephone wire around the Oakland Hills course. The wires were put about two inches below the surface to protect them from spiked shoes often worn by people in the gallery. The scar left by the sod cutter had grown over by the time the tournament had started.



Ted Woehrle is superintendent at Oakland Hills Country Club, Birmingham, Michigan, where the 54th PGA Championship was held in August.

Healing the scars left by the galleries totalling more than 114,000 people was still another problem for Woehrle. His solution actually began before the tournament practice rounds.

"We were not concerned about damage to the fairways, even from galleries this big," commented the superintendent. "People don't do

(continued on page 20)



GROOMING THE MONSTER (from page 12)

much damage to turf when they are walking. But we knew there wouldn't be much turf left in the areas immediately surrounding each green where crowds would be standing and constantly shuffling their feet."

Woehrle drew on the experience of colleague Andy Bertoni, now superintendent of Holly Greens Country Club, Holly, Michigan. "Just prior to a major tournament at Meadowbrook in Detroit where Andy was superintendent at that time," Woehrle said, he overseeded the areas where he expected damage from the crowds. As predicted, the existing turf was demolished, but immediately after the tournament was over, Andy had new turf coming up."

Woehrle used the same concept for this year's PGA at Oakland Hills. One week before the start of practice rounds, and after the gallery ropes had been strung, Woehrle overseeded the area (approximately 10 feet wide) behind the ropes. "We did nothing more than put down seed over the healthy turf at about 1½ lbs./1000 sq. ft.," Woehrle stated, "and let the crowds work the seed into the ground for us. A day or so after the crowds were gone, we had new bluegrass coming up."

Only five weeks before the PGA another problem came up — tropical storm Agnes. Although Detroit was only skirted by Agnes, more than 3½ inches of rain fell in a 72-hour period, leaving the course vulnerable to disease.

Immediately after the rain stopped, Woehrle stepped up his fungicide program to head off possible trouble, particularly from leaf spot and dollar spot.

"I had been applying fungicide to the greens and fairways on a 7-10 day schedule at two ounces/1000 sq. ft.," said Woehrle. "After the rain stopped, I immediately doubled the rate until I was certain things had dried out enough. I like to keep the turf reasonably dry and healthy."

Among the fungicides Woehrle utilizes at Oakland Hills is Daconil 2787 from Diamond Shamrock Chemical Company. He began using Daconil to obtain control of a broader spectrum of diseases on his greens and fairways when he determined mercury would no longer be acceptable.

"A couple of years ago it was pretty obvious mercury would be on its way out," commented Woehrle,

"and I also noticed that the mercury was a little toxic to the turf, causing a temporary change in color. I didn't have this problem at Beverly (Woehrle was superintendent at Chicago's Beverly Country Club from 1959 to 1968) but I definitely did get a reaction here in Detroit."

Changes on some of the fairways and greens on the 7,054-yard course were also made for the tournament by Woehrle's 20-man crew. "We reduced the landing areas to 90-100 feet from the normal 110-120 feet," noted Woehrle, "and we added some prominent sand traps (more than 100 already existed) on several



Rain and tough rough made the course even more difficult during a practice round for this year's National PGA Championship tourney. Course superintendent Ted Woehrle (far right) offers solace to Jack Nicklaus as he surveys an errant drive on the eighth hole. Meanwhile, Arnold Palmer climbs aboard a groundskeeper tractor and shields himself from the downpour by an umbrella.

holes. Our sand traps are not manicured. We have a very rugged lip similar to traps in Scotland; we never touch it."

The par for members is normally 72, but for the PGA we made two par five holes into long par four's. All of these things made the course, which was designed by Donald Ross in 1917 and toughened by Robert Trent Jones in 1951, about as difficult as it has ever been.

Truck drivers and the press were two elements of tournament week upon which Woehrle focused much of his attention.

His past experience with major tournaments, including two Western Opens at Beverly convinced him that the single biggest problem came

from trucks delivering the variety of goods necessary to the tournament, ranging from beer to sanitary facilities.

"Delivery truckers seem to share a common philosophy," Woehrle commented, "that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Once they pull on the grounds and see the tent they're supposed to go to, they head straight for it — across fairways, tees or whatever."

For this tournament, Woehrle made it standard operating procedure that no truck was allowed on the grounds without one of his men accompanying the driver. "It eliminated a lot of problems," he

recalls, "such as the time a hot dog bun delivery van pulled on the course, and headed directly for the concession tent in the middle of the course. He would have made it non-stop, but he came to a tee. He got out of the truck, dropped the ropes, and drove over the tee. When I approached him about it, he offered me a dozen buns to forget the incident."

"During another major tournament, a beer truck got stuck in the middle of a fairway. Fortunately, the truck was close enough to the tee so the players could hit over it. But we had to unload every case of beer and call in a large wrecker, which left more tracks, to get the truck out.

We also worked pretty late that night repairing the fairway for the next morning's round," he said.

Woehrle also made press relations part of his standard operating procedure for this year's tournament. "The inaccurate and incomplete press coverage concerning the condition of the course in some of this year's earlier tournaments," emphasized Woehrle, "convinced me that I should be aggressive in seeing that the press had a source of complete information about Oakland Hills."

Woehrle followed a two-step plan for press relations. First, in the press tent, he made certain each of the 200 typewriter had a note on it offering to answer all questions concerning the course and its condition.

His second step was actual *face to face* contact with the press during the tournament. "I spent a substantial amount of time around the press tent offering to supply information or answer questions," he injected. "Even though the course was in excellent condition, I still found being there gave me a chance to talk about the course preparation, how we made it more difficult, and so



Sand traps at Oakland Hills are never manicured. They feature a rugged lip similar to traps in Scotland.

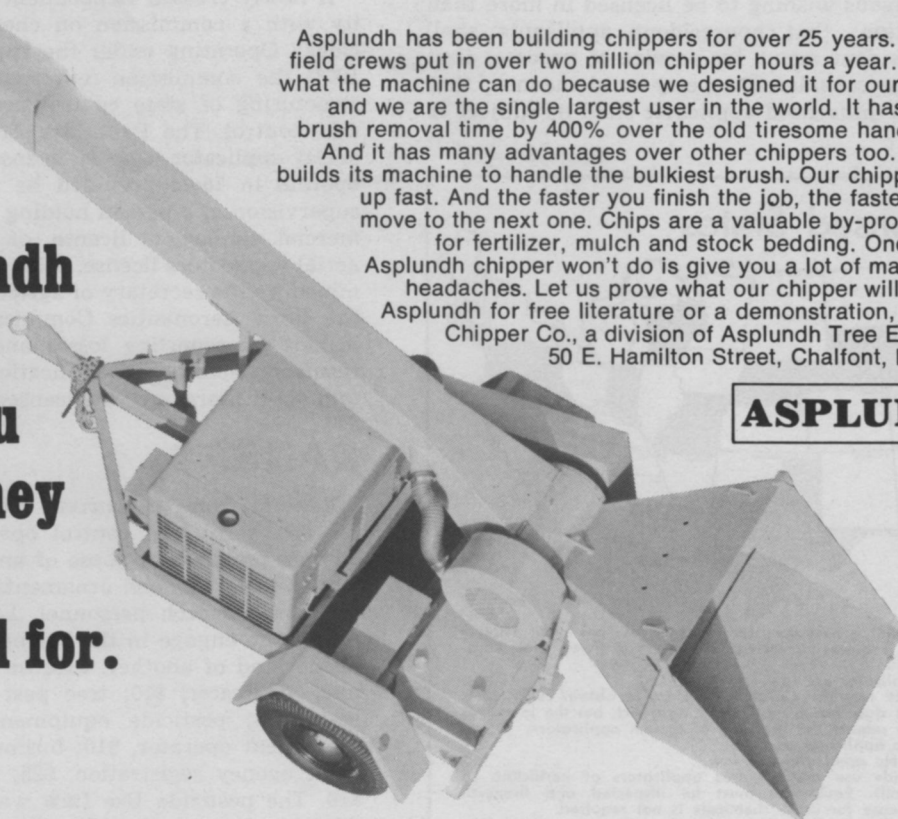
on.

"In contrast, if the course had not been in good shape, being in the press tent would have given me an opportunity to explain to the reporters why it wasn't before they wrote their stories. At least they would have had correct information to work with, even if their stories still came out unflattering. I think this year has shown the absolute neces-

sity for the superintendent to be providing accurate, complete information whenever the press is involved with the course."

Woehrle is now putting these ideas and many others he used in preparing for the 54th Championship into a booklet for other superintendents to use in getting ready for a major tournament. It should be finished late this year.

**An Asplundh
Chipper
makes you
more money
than you
bargained for.**



Asplundh has been building chippers for over 25 years. Asplundh field crews put in over two million chipper hours a year. We know what the machine can do because we designed it for our own use, and we are the single largest user in the world. It has speeded brush removal time by 400% over the old tiresome hand method. And it has many advantages over other chippers too. Asplundh builds its machine to handle the bulkiest brush. Our chipper eats it up fast. And the faster you finish the job, the faster you can move to the next one. Chips are a valuable by-product used for fertilizer, mulch and stock bedding. One thing an Asplundh chipper won't do is give you a lot of maintenance headaches. Let us prove what our chipper will do. Write Asplundh for free literature or a demonstration, Asplundh Chipper Co., a division of Asplundh Tree Expert Co., 50 E. Hamilton Street, Chalfont, Pa. 18914.

ASPLUNDH