



Inverness Club superintendent Tom Walker is confident the "Hinkle Tree," the blue hills spruce directly behind him, will provide the barrier needed between the 8th and 17th holes.

IDYLIC INVERNESS

Superintendent Tom Walker keeps his course, host of this year's PGA Championship, in superb shape with a 'light and frequent' maintenance program.

by Ken Kuhajda, managing editor

It doesn't look like much, the blue hills spruce that sits near the tee of the 8th hole. But it sure made Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio, even more famous.

It's become known simply as the "Hinkle Tree," the 25-footer that golfer Lon Hinkle made famous at the 1979 U.S. Open.

During the opening round, Hinkle decided to take a short cut on the par 5, 528-yard, dogleg left 8th hole by hitting his tee shot through a narrow opening and into the parallel 17th fairway.

From the 17th fairway, the no. 8 green was reachable in two strokes.

may have been the only Open participant to realize that, and during the first round, he hit a one-iron and two-iron, and then two-putted for birdie.

Word spread and two other golfers birdied the hole. The next day, golfers were surprised to see the scraggly blue hills spruce in the slight gap Hinkle had hit through.

On Friday, Hinkle was unaffected by the tree. He hit his driver over the Hinkle Tree and into the 17th fairway for another birdie.

Superintendent Tom Walker and tournament officials are hoping the same thing won't happen this year when Inverness hosts the PGA Championship Aug. 4-10. The tree is several feet taller, and the woods between the 8th and 17th holes has grown considerably more dense.

The Hinkle Tree has added to the legend of 83-year-old Inverness, host of four U.S. Opens (1920, 1931, 1957, 1979), one U.S. Amateur (1973), and a PGA Championship (1986).

Maintenance tricks

Walker tends a course that exhibits common northern characteristics: bentgrass tees and greens, bentgrass and poa annua fairways, and a bluegrass/tall fescue mix in the roughs. He says that only subtle changes are being made in preparation for the PGA.

The course has 94 sand traps, some of which are bordered by yarrow, a noxious weed that Walker lets grow and then uses to his advantage.

Hundreds of varieties of trees dot the course, some of which were gifts from members. "We have a membership who loves their trees. We try to bring in some different trees for them," says Walker, pointing to a fern leaf beech.

A paperbark maple in the 9th fairway is a gift from a doctor



Number 18 at 354 yards is probably the shortest finishing hole on a major U.S. course. But the tiny green, bunkered front and left, slopes to the right and back, thus creating a challenge even for the pros.

LANDSCAPE PROFILE



Inverness employee Eric Malczewski mows a narrow strip of turf in the U-shaped sand trap that sits in the fairway between holes 14 and 15.



Jay Collins is all eyes as he mows tees to just under 1/4-inch.

member, says Walker. "We have more than 10,000 trees."

Inverness has its own nursery of sorts but it is temporarily uprooted in preparation for the PGA. It lost a territorial battle to the press tent. Walker says trees generally grow four to five years before they are planted on the course.

'Lightly and frequently'

In maintaining the trees and turf, Walker says he has no tricks. But after talking with him, it's evident that his maintenance program should be labeled "lightly and frequently."

The trees are frequently pruned

by Inverness staff.

He uses a low nitrogen program, fertilizing lightly and frequently (every two weeks). He feeds his turf a lot of potassium.

He aerifies the greens in the spring and fall, the fairways in the spring and sometimes in the fall, and the tees continuously in the summer months.

He topdresses the greens lightly every two weeks.

In addition, he verticuts frequently, using a Toro riding greensmower. "It helps speed up the greens but certainly doesn't help with thatch," says Walker.

He mows his tees at just below 1/4

inch, the fairways at just below 1 inch, and the greens at just under 1/8 inch. The rough is kept at anywhere from 1 to 4 inches.

Strong support

With all his maintenance activity, Walker needs both a big and capable crew. He's lucky. He has both.

About 30 workers toil the turf at Inverness (mainly with Toro and some Jacobsen equipment), with just

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—Tom Walker, superintendent
Inverness Club
Toledo, Ohio

five remaining year-round. Walker repeatedly points out his crew's talent.

"I'd put this crew up against any in the country," says Walker. He adds there's something special, an added incentive, when preparing for a major tournament.

"Something like the PGA pulls them together. They realize it's a once-in-a-lifetime event and they get to participate in it," he says.

The crew is an interesting bunch. Assistant superintendent Tim Kennelly, 23, already has eight years golf course experience. He has an associate degree of turfgrass management from renowned Michigan State University.

The tall, blond Kennelly worked for Walker at Highland Meadows. He also worked two summers at famed Oakmont Country Club in Oakmont, Pa. The youthful Kennelly says he doesn't feel great pressure to perform.

"I don't think age is an issue. It's ability and experience," says Kennelly, who hopes to land his own superintendent's job after this year's PGA.

Kennelly says he knew he wanted to be a golf course superintendent by his sophomore year in high school.

Crew member Aaron Asmus aspires to land an irrigation construction job in Florida when he graduates from the Agricultural Technical Institute (a part of Ohio State University) in Wooster, Ohio.



Walker allows the noxious weed yarrow (some varieties are known as Queen Anne's Lace) to grow free in the traps, creating an ornamental look.

A member of a religious singing group, summer helper Asmus will graduate in the spring, 1987 with an associate degree of applied science in turfgrass management.

Fellow crew member Chase Clements Jr. has a well-known name in the Toledo area. His father, Chase Clements Sr., is a columnist for the local *Toledo Blade* newspaper. Chase Jr. is also an aspiring writer.

A long career

Walker, in his sixth year, is preparing for his first major tournament. That's something special for a man who began raking bunkers at Inverness when he was 14.

When former superintendent Wilbert Waters retired in 1980, his understudy Walker came back to Dorr Street (Inverness' location in southwest Toledo) to fulfill his dream.

"I'm really proud of this course," says the 35-year-old. "Being the superintendent here is something I've always wanted to do."

Walker, with an agronomy degree from Ohio State University, has also worked at Muirfield Village Golf Club (Dublin, Ohio), Kettering Country Club (Defiance, Ohio), and Highland Meadows (Sylvania, Ohio).

Inverness, 1986 style

When Inverness hosted its first U.S. Open in 1920, contestants were housed at five downtown hotels and paid rates ranging from \$1.50 to \$5 per night. They'll pay a little more this year.

And the course they'll play has also changed substantially.

In 1979, four new holes were added to relieve congestion and

accommodate today's galleries. Numbers 3 (par 3, 185 yards), 5 (par 4, 401 yards), 6 (par 3, 220 yards), and 8 (par 5, 528 yards) were added for the 1979 U.S. Open.

The battle still rages between traditionalists and progressives about the additions. However, the PGA press kit notes: "...as the new holes mature and the memory of those eliminated fades, the furor has somewhat subsided. Most of

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—Tom Walker

Inverness is still pure Donald Ross (the original architect)."

The course measures 6,982 yards with a par of 71.

There's no arguing over the fact that Inverness is well-respected and highly-rated in the golf world. *Golf Digest* ranked Inverness 55th among the nation's top 100 golf courses in 1985.

Back to normal

Walker and crew admit there's something special about preparing for a major golf tournament. But when the last hot dog wrapper is vacuumed after the PGA, Inverness will return to serenity with its 220 members at center stage.

That's fine for Walker, who knows success begins and ends with your members. "Our members care about this course as much as we do," says Walker, who prefers to stay behind the scenes.

Walker believes he and the crew are doing their jobs when they don't hear from the members. "Few know where my building is but if we have to shut the course down on a wet day, I'll be in the men's grill going from table to table explaining to them what we're doing," says Walker.

It could be that kind of attitude that makes Inverness a great place to belong and one of America's top courses. **WT&T**

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