

# Tournament conditions are tough to meet

■ If you'd like your golf course to be tournament-ready, or would like to actually someday host a major tournament, then read on.

Ed Walsh, superintendent of the Ridgewood Country Club, Paramus, New Jersey, hosted the 1990 U.S. Senior's Open, and learned first-hand what sort of course conditions the USGA requires for tournament play.

Ridgewood—which is featured on this month's cover—was chosen to host the tournament nine months after the course was offered to USGA officials.

Tournament preparation took Walsh and his 15 extra employees two years, a great portion of which time entailed training for new crew members, bunker renovation and intensified maintenance.

Do members of private clubs welcome tournaments?

"They do, in almost every instance I'm aware of," says Walsh, "but they have to be sold on the idea. In most cases, I think the decision is made by the board of directors, with input from membership or it's put to a membership vote. There's so much responsibility, so much of the golf course is going to be changed relative to the people on the course. (Members) should be

made aware, and have an opportunity to approve or disapprove."

Tim Moraghan, a member of the USGA advance team, reminds that tournaments put an inordinate strain on a golf course, and the people who work it

"There's a big misconception that you can maintain these conditions year round," says Moraghan. "I try to tell people that we're peaking for one week in June. When it's over, the club cannot maintain that level of intensity throughout the year."

Moraghan says a prospective host city must first meet logistical requirements before the USGA even agrees to visit the course. Those include: office space; parking; room for gallery seating; nearby airport facilities and adequate hotel accommodations; communications and first aid.

If these requirements all pass muster, the USGA then will walk the course.

● Tee areas must be roomy, on firm and stable ground and point toward the prime landing zone.

Moraghan says the USGA puts a premium on driving accuracy.

"We don't want to have a player hit it anywhere and be able to wedge it back towards the green, if he's hit it 50 yards left or right."

● Bunkers should have adequate turf around the perimeter, drain properly and be free of rocks or other debris; neither too deep or too shallow;

● Roughs should be at least 20 yards from the edge of the fairway, and of adequate density and uniform height. Moraghan advises that roughs should allow a half-shot penalty; "you don't want to embarrass the player and have him need to hit the ball 50 yards to the side to get it back into play. You want to give him the opportunity to advance the ball about 100 to 150 yards."

● Greens must be firm and fast, because as Moraghan says, "putting is 50 percent of the game." Moraghan adds that the USGA selects green speeds based on: 1.) the event being played; 2.) green contours; and 3.) turf type.

According to Moraghan, extremely fast greens for a junior amateur or senior women's amateur would not be sporting.

Contours must be reasonable and can't resemble your local putt-putt.

It's in the category of turf speed that Moraghan says the average club management tries to emulate U.S. Open conditions. It's Moraghan's philosophy that "slow grass is better than no grass or fast dirt.

"I think an 8-1/2-foot (stimp meter reading) is ideal," says Moraghan. "I would rather play a club that has 8 to 8 1/2-foot (green speed) and has turf on it."

Moraghan also advocates lightweight mowing.

"Lightweight mowing and clipping removal helps in *Poa annua* reduction and eliminates compaction," advises Moraghan. "We want to encourage bentgrass, which in turn decreases water use because bentgrass uses less water."

Moraghan recommends hand-raking of bunkers during tournaments, and rotary mowers in roughs for heights above 2-1/2 inches.

Use a turf groomer to achieve faster green speed without a lower cut, but only in spring or fall, when bentgrass is growing well and the weather and soil temperature promotes good growth without heat stress.



Ridgewood Country Club's 4-West.

—Terry McIver