



Taping for TV coverage will take place at the heart of your course. Here a cameraman and announcer confer on camera angles for coverage of the John Deere Team Championship in La Quinta, Calif.

Preparing your course for local, national media

Photos in your local newspaper, commentary by hometown radio personalities, and TV sports coverage can attract area golfers to your course.

by Steve Trusty, Bob Tracinski

■ It's show time! Broadcast crews and print reporters will invade your golf course to cover the big event. Reporters and "analysts" will dissect the playability and aesthetics of your facilities; the competence and cooperation of your staff.

Accommodating the needs of these invaders will take extra time and lots of work, but—done well—the rewards are well worth the effort.

"The exposure is the pay-off," reports W. Scott Lewis, superintendent of the TPG Stadium Course and The Jack Nicklaus Resort Course at PGA West, La Quinta, Calif.

Lewis is accustomed to working with the media. The Grand Slam, November 10-11th, 1992, was followed one week later by the John Deere Team Championship Golf Tournament. "For the last Grand Slam held here, we had eight hours of cable TV coverage," Lewis remembers. "Viewers could see what we have to offer and think, 'I'd like to play that course; I'd like to try that shot.'"

Naturally, you try to keep the course in top condition for any play, but when TV cameras will be rolling, strive to be as close to perfect as possible.

"Watch the details," cautions Lewis. "Little things can look pretty big when flashed across the TV screen.

"Once you learn a media-covered event is scheduled, do as much advance planning as possible. For an event as important as the Skins Game or Grand Slam, we find it easiest to schedule in reverse.

"Work backward from the date of the tournament to establish the proper timing on procedures. Planning is the real key. You need to know what can and must be done—and when to do it. You want to be ready before the first camera shows up."

For example, Lewis notes, if it's going to take 10 days to edge the cart paths, work backward from the scheduled event to make sure the work is completed. Time overseeding so the new grass is ready for daily mowing. Increase seeding rates drastically if necessary to attain full turf in a limited time span. Green speeds should be ideal. Time your topdressing procedures accordingly.

Weather is a major factor to consider. What time of year will the event take place? What delays could weather conditions cause? What procedures might need to be postponed or moved ahead to accommodate inclement weather? What materials and equipment need to be on hand to compensate for problems?

Communicate special procedures to your staff. For example, if you're going to

Media coverage idea file

■ Other ideas from California superintendents W. Scott Lewis and Michael J. Tellier:

- Obviously, you must comply with golf rules. Pay special attention to the height of cut, bunker raking and bunker sand content.

- Pull sand away from the bunkers, hand rake the area and make sure that no rocks have been pulled to the surface.

- The greener the grass the better. Deep green shows up well on the TV screen and in color photos. Decide on mowing patterns and keep them consistent throughout the course.

- If your course has notorious wet areas, make sure those spots are drained well in advance of the special event. Have extra pumping equipment and squeegee-type tools on hand in case irrigation problems occur. Order extra sand and organic wood chips for use if needed.

- Spend extra care on trimming and cleanliness in the perimeter areas as well as the course itself.

- Aesthetics are important. Enhance the background prior to the event. Reseed thin or lackluster turf. Plant flowers and add more color to existing flowerbeds. Use flowers to highlight the corporate logo or some distinctive feature of the facility.

- Expect to pull in extra help to prepare for a major tournament. Divert employees from other departments or use temporary personnel for supervised tasks.

- Try to have the course ready when the practice rounds start, which is usually two days ahead. The players don't want to cope with changes during the actual competition.

- Once the event starts, make sure all crews are out of the way. Alert your staff to the procedures to follow.

- Be prepared for more work at the end of the event. There will be lots of clean-up. Grass will be matted down. Some repairs may be necessary.

be altering mowing patterns, review the material with your staff in time for them

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Picture perfect means the course looks so inviting that those viewing it can see themselves playing on it—and may make plans to do so. (The Dunes Course at LaQuinta Golf and Tennis Resort, LaQuinta, Calif.)

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to make the proper adjustments.

Michael J. Tellier, Golf Course Superintendent of the Dunes and Mountain Courses of the LaQuinta Golf Club, LaQuinta, Calif., whose Dunes Course served as a venue for the John Deere Tournament, also is skilled in work-

ing with the media. He adds these suggestions on course preparation:

"Communication is vital," says Tellier. "The advance production staff for television coverage usually comes to the facility two months prior to the event. For annual events, we start preparing for the coming year the day after the current event ends."

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The superintendent is becoming more recognized as a factor in golf course success by the media, especially over the last five years, according to Tellier.

Go over the course with media advance personnel, looking for eyesores. "See what has to be done and develop a priority list, tackling the major problems first; then the minor ones," Lewis says.

Tellier says you should take this opportunity to determine what camera angles they wish to use; to mark areas for towers; to determine special angle shots, etc. Decide if trees must be trimmed for sight lines to make sure the shots will be "clean."

"View the course from the camera's perspective," Lewis recommends. "Know exactly what will be seen in shots from each position. How will normal care procedures affect the camera's picture?"

There's always give-and-take with media coverage. For example, there may be some discussion as to where to set up the announcing booth. The area needs to provide a good scenic angle, yet be out of play. It may be necessary to change a location choice to accommodate irrigation or computer lines.

"Keep an open mind," Lewis says.

The superintendent is becoming more recognized as a factor in golf course success by the media, especially over the last five years, according to Tellier: "Commentators like to relay information on course care during telecasts, so expect them to ask you questions to fill in their background material." They want details so that people who know the game of golf will understand why certain things look certain ways.

Both superintendents agree that something always comes up, but you can handle it if you plan ahead, schedule wisely, anticipate problems, work hard and follow up thoroughly. Then enjoy. Good media attention attracts new golfers to your course.

—Steve Trusty is President of Trusty & Associates, which provides consulting services to the horticultural trade. Bob Tracinski is manager of public relations for the John Deere Company in Raleigh, N.C.