



It's tourney time!

Tournament-tested superintendents share their experiences so that your big event showcases both your club and your value as a superintendent.

By RON HALL/ Managing Editor

Canterbury Golf Club, Beachwood, Ohio, hosted the 1996 U.S. Senior Open. Not every golf course has Canterbury's heritage. But, just about every golf course hosts a tournament. As your big tournament approaches (maybe even a club or city championship) read on to garner tips to put your course at its best.

Starting with veteran superintendent Terry Bonar, CGCS, at Canterbury, several experienced superintendents offer suggestions to help you prepare for your special event.

Hosting a nationally televised tournament is a big honor, both for the club and its superintendent. It directs a spotlight on the club and course. The superintendent gets a chance to display the course at its best.

But, your tournament doesn't have to be televised to be important. In fact, *every* tournament is important to the participating golfers. And, the superintendent is

called upon to do something special with the golf course at just about *every* tournament.

Canterbury management actually began considering a major tournament almost 10 years before it actually hosted the '96 Senior Open. In 1988 the Club asked Stanley Zontek of the USGA Green Section to visit the course with an eye to hosting a major event. Zontek visited the Club annually and made many helpful suggestions to make the course more tournament ready, as did Bob Brame, his successor in the USGA Green Section, recalls Bonar.

A big help

"The turf advisory service really helped us in preparing for the Senior Open," says Bonar. "And, it's a credit to Canterbury's membership that it followed through with these improvements."

A club applies for a major USGA tournament years prior to the event. This "invitation" is scrutinized by a special USGA committee. It considers factors like layout and condition of the golf course, its proximity to a metropolitan area, whether the club has the room and facilities to handle so many people and vehicles, willingness of the club's membership and availability of volunteers, and practice areas.

Actual tournament preparations begin almost two years ahead of time—in Canterbury's case in the fall of

1994. That's when David Eger (he is now with the PGA in a similar capacity) and Mike Davis of the USGA played the course with Bonar and Skip Vogelsberger, vice chairman of the championship for the Club. In resulting discussions it was suggested that Canterbury enlarge four tees and widen two fairways.

The Club made the tees larger that same fall. It also put in three target greens and replaced the bridges on the course. The USGA didn't require these improvements, but the membership had been considering them, and thought it was a good time to do them, says Bonar.

Improvements continue

Tim Moraghan, USGA championship agronomist, visited the course during the 1995 season. He checked on the tee work, and suggested that the Club level the landing areas—for instance, locations where settling had occurred along tile lines or irrigation trenches. Bonar assigned a crew to do that in the fall of 1995.

Meanwhile, the Club also continued its two-year tree trimming program. Canterbury places a high value on its trees, and Bonar has an arborist on his staff. But the trees got special attention anyway.

"We examined every tree and we trimmed it up to eight feet," says Bonar. "We tried to look at things from a liability as well as a playability standpoint."

While Bonar is no novice in preparing a course for a tournament (Canterbury has hosted PGA events) he, in company of committee members and other club officials visited and gathered suggestions from superintendents at other sites familiar with major tournaments. These included Mark Kuhns at Oakmont Country Club (1994 U.S. Open), Pine Hurst's Brad Kocher and assistant Bob Farren, host of the 1994 U. S. Senior Open, and Paul Latshaw, Sr., Congressional Country Club, (1995 Senior Open, '97 U.S. Open). Tom Walker at In-

verness Club, Toledo, Ohio, and other superintendents willingly shared their tournament experiences too.

With so much preparation and so much experience how could anything go wrong? Somehow, something always seems to pop up to challenge the superintendent.

Problems to solve

In Canterbury's case, an application of ammonium sulfate fertilizer the December before the tournament created ugly small spots of dead grass on several greens. "To this day we don't know exactly what happened. It wasn't a good thing to see," remembers Bonar. Putting a cover over the greens early that spring to protect the turf and promote growth helped heal the damage.

Then, as the tournament got nearer, a greens mower sprang a hydraulic leak and Bonar and his crew were forced to resod a section of a green. And, finally, two weeks before the tournament the turf on the rebuilt 7th tee died. "Up until two weeks before the event it looked great," says Bonar. The Senior Open didn't use that portion of the tee, and Bonar has since solved that problem with the fungicide Heritage.

One crucial decision Bonar made—and one that turned out well—was his decision to limit the volunteers he would use once the tournament began.

"I really didn't have a lot of volunteers," says Bonar. "We decided to use the staffing we had used for our Senior PGA Tour events. We ended up with 29 people and two volunteers."

During tournament week, Bonar and his maintenance staff arrived at the course 5 a.m. daily and briefly discussed the day's plan. By 5:30 a.m., when the sun peeked over the horizon, they were on the course. By 9 a.m. each day the greens had been double cut. The crew had also cut the fairways, collars and intermediate rough. Terry's crew had changed the hole locations and hand-raked the bunkers. The



Terry Bonar sought advice of other supers.



James Baran, CGCS, increases the height of cut on his roughs and no longer uses a gang mower. He now uses the Articulator mower.

course was ready for play. Some of the crew was then sent home, but Bonar and his full-time staff members stayed at the course.

The extra crew members returned at 5 p.m. They got on the course immediately after the first group of golfers cleared the 9th green. They cut the fairways for the second time each day (left to right in the a.m., right to left in the afternoon), machine-raked bunkers, filled divots and watered green banks.

Good weather a plus

Bonar says that both the time of year, early July, and the weather, dry for the most part, smiled on his course for the Senior Open. He had kept the greens dry. By the third day, he was asked to water some of them to soften them a bit.

"The event was at a time of the year,

the 4th of July, right before stress (turf) and we could do some things to the golf course that we couldn't have done later," says Bonar. "By that time the staff was pretty well trained too. It was a great time of the year."

If you don't have several years to prepare for your big event (and who does?) consider some of these "tricks of the trade" that other superintendents employ.

Everett Holzapfel, III, Jackson Country Club, Jackson, TN, likes to make a fungicide application with a little more iron to the greens a few days prior to the event. He feels wants a little extra protection against disease, and a little more color in

'Overhead' precautions

Whether or not a golf course has an arborist on staff, the condition of trees has the potential to add to or detract from the overall appearance of the course. Dead branches, stressed or declining trees, loss of leaves through anthracnose or chewing pests are only a couple of potential problems.

An additional concern is the potential for liability. Dead limbs, trees with cavities and/or decay are all potential hazards not only for golfers but for the increased traffic and the number of observers who will be standing underneath those trees.

Not only should the trees be inspected for appearance but also for potential risk of hazard. The timing of the failure of a tree cannot be predicted but the potential for failure can be identified and addressed. Pruning, removal or control of traffic around a concern can be considered.

Hiring a consultant who is a certified arborist with experience in hazard tree assessment is a valid and responsible step not only in preparing for tournaments but also as a part of routine course maintenance.

—Nancy Stairs

the turf.

Consider using Primo

He also schedules a fertilizer application for the fairways and tees a couple of weeks prior to the club championship. The week prior to the tournament he will apply Primo (again with a little extra iron for color) to protect himself from inclement weather.

"Two years ago, while hosting a state amateur event I did just that. Right after the first round was over we had a two-inch rain," says Holzapfel. "We could not mow fairways until the last day of the tournament and when we did it was as if we had not missed a day."

In addition to giving more attention to blowing all debris off the course—aprons, fairways and the rough—his crew also spends more time on bunker preparation. They will edge and Flymo all the bunkers the week before and continue to Flymo them daily in the evening after the last group. They hand-rake bunkers daily during an event too.

"Lastly, mowing heights are usually not compromised depending on the time of year," he says. "We manipulate speed in other ways by double cutting and rolling the greens daily."

Some special touches

James Baran, CGCS, superintendent at Eagle Creek, Norwalk, Ohio, says his Penneagle/Pennlinks fairways, mowed at 1/2-inch, are pretty much tournament ready throughout the season. But he does give special considerations to greens, bunkers and roughs, particularly for tournaments involving golfers with low handicaps.



Everett Holzapfel, III, says Primo can help prior to a tournament.

"About four days before a tournament we will topdress the greens pretty heavily, brush them and double-cut them. Then the day before the tournament we will brush and double-cut them," says Baran. "We can take them up to 10 1/2 or 11 pretty quick. We don't even have to change the height of cut."

Usually also, Baran will raise the height of cut in the roughs. "We've gotten away from using the gang mowers and we're using a pull-behind rotary mower, the Articulator. It has seven decks, and we can take it right over the mounds and never scalp."

Baran's crew may also fluff up the sand in the traps a little more than normal too, particularly if the golfers in the tournament are supposed to be really good golfers. "Normally we keep the sand on the firmer side," he says.

And finally, but equally important, don't forget marking the course properly.

"Marking the golf course for rules and regulation interpretation is based on condi-

"I really didn't have a lot of volunteers. We decided to use the staffing we had used for our Senior PGA Tour events. We ended up with 29 people and two volunteers" --Bonar.

tion and accuracy of hazard, lateral and out-of-bound stakes," writes Rich Marshall in the Georgia *Through the Green* publication.

"On a consistent basis, all staking should be kept in good condition with periodic fresh coats of paint to maintain maximum visibility. Staking that is set in sleeves allows constant maintenance in correct position.

"Monthly applications of growth retardant to creek banks and lake banks residing along play areas of the golf course can minimize hourly labor to keep these areas mowed," adds Marshall, superintendent of The Orchard Golf and Country Club, Cornelia, GA. □