

## **Setting up a Golf Course for a Championship**

1. Thank you. It's a great pleasure to be here in Pattaya on behalf of The R&A and to have this opportunity to attend and participate in this Conference. I would first like to thank and acknowledge the great work of Micah Woods, the TGA and TGCSA in bringing this Conference together and hope that you all learn some valuable information and insights over the three days.

2. Based in St Andrews, The R&A is golf's governing body and the organiser of The Open Championship. The R&A is committed to working for golf and operates with the consent of 138 organisations, from the amateur and professional game, and on behalf of over 30 million golfers in 124 countries.

3. Today, I would like to give you a bit of an insight into the requirements for setting up a golf course for a golf championship. More courses in the Asian region are being approached to host championships and hopefully some of the information I will cover today will be of assistance to superintendents, managers and owners.

4. Your General Manager has just told you that your club is hosting the Asia-Pacific Amateur Championship in 14 months so what are your key initial planning requirements?

1. Start planning well in advance and develop an action list, budget and timeframe.
2. Establish good communication with and expectations from the Tournament Director.
3. Obtain a list of Course Preparation Guidelines from the Tournament Director.
4. Arrange a schedule of inspection visits.

5. In general, the preference for most championships is that the course plays firm and fast.

6. More often in Asia however I encounter courses that are over-watered, not only on the fairways, tees and greens, but in the rough. While many superintendents are directed by their employers to showcase courses that are lush and green, this is often to the detriment of players and tournament officials involved in a championship. Wet courses also have the potential to damage the course due to larger than usual traffic and the course can therefore take much longer to recover after a tournament.

We therefore need to educate owners, managers and members that less water can enhance the playing experience and presentation of a course.

Additionally a course can also only be held at Championship standard for a certain time before the grassed surfaces starts to suffer, and that applying more water, fertiliser and pesticide to try and beat nature and extend this period is not sustainable.

7. In an address in 2010 the then USGA President, Jim Hyler, commented “Many of the standards by which we construct and maintain our courses have become, quite simply, unsustainable. I believe that our definition of playability should include concepts of firm, fast, and yes, even brown, and allow the running game to flourish. We need to understand how brown can become the new green.’

8. The R&A has always had a policy to present Open Championship courses with brown fairways, rough and conditions as can be seen in this picture with Tiger at Hoylake in 2006.

9. According to USGA Agronomists', Patrick O'Brien and Chris Hartwiger, the benefits of the 'Brown Approach' to courses in the Southeast region of the USA include:

1. Excellent lie - The lie of the golf ball is not affected by young ryegrass seedlings.
  2. Fast and firm - Dormant bermudagrass can be kept dry and firm, which increases ball roll. In contrast, with overseeding, frequent watering during establishment is necessary resulting in very wet playing conditions.
  3. Mowing equipment lasts longer - Overseeded fairways must be mowed all winter. Eliminating these mowings extends equipment life.
  4. Fewer resources used – Fuel and water consumption are reduced resulting in a significant savings in maintenance expenses.
  5. Weed control simplified - Weed control in dormant bermudagrass is much easier and less expensive than in ryegrass overseeding.
  6. Faster spring greenup - With no competition from overseeded ryegrass, the bermudagrass will return to summer playing conditions much faster.
- (Please note: points 5 and 6 are relevant in places where warm-season grasses go dormant in the winter.)

10. One other point I would also like to highlight which seems lost to many architects and managers is that a 'Bunker is a Hazard' and therefore golf does not benefit from the relentless drive to present 'perfect' bunkers. Is it right to attribute 20% or more of your staff's time to managing a hazard in the lead up to a championship? Or could you staff be better utilized in other areas? Less time spend maintaining bunkers results in more time being available for greens, fairways, tidying the rough and so on.

11.
  1. Definition of Areas - It is important that all areas on the course are well defined including fairways, hazards, bunker edges and the rough. This will greatly assist the referees and players in determining all issues related to rulings.
  2. Drainage – Ensure that the drainage system works well and in particular that bunkers drain well. A full system check should be carried out on a regular basis.
12.
  3. Sand – Ensure there is an adequate supply of sand in all bunkers and that both the depth and composition is consistent. All bunkers need to be physically checked to

determine if they are up to standard. If more sand is required this should be put into the bunkers at least four months prior to a championship. Also ensure that all rubbish and rocks are removed.

4. Greens - It is essential that all greens are firm and have a consistent coverage of grass. They also need consistent stimpmetre spots on greens.

5. Rough – Tidy up the rough and trees and remove all dead and broken branches

#### 13. Greens

1. Survey and create consistent stimpmeter spots per green.
2. Clear, definitive mowing line between green and green collar.
3. Avoid using tournament hole locations two-three weeks prior to tournament.
4. Double-cut and roll greens as necessary to reach targeted green speeds.

#### 14. Collars

1. 1/4" height or lower.
2. Avoid high rough cut immediately adjacent to collar.
3. Rough cut must not be present in the approaches to greens. Approaches should match fairway height.

#### 15. Tees

1. Remove any obstructions that may interfere with the player's intended area swing.
2. Avoid tournament tee settings in advance of the tournament.
3. Maintain a firm dry turf (3/8" height); do not over water.

#### 16. Tees

4. Have a green divot mix prepared and available for players and caddies on all par three holes.
- . Be prepared to drag morning dew.
6. Ensure all tees are level.

#### 17. Practice Green

1. Cut an adequate number of holes.
2. Change cups the evening prior to the next day's play.
3. Have any practice flagsticks removed for the week of the tournament.
4. Mow daily prior to play. (Should be mowed first in the AM rotation.)

#### 18. Practice Facility

1. Mow teeing area each evening at same height as fairways.
2. Move hitting line to new area each evening for the following day.
3. Divots to be sanded only.

## 19. Fairways

1. 7/16 – ½”
2. Establish tournament mowing height in advance to avoid scalped areas during the event.
3. Gauge irrigation applications well in advance to provide firm, fast surfaces.

## 20. Fairways

4. Be prepared to drag dew from fairways and collect divots.
5. Establishment 30 yards of widths and contours.
6. Establishment of fairway collars and walkways from tees to fairways.

## 21. Fairways

7. Determined the desired mowing pattern with the TD – cross or parallel.
8. Weather permitting, mow every night or morning, before or after tournament play.
9. Remove stones and pebbles.

## 22. Rough

1. Intermediate rough should be 1.5”. Suggested widths are 42” around greens and 66” around fairways.
2. Top off primary rough at 3”.
3. Remove stones and pebbles.

## 23. Bunkers

1. Remove stones and pebbles.
2. Establish 3-4 inch grass lips on greenside bunkers and a clean edge in sides of bunkers.
3. Check for uniform sand depth (4-5 inches) on bunker floors and (1-2 inches) on faces. If faces are high and deep, OK. If playable, 2-3” on faces, 4-6” on floor. If more sand is needed add this at least 4 months prior to the tournament.

## 24. Bunkers

4. Place rakes on outside of bunkers in line with play.
5. Grass bunkers should be closely mowed to avoid hanging lies.
6. All bunkers should be raked in direction of play.

## 25. Trees

1. Remove all non-essential stakes and support wires in playing and spectator areas.
2. Level to grade all tree basins in playing areas.
3. Trim or remove all low, overhanging branches and shrubs that interfere with spectator movement, player walkways or ball flight corridors.

## 26. Other Considerations

1. Generally, have the course free of markings. Referees will mark the course and determine hole locations of each hole.
2. Provide the TD with a list of hole locations from previous championships. Just on hole locations, as a general rule I like to have all days of a tournament consistent with a combination of front and back, left and right and generally 6 easy, 6 medium and 6 hard. No one day is tougher than another.
3. Have a quantity of pointed 1"x2"x4' long wooden stakes (red, yellow and white) for course marking.

#### 27. Other Considerations

4. Have a number of rubber roller based squeegees in good repair, with team ready. Test them prior to use.
5. Have at least two gasoline pumps in good working order to remove water from bunkers.
6. Prepare tournament flagsticks and tee markers for on-course placement for the beginning of tournament week. These items are to be immediately removed from the course after completion of play each day.
7. Have a stimpmeter.

28. With adequate preparation hopefully your course will look a little better than Japeri outskirts of Rio in Brazil. This is the country's first public golf course but has been very successful in getting disadvantaged children into golf.

#### 29. The Holing Out Test

When golfers stand over a putt, if they hit it on line and at the right pace they expect to have every chance of holing the putt. Now we have a means of assessing the reliability of a putting green; the 'Holing Out' Test, developed by The R&A.

The 'Holing Out' Test will identify issues related to foot printing on overly soft surfaces, disease scarring, grass seed head production, seasonal variation in growth and general wear and tear. The Test can also be used to measure the degree and longevity of disruption to the reliability of putting surfaces from intensive maintenance procedures. It can also be used to inform preparation for important tournaments.

Our preferred device for this is the Greenstester <http://www.greenstester.com/> which is not yet in full production but will be demonstrating this during the Field Day.

Also visit <http://golfcoursemanagement.randa.org> for more information.

(Video to be shown)

30. In closing, I would like thank you for being such an attentive audience – this has been a great opportunity to tell you a about setting up a course for a championship and I hope that this information has been useful.

It is important that golf at all levels is sustainable and this applies just as much, if not more, to the preparation and management of courses for championships. Championships provide golf with a great opportunity to showcase the sport to not only the golfing community but governments, legislators, environmental agencies and the general community. If championships can therefore showcase best management practices we can send out positive messages about the sport.

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