

1979 U.S. OPEN

Some Reflections

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OUR SUPERINTENDENT, Wilbert Waters, said it best: "Compared to this one, the 1957 Open Championship was a breeze! Today, it's not easy to keep up with the everyday problems which arise as a result of the vehicle traffic, the needs of all the people involved in the event while thousands of spectators are on the course, and the National Open Championship is in progress."

Some of the problems in preparation for the 1979 Open were unique to Inverness. The primary problem was construction of four new holes, which required a vast amount of additional time and effort on the part of the grounds superintendent and crew; hence, it was impossible to give the remainder of the course the attention it usually receives. Two years is probably too short an interval between construction and a major competition. More time is needed for the grass and the trees on the new holes to mature.

For the Open Championship, fairway lines are altered to conform with the degree of difficulty of play on each hole. In my view, it is necessary to narrow the bentgrass fairways to championship width as early as possible in order to obtain more uniform rough in the areas formerly designated as fairways. Bentgrasses grow slowly, and *Poa annua*, when it is first allowed to grow to rough height, produces an extremely tangled pattern. I believe that this narrowing of fairways should be done in the spring of the previous year, instead of in the early fall, to allow careful nurturing of the grass in this difficult area. I feel the primary rough should be brought to a height of four inches as soon as possible, and held there by mowing with rotary-type riding mowers. We found we had insufficient rotary mower capability until just before the Open, when a major manufacturer of mowing equipment lent us several units.

A detailed map of the golf course, showing all underground installation, such as irrigation systems, power lines, drain tiles, must be available. Reproductions should be given to the command personnel of television, bleacher installation, and to the concessionaire. Organizational meetings with the television company should be carried out in early summer the year before the Open so that they can lay out their requirements for underground coaxial cables and telephone lines. Six to eight weeks' delay is inherent for delivery of the coaxial cable.

In September, the majority of the cable was carefully installed at Inver-

ness less than six inches deep to avoid our in-ground hydraulic tube controls for the irrigation system. At that time, the telephone lines to each green and mid-fairway landing area were also installed. Because ABC, which did the telecast, set up three separate control areas, it was necessary to run power lines to the three separate areas. We were fortunate to be able to reach those areas by overland power lines around the perimeter of the course.

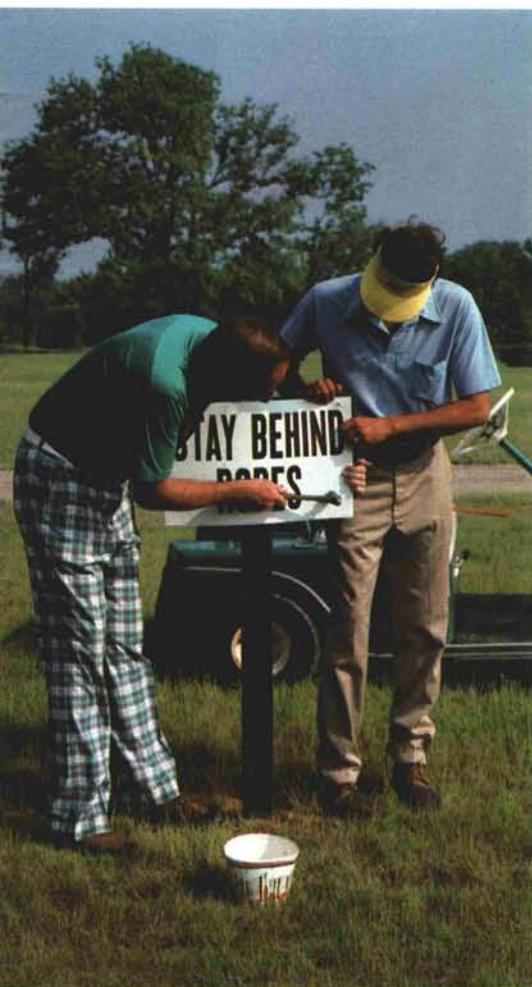
With transite pipe in primary use for our irrigation system, we stressed immediately that no heavy cranes or equipment would be allowed over our main water supply line and that all

No stakes should be driven without direct approval of a groundsman familiar with the irrigation system.





(Above) Preparing the course is easy compared to accommodating large vehicle and trailer traffic for a major championship. A view of the ABC TV area at Inverness.



(Left) The author and groundsman Michael Strantz, right, attending to appropriate signs.

moves by heavy equipment could only occur with direct supervision of a representative of the grounds department or the subcommittee of grounds and television. We recommend this procedure highly. We should state that we had the full cooperation of ABC personnel. No tree trimming was allowed during the placement of TV towers or other equipment without grounds committee approval.

Additionally, a member of the grounds committee who knew the location of the underground installations watched while the course was roped for gallery control. No stakes were allowed to be driven into the ground or moved during the championship by marshals or other personnel without the direct approval of our groundsman.

It is also important to define responsibility for the evening trash pickup before the tournament. We found that two ground crews, using small open-body trucks, could quickly pick up

the filled and tied plastic bags, which were removed from the trash boxes by the Boy Scouts. It would help if the ecology committee could draw up a map showing sites of the trash containers so that all areas can be cleared each evening. An additional item under grounds and ecology would be to not allow the concessionaire to use pull-tab beer or soft drink cans.

In conclusion, be prepared to cope with many small but critical problems during each day of the championship. It is inevitable, and despite the best organization and planning procedures, something will go wrong. As our Wilbert Waters said, "Preparing the course was the easy part of it all."

Editor's note: Indeed, the overall course condition was excellent — greens in particular were superb, and for most of the championship their speed averaged 10 feet 3 inches using the USGA's Stimpmeter.