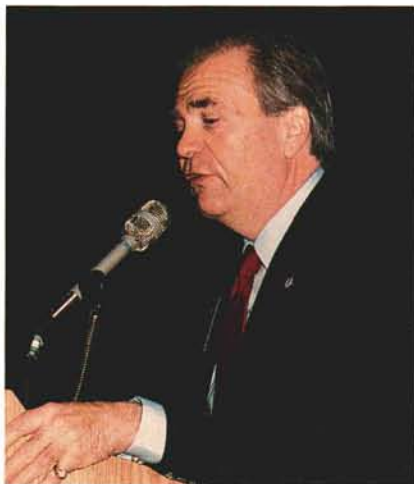


Joining Efforts to Bring The Course Up to Par

by JOHN D. LAUPHEIMER
Commissioner, LPGA



John D. Laupheimer

MANY FACETS of an LPGA tournament must be brought together in order for the event to be a success. One of the most important areas is that of tournament course conditioning.

The condition and appearance of the course at any given tournament depends on the teamwork of the sponsor tournament committee, the course superintendent, the LPGA tournament staff, and the USGA Green Section. Of course, the ultimate responsibility for the course lies with the superintendent. However, he receives input from, and his work is greatly influenced by, many different entities not only leading up to but also during an LPGA tournament. The ability to blend these entities and come up with a course in prime condition shows not only the superintendent's skill, but also how he manages himself and other people.

The process of preparing the course for an LPGA event begins with choosing the venue. The sponsor tournament committee will select a course it feels will suit all purposes for an LPGA tournament. Influences on the committee's decision will include reputation, accessibility to the public, aesthetics of viewing, and the club members' desire to hold the event. The LPGA operations staff looks at the course for many of the same reasons, but it adds a few items to its checklist to determine if it is to be approved as a tournament site. Of these, the most important is whether or not the course can be adapted to LPGA tournament play. At this point the superintendent is brought directly into the picture. It must be determined if the superintendent can groom the course to our tournament standards in terms of mowing heights and frequency, fairway size and contouring, green speed, bunker consistency, and the peripheral things that ensure all specifications are met.

As the LPGA grows in size and popularity by the year, it is important for the course to have the capacity to comfortably hold a gallery of up to 20,000 on any day. We also need plenty of room for physical structures such as concession stands, restrooms, leaderboards, and hospitality areas, enough room so that these entities serve as a convenience and not a hindrance to the spectators' experience.

The superintendent is not necessarily directly involved in the construction of these items, but he knows his course better than anyone, and his advice is essential.

To cater to the growing number of spectators now attending LPGA events, there needs to be ample parking facilities, either on the site or in the vicinity. From these areas it often occurs that spectator entrances must be created. In doing so, we must consider how this will affect the superintendent's work in maintaining the course properly. Careful thought also must be given to the adequacy of the practice facilities. Professional golfers spend a great deal more time on the practice areas than amateurs do. A large hitting area and putting green are paramount for a professional tournament. Hence the superintendent will be asked to maintain and save areas exclusively for the professionals.

Once these details have been agreed upon with the superintendent, the sponsor will arrange for various committees to perform the many duties necessary to the production of a successful tournament. Some of these committees are assigned to the sales and marketing areas of the event, while others look after the many operational aspects. These committees need to communicate closely and cooperate with the superintendent, because any decision they make will affect his preparation of the course. For example, no construction will be done on the course without the

superintendent's prior knowledge and approval. Therefore, it is critical that we maintain this communication between the sponsor committees and the host club and superintendent throughout the tournament process.

In its sponsor manual, the LPGA suggests each tournament have a green committee chairman, preferably a representative from the host club, to liaise with other committees. This chairman works particularly closely with the construction committee chairman to ensure that all signs, concessions, and the like are properly installed, and that damage to the course is kept to a minimum.

Now to the superintendent's primary involvement with the tournament. The LPGA's operations staff become the host club superintendent's main resource on course conditioning. Our specifications for tournament preparations do not vary a great deal from the club's day-to-day maintenance. We attempt to ensure that our players generally have consistent conditions throughout the year, subject, of course, to local variances, such as types of grass, weather, and time of year the event is played.

It is a standard policy for the LPGA to send one of its tournament officials to the tournament site a week before the event begins. During this time he becomes acquainted with the superintendent, will prepare hazards, boundaries, and note other course conditions for the information of the LPGA staff members who arrive the week of the tournament. The tournament official and the superintendent will spend the week discussing course setup and the maintenance plan. If any minor changes need to be made, the official and the superintendent can set things in motion prior to the extra commotion and pressure of tournament week.

Once the tournament is underway, the superintendent uses his management and personnel skills to their fullest. By this time, he hopes that the fruits of a year's labor to bring the course to its peak have paid off.

As good as the condition of the course may be at this stage, the superintendent does not have time to sit back and enjoy watching the Tour members play his course. Not only is he answerable to the LPGA tournament staff for course conditions (literally because he carries one

of our hand-held radios), but he also has to respond to the other tournament committees through the club's course liaison. The superintendent will become probably the person most in demand during the week. The term "no rest for the weary" is very appropriate to this individual throughout the tournament.

In everything I have already mentioned, I gratefully acknowledge the service the USGA Green Section provides to it all. Unfortunately, this usually goes unnoticed to the public, even though it is an essential part of the tournament's makeup. The LPGA recommends as a matter of course that host clubs use the Turf Advisory Service as a tool to ensure top conditions for tournament time. As the Green Section will heartily agree, this also makes for better playing conditions year-round for the club members. We believe that experts talking to more experts can only be better for the course conditions that our players enjoy.

ICANNOT say how important it is that the course be perceived in a good light by the sponsoring company and the public. The work a superintendent does in preparing the course for an LPGA tournament has a tremendous impact on the feel and ambiance of the event. If he has been able to manage his course and staff properly, and Nature has been reasonably cooperative, the tournament's image will be greatly enhanced. A sponsor is always more inclined to entertain his clients in pleasant surroundings, and what can be more conducive than a well-groomed course?

A local course may be using the tournament to increase its membership, to further promote itself as a resort facility, or to sell property within a real estate development. A course that can boast the "tournament look" always enhances this goal, and this may continue to be a reason for the tournament to return to the same venue. Galleries also enjoy the aesthetics of a lush, green golf course, although I don't need to tell any superintendent that green doesn't necessarily mean good. However, a course that is well maintained for a tournament will still give the galleries the feel of a quality event, and that is an image the LPGA is eager to portray.

As every superintendent is aware, the greater his budget, the better he can

prepare and maintain his course. A tournament brings increased money to the club to use for just this, and that means better year-around care. As I already have discussed, the LPGA's specifications are not very different from what a course should be doing normally. However, the superintendent often feels the need to have a little extra in his budget to be sure he can do things properly and make sure that his course is the best it can be.

Projects such as new cart paths, larger tee areas, and a change of landing areas in fairways can do a number of things for both normal course play and the tournament. The superintendent can protect worn areas from play easier, which improves the playing surfaces of fairways and areas near greens for members and tournaments alike. A larger tee can allow him to use and save more places on the tee, and create new challenges for his members. If the LPGA suggests a different fairway contour, he can do it, and at the same time give his members a new look on a hole, and better provide the LPGA with a good tournament hole.

It may be that a club committee can be convinced to make these changes when an LPGA tournament is coming to the course. There also is the possibility to convince the sponsor to assist in the financing of such ventures. This way, everyone shares in both the cost and the benefit of a well-conditioned course.

In reviewing just a few parts of the well-oiled engine of an LPGA tournament, we have seen that although golf is itself very much a game of individual skill and achievement, the venues at which the professionals display their abilities are really the result of a team effort. The sponsor committee, host club, LPGA, superintendent and USGA Green Section mold the tournament idea into reality by working together and understanding and respecting each other's responsibilities.

In doing all of this, everyone can take pride in the effort when a great LPGA champion is crowned with her title, and the local charity is presented with a handsome check of the proceeds from yet another successful tournament. The team concept never worked better in any other sport.