



*A water line break demands quick attention just before the championship begins.*

# Member-Guest or U.S. Open: How to Prepare for a Tournament

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**T**HE U.S. Open and the mid-season Member-Guest Invitational may appear to be miles apart in importance and preparation, but a closer look reveals many similarities. Both events assemble prominent players to the arena for a short period of time, with specific demands of the contestant and high expectations from the host.

The superintendent's ability to plan in advance for changes in course architecture, agronomics, budgets, day-to-day operations, encounters with the contractors, and approaching deadlines all are tested dur-

ing tournament preparation. Following are some of the standards applied to major championships that could be useful to know about as you prepare for tournaments, big or small, at your course.

## ARCHITECTURAL CHANGES

Occasionally, changes in course design are included for U.S. Open preparation and are accomplished with the permission of the host club. Feature changes are usually minor, but a well-qualified golf course architect should be consulted. All features of the

golf course are evaluated, and recommendations are made to improve conditions for the event and for the long-term benefit of the club. Following are typical changes to greens, tees, and fairways:

## Putting Greens

- Recover lost green surface to restore strategic hole locations.
- Improve heavily trafficked hole-location areas by increasing surface area.
- Flatten or moderate a steep slope.



*Installing new sand just prior to an event usually requires tamping or compacting activity to prevent fried-egg lies.*

- Rebuild broken-down greenside bunker banks.
- Add drainage, remove trees, or completely rebuild or regrass the putting surfaces.

#### **Teeing Grounds**

- Reestablish a firm, level playing surface.
- Reshape and point the tee toward the architect's intended target.
- Add surface area, corresponding with the number of rounds played, to improve turf consistency.
- Reduce tree effects, by root or canopy pruning or tree removal, to improve turf performance or remove unfair obstacles from blocking tee shots.

#### **Fairways**

- Establish a fair but challenging target for all levels of ability.
- Fairway boundaries should provide shot variety from the tee and exact some degree of penalty for a poor shot.

- Place a premium on accuracy and allow the player to "let it out" with the driver on a long par-4 or par-5 hole.
- Establish specific turf types for fairways and roughs to avoid unwanted shrinking, straightening, or expanding.
- Properly established fairway perimeters will aid decisions on the position of extra features such as trees, bunkers, ponds, etc.

Grooming for a tournament combines two primary qualities: playing conditions and aesthetics. When referring to playing conditions, the thought that "green is not necessarily great" should apply to course conditioning. Over-irrigated and over-fertilized lush, green turf does not equate to or produce fine playing conditions.

The goal of preparing for a competition at any club should be to capture the "Golfer's Eye" — to have all areas of the golf course in proper playing condition, while meeting the need for extras such as an adequate supply of practice balls at each station and water in the ball washers on each tee.

#### **GREENS**

In preparing for a golf event, goals and priorities must be set. Statistics tell us that 42% of the game of golf occurs on the putting greens. Following are some factors to consider when grooming your greens.

- Greens should be firm and fast. Green speed should be established according to the skills of the contestants.
- Greens should provide a true putt and be uniform and consistent from green to green.
- Follow through with proper cultural practices.
- Maintain a preventative pest control program.
- Avoid excessive irrigation.

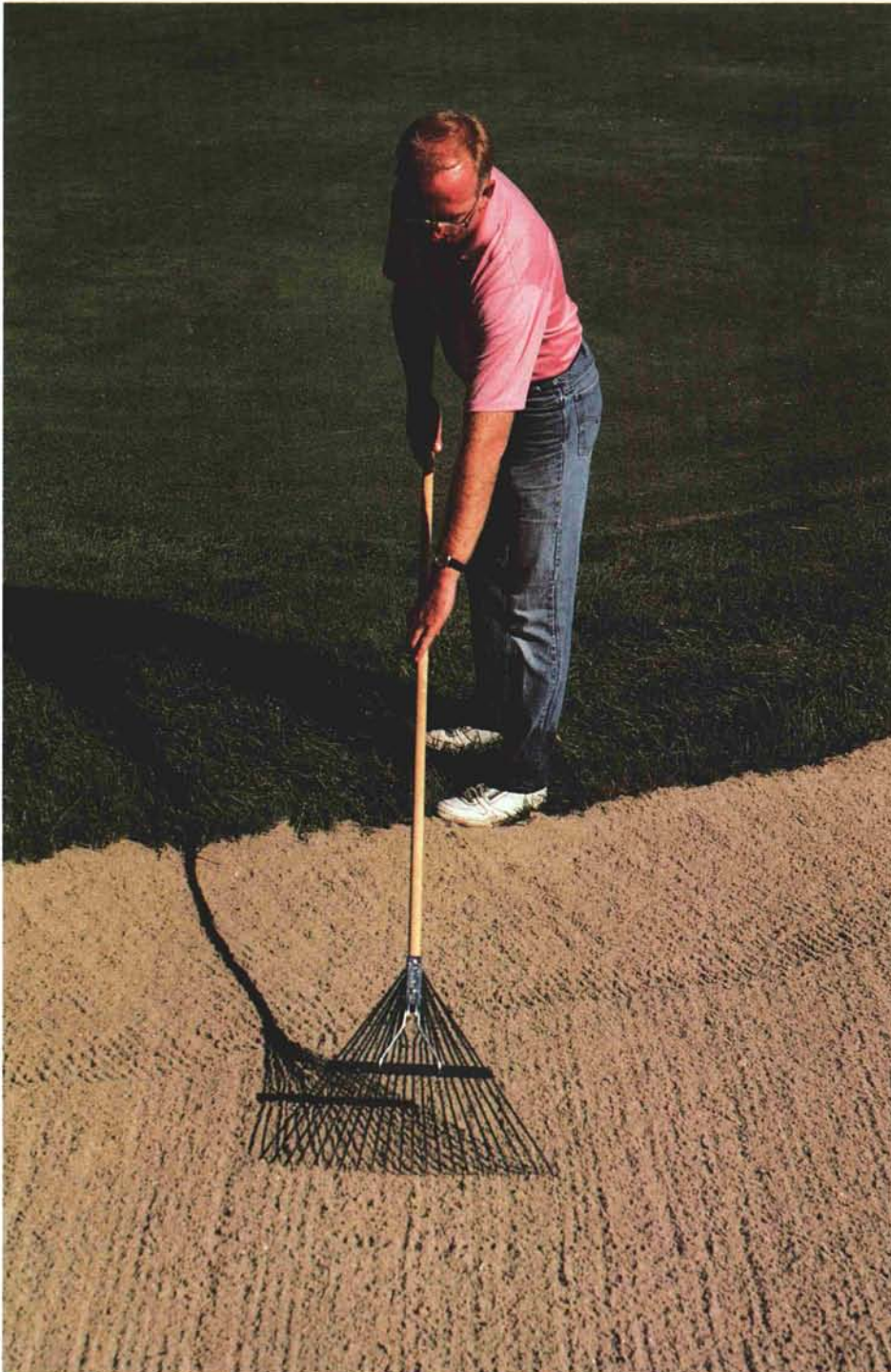
#### **Aeration**

Never a popular topic among golfers, the aeration process is a must to produce fine turfgrass that can withstand player and cul-

tural abuse during the week of a tournament. Following are some general guidelines.

- Aerification can be accomplished in mid-May, before the rush of play begins, and in mid-September, after all important club events have been played.
- Use half-inch hollow tines on conventional punch-type machines. Smaller tines have less impact on play.
- Remove the cores completely. Try to completely fill the holes with good-quality topdressing material.
- To avoid "pimpling," or the surge of growth near the top of the aerifier hole that causes a bumpy surface, continue topdressing lightly and frequently every two to three weeks.

*Attention to detail is the name of the maintenance game in preparing for a tournament.*



- Consider water injection as an alternate form of aerification.
- To minimize surface damage, consider using the quadra-tine aeration system.

### **Topdressing**

Done to promote smooth, uniform, and consistent putting surfaces, topdressing on a light, frequent schedule is perhaps the most important management tool the golf course superintendent can use on established turf. The benefits for proper playing conditions include:

- A smooth putting surface, finer-textured turf, with a tighter, more upright growth.
- Control of unwanted grain or leafiness.
- Thatch and compaction control for better shot-holding characteristics.

For tournament preparation, applications should be just enough to be gently worked down into the upper profile of the green. A suggested amount would be  $\frac{1}{3}$  cubic yard of material per 3,000 square feet of putting surface. Topdressing should not be done closer than 14 days prior to the first day of your event.

### **Vertical Mowing, Turf Grooming, and Rolling**

- Vertical mowing can be done to remove thatch and heavy growth. It often is done before aerification and before topdressing. New, sharp blades should be used during the spring and fall, while older, dulled blades should be used prior to the event to reduce turf stress. Heavy vertical mowing should be done at the optimum time for recovery.
- Turf groomers are used to produce smoother and faster greens without having to drastically reduce the cutting height. Grooming blades should be set about  $\frac{1}{32}$  inch below the cutting height, and best results are obtained when going in the opposite direction of the greens-mower. Avoid grooming around the perimeter pass and on severely undulating surfaces. Grooming can be done as often as necessary, but caution should be used if signs of wear or turf stress are observed.
- Rolling units recently have been introduced to green maintenance programs. Initial use suggests that green speed can be significantly increased in some circumstances without having to lower the cutting height. Trials will be continued to determine the place of these machines in tournament preparation and green maintenance.



Traffic control is essential to protect the course when large galleries are expected.

### Fertilization

Proper fertilization with respect to a tournament is based on application timing, amount applied, and type of fertilizer used.

- Reduce the amount of fertilizer applied as the event nears to minimize the opportunity for an unexpected surge in growth. Time the last application of granular products so that nutrient supply ends at about the time the tournament begins. Timing will depend on the type of fertilizer applied and the weather conditions expected at that time.
- Liquid applications of fertilizer can be used in combination with granular appli-

cations. With proper timing, liquid applications can maintain turf color and strength while avoiding unexpected growth. When using liquid products, add a dye for tracking to avoid overlapping or skips.

### Irrigation

Applying too much water will make the golf course appear lush and green, but it will play soft and slow. Too little water may improve playing conditions, but the turf will be severely stressed. During the final month, manage your irrigation program day to day

and apply water when and where it is required. The week preceding the tournament, and during the event itself, apply only enough water to keep the plant alive. Remember, it is easier to apply water to dry turf than it is to take it away from saturated turf.

- Always carry and use a soil probe.
- Understand the difference between hand-watering and syringing.
- Check all irrigation heads for water pattern and distribution.
- Level all irrigation heads in play areas.
- Check all syringe hoses and nozzles for leaks and have extras on hand.
- When syringing during play, work in reverse order when possible.
- Schedule sufficient manpower to cover all putting surfaces.
- Irrigate greens in the morning. Watch the water pattern and look for leaks, breaks, sticking heads, and signs of overwatering.

### TEEING GROUNDS

The teeing ground is the starting place for the hole to be played. Tees should be level, firm under foot, and closely cut. Proper cultural practices are required to insure healthy turf to withstand player use.

- Divot repair should take place on a daily schedule and be done at the end of each round.
- To protect the play areas prior to the event, use wind screen or erosion netting. It can be laid down or placed upright by using stakes.
- Mow tees in the morning to provide a fresh cut, remove dew, check for damage, and reduce the afternoon workload.
- Prune surrounding trees to eliminate unnecessary interference and improve turf growth.
- Prepare at least two complete sets of tee markers that are the same shape and color.
- A note on location: It is preferable that tee markers be placed about six yards apart. If the width of a teeing ground is wider than that, players are more likely to inadvertently tee up in front of the tee markers. Tee markers should be set up square with the center of the drive zone.
- Place a small white dot of paint on the turf beneath the marker to preserve the location and position of the teeing ground in the event a marker is lost, stolen, or broken during play.
- If caddies are involved, place a five-gallon bucket filled with water near the tee so they can wet their towels to clean clubs and golf balls during play.
- Place all accessories (benches, ball washers, trash cans) within reach, but away from the designated tee.

- The teeing area is usually rectangular in shape, measures 5 to 10 yards in width, and is two club lengths in depth.

## FAIRWAYS

A course should be set up to require accuracy as well as length. For the U.S. Open, fairway widths range from 27 to 35 yards. On a short par-4, a 27- to 30-yard fairway is adequate, but on a long par-4 the fairway should be wider to allow players to "let it out." The narrowing or widening of fairways, which necessitates a change in mowing height, should be undertaken as long in advance of the competition as possible. Fairways should be maintained to provide a firm and tight turf. Fluffiness results in "fliers," or shots without much backspin.

- To decrease grain and playing against a mowing stripe, mow fairways at an angle against the direction of play.
- Locate the center of the landing zone from the tee, and repair all unplayable areas from that point going 45 yards forward to the green and 45 yards back toward the tee.
- Overwatering landing areas and approaches to greens will be perceived as tricking up the course.
- When mowing, use metal irrigation flags as directional markers for straight lines.
- Dew drag before mowing with a hose filled with water or sand to reduce bouncing and decrease the formation of clipping piles.
- When using two lightweight mowers, start mowing in the middle of the fairway landing zone and work in the oppo-

site direction. This avoids extra tracking, turning, and clipping piles in the drive zone.

- Mow fairways as you would paint a floor. Start near the first tee and mow away from play to keep noise and interference away from the competition.
- For clipping removal, park a truck in a centrally located position to reduce the travel time of the mowers, and provide a supply of soil and seed so the driver can patch divots until the truck is full of clippings and ready to be driven to the disposal area.

## BUNKERS

The settled depth of sand in bunkers should be 4 to 6 inches, except that the sand in the faces of bunkers must be shallow and firm enough to prevent balls from becoming plugged or lost. To prevent this, create a lip on the front edge of greenside bunkers. No new sand should be placed in the bunkers within eight weeks of the first day of practice.

- To settle new sand, apply a wetting agent at 6 to 8 ounces per 1,000 square feet every 7 to 10 days.
- For packing sand, use the mechanical sand rake with its rakes raised and drive back and forth over the floor of the bunker. Using a hand-held hose, irrigate the sand prior to packing with the sand rake or other packing device.
- To aid in the firming process, hand rake bunkers when labor and time permit. When hand raking, always rake in the direction of the shot to be played.

- Use backpack blowers to quickly remove leaves, twigs, and debris after strong winds or a storm.

## ROUGHS

Roughs should be of sufficient height to provide a significant problem, but not so penal that a player in the rough off the tee will have to take a wedge and hack the ball sideways to the fairway. If the rough is this penal, a player will be penalized a full stroke for an errant drive. The USGA believes that the penalty for straying off the fairway should be about one-half stroke.

- For a cleaner cut and more upright stand of turf, use a rotary mower as opposed to a reel mower.
- To reduce the competition for water and nutrients, and to improve the density of the rough, root prune along all tree-lined roughs.
- For a thick stand of turf, consider a dormant fertilization with an organic source such as Milorganite in the late fall. In the spring, use a soluble product when the event nears.
- To keep the rough growing upright, remove all vehicular traffic from the roughs 14 days prior to the first day of the event.

## EQUIPMENT INVENTORY

Each piece of equipment, from shovels to lightweight fairway mowers, should be accounted for during the off-season, prior to your club's budgetary review and the upcoming event.

*Inconsistencies in the rough may require major renovation in some cases.*



- Your event may require a separate tournament budget.
- Review your equipment and decide if you have what it takes to get the job done and done on time. If not, then present the dilemma to the Board for evaluation.
- If there is a shortage in one area, especially heavy equipment, consider a lend/lease program with local distributors or neighboring clubs.
- Even the best equipment inventory can be lacking during an emergency. Know who, where, and how to acquire additional equipment in times of crisis, including bad weather, vandalism, and parts shortage.

Consider the following items and their value to your event, and plan for their use and/or shortage.

### Marking Stakes

Have an adequate supply of marking stakes, including those for out-of-bounds (OB), ground under repair, water, and lateral water hazard. OB stakes should be placed no more than 20 yards apart so the player or official will have line of sight from stake to stake when making a ruling. Hazard stakes should be 2" x 1" x 24" in shape, and OB stakes should be 2" x 1" x 36".

### Flags and Flagsticks

The USGA supplies two sets of flags to the host club for USGA championships. Having two sets of flags helps in case of damage, vandalism, and souvenir hunters. The USGA requires flagsticks be supplied that are 8 feet in length, yellow for sighting against a gallery, and straight from top to bottom in design. As with the flags, have two sets of flagsticks on hand.

### Pumps, Hoses, Squeegees

When it rains during an event, it pours, usually uncontrollably. The goal after a rain delay is to return the course to the competitors within 45 minutes after the rain has stopped. To make the transition easier, consider the following:

- Divide the course into sections (three or four) and have two pumps per section.
- One hundred feet of hose should accompany each pump to move water far enough away so it will not return to the area just cleared.
- Each section should have at least five squeegees, shovels, and rakes to move water, replace sand, and clean up debris.
- For easy transport, have one utility vehicle per section.

- Clean and flush all known drain lines for bunkers, greens and fairways to remove blockages that would slow down the recovery process.

### Ball Washers, Towels, Benches, Water Coolers

Each item is required for any event. Whether or not they are used depends on the contestant. They should be placed for easy use, but not so close that they would interfere with play.

- Water cooler placement depends on terrain, temperature, and size of the field. Normally, one cooler per tee is sufficient. However, the warmer the weather, the more water is consumed, so be prepared to have 36 coolers for the golf course, and an additional 12 for replacements.
- Tee towels should be thick enough for cleaning. Avoid fancy logos that would make attractive souvenirs.

### Plywood Sheets

Wet weather, soft ground conditions and heavy equipment can make a great impression, but on the negative side. Erecting tents, scoreboards, and concession stands requires traffic of heavy equipment across the golf course. Having 50 to 100 sheets of 4' x 8' 3/4" plywood on hand make it much easier to traverse the course.

### Sand, Soil, and Woodchips

Bad weather or excessive vehicular and spectator traffic can cause very muddy conditions both on and off the golf course. Arrangements should be made to provide an ample supply of woodchips, bark, mulch, sand, or similar material available for such conditions. Also, make arrangements with your supplier for quick delivery and easy access to the club.

### Radios

Proper communication is essential for a smooth-running operation. Radio contact between the superintendent, crew, clubhouse, and tournament officials is a must, especially during an emergency. For quick and easy response, acquire a multi-channeled radio, where each area of responsibility for the event can conduct its business on its own station.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Weather Emergencies

Foul weather, heavy rains, and lightning are quick to form and can be very danger-

ous. Thorough preparation and evacuation plans for sudden storms should be complete and practiced.

- Develop a written plan for everyone involved covering emergency procedures and evacuation.
- Contact and work with local weather authorities.
- Have buses, vans, and cars positioned at specific spots for evacuation.
- Provide a course map with the position of vehicles and rain shelters.
- If the fairways are lined with private homes, check with the owners for permission to house golfers during a sudden storm.
- Have a warning system (sirens, horns, etc.) loud enough to be heard on all parts of the course.
- Contact local police, fire, and EMS groups, and coordinate their services for the event.

### Security and Medical

For protection and first aid it is suggested that these services be contracted out. The professionalism and experience cannot be substituted.

- Course security is most important at night.
- Provide a tour of the course for security staff and set aside two working golf carts for each night.
- Medical personnel should be centrally located on the course.
- A quick, easy, and firm roadway should be provided for easy entry and exit.

### Parking

Though you may not have U.S. Open numbers with respect to parking demands, it would be wise to have an area large enough to meet your needs.

- Priority should prevail for your members, clubhouse staff, and grounds maintenance personnel.
- All parking areas should be well drained, dry, and easy to get to.
- Always have backup parking available.
- Contact a towing service for repairs and for cars that are stuck or abandoned.

Preparing a course for a tournament, whether it be the U.S. Open or the annual member-guest, can be stressful for all involved. Good communications can keep problems and conflicts to a minimum. But keep in mind that golf is a game. Take some time to enjoy the event, watch some golf, and take pride in the fruits of your labor.