



PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL
GOLF COURSE VISIT
PGA GOLF DE CATALUNYA
23RD FEBRUARY 2009

Subject: Venue for the Open de España 2009

Present:	Agustin Garcia	PGA Golf de Catalunya
	David Batalle	PGA Golf de Catalunya
	David Gomez	RFEG
	Miguel Vidaor	PGA European Tour
	Graeme MacNiven	PGA European Tour

Report:

Further to my visit to PGA Golf de Catalunya on Monday 23rd February, when a thorough inspection of the course was carried out, I am now forwarding a summary of my observations and recommendations.

Greens, Collars and Approaches:

The reports received from the qualifying school last November indicated that the green surfaces were softer than would be desired for professional golf and needed to be worked on intensively in order to present them in suitable condition for the 2009 Open de España.

My colleague, Scott Mclean, made a winter programme for David, of which, 2 hollow-corings have been completed, the first in early December, the second 6 or 7 days before my visit.

The green surfaces had full grass cover and were soft underfoot, which would be considered normal for a short period of time after aeration. Upon closer inspection it was determined that a thatch layer of approximately 3cm was present. Upon questioning David indicated that his programme was indeed finished and ready for the season bar his routine verticutting programme, something that was underlined by the fact that he had already completed his spring overseeding programme.

It is common procedure, especially on tournament courses, that after all core-aeration is completed a final pass with a deep scarifier – Mataway, Graden or similar – will remove more thatch, join up the vertical aeration holes with a whole network of fine slits and last but not least level the surface, allowing for a smoother ball roll and therefore faster green-speeds at higher heights of cut.

The aforementioned has been carried out on numerous tournament courses over all 5 continents in recent years and has proven to be without doubt the perfect way to end an aeration programme preceding a professional golf tournament.

However, it was perfectly clear that both David's were not comfortable with the above, giving several reasons, as is their right, ranging from not having staff capable of carrying out the procedure without causing damage to the collars and surrounds when lifting, lowering and turning the machine, to, having limited staff to carry out the scarifying together with all the other work they have to do before the tournament.

Greens - Plan B:

David is in possession of a set of Greentek 'scarifier' units that fit his triplex mower. There are 2 reasons why units are not so effective as a Mataway or Graden, firstly because they 'float' over the surface and secondly they have a maximum working depth of 10mm due to the cleaning brushes situated between the scarifying hooks. (A Graden is normally set to work at anything between a 20mm and 40mm depth). They will however do a much better job in removing excess thatch than conventional verticut units.

On tour we have developed a way of using them to produce similar results to the deep-scarifier. This is achieved by weighing down the unit slightly by securing some kind of heavy object to the top/centre of each unit, this will limit the degree of float and make the unit hug the surface more. It is at this point important to ensure the weight is still centralised upon the unit and doesn't make it lean to one side.

Obviously the depth of verticut should be adjusted to the amount of weight applied e.g. if the unit is being pushed into the surface by an additional 3mm then the bench working depth needs to be adjusted to -7mm (not -10). It is extremely important that the brushes that help clean the debris into the grass boxes are not rubbing too much on the surface, otherwise the turf may be unnecessarily scoured/rubbed or damaged.

This programme is best carried out in dry conditions, you will collect more debris in the box and have less on the green thus making the green instantly playable for any golfers that may be on the course. Extend this programme in the collars and as far into the approaches as agronomically possible.

The regularity of the above must be determined on-site, most courses I deal with choose to use it alternately with regular verticut units every 14 day or so, followed by a light topdressing.

When doing so, each pass should be rotated through a 30-45 degree angle. On no account should consecutive passes be carried out at right angles (90 degrees) to one another.

Greens Continued:

It was agreed that the green contour on the right hand side of green 4 should be reinstated to its original position, by lowering the height of cut in small increments.

A regular programme of mini-tining with 5mm solid-tines will help retain good air percentages in the non-USGA profile, this can be carried out up until 10-14 days before tournament week depending on the type of tine used (regular or Dillanium cross-tine). In addition, a Hydroject aerator would compliment the solid-tine programme perfectly and can be used even closer to the tournament week.

A good supply of Toro 'Microcut' blades should be in store for the green mowers and a suitably experienced tournament mechanic on-site to help fit them and deal with all possible eventualities.

Miguel has asked for the greens to be running at approx. 10.5 feet for the weekend preceding the tournament. He will then look at all possible weather scenarios with our professional weather experts on site and then upon final assessments of all variables, including quality of turf, inform us of his desired green-speed for the week. This will then be our chance to show our expertise in targeting a given green-speed and retaining it throughout the week.

As we all know, there is no great skill in achieving uncontrolled amounts of pace on a golf green, anyone can do it and everyone already has done. However, producing a 'requested speed' and holding on to it for a whole week, highlights a Greenkeeper who really understands his job and his turf to truly professional standards.

It was also agreed that a number of run-offs, that are unfortunately grassed to Tall Fescue, be maintained as low as possible – without causing damage – for the tournament. David suggested he could maintain them at semi-rough height and possibly lower them bit for bit shortly before tournament week. The run-offs in question are at the left of green 3, left of green 5 and the area left and behind green 11.

There are some rather obvious uneven areas to towards the back left of the 8th green that Miguel requested be levelled.

Tees:

All back tees have been closed for play and will remain so until the tournament. The forward tee on hole 5 should also be for the tournament as an alternative.

Tees have also been hollow-tined and should now be scarified once by means of the pedestrian Graden in a corner-to-corner direction with a standard reel of 2mm blades. This will reduce thatch levels and general softness underfoot as well as improving levels. A light dressing of sand should follow to restore levels. Some tees still had aeration holes that have not yet been filled, after the Graden is finished all aeration holes should be, within reason, completely filled.

Par 3 tees are still very badly scarred from the Tour School. Although the divots have been dressed with sand and seed I feel we would get quicker establishment if a more organically based mix was used instead of the pure sand.

The organic will warm up quicker in the sun due to it's darker colour, lose less heat during the night, it will retain more moisture as well as not leaching nutrients so quickly, all in all a win/win situation for the germinating seeds.

At present the mowing pattern should be alternated in all directions. For tournament week the mowing regime should be a diamond pattern from corner to corner.

Player walkways from Tee to fairway will be mown out ASAP in the manner agreed to avoid potential yellowing. The player walkways at par 3 should stop short of the approach or green e.g. the walkway on hole 11 should stop level with the timber-ties short left of the green.

Fairways:

David's main battle here is with compaction and it will be a constant one. All fairways have been hollow-cored and topdressed with sand.

The first 9 holes have been scarified to 40mm depth with the club's new Graden Swing-Wing, an excellent 3-unit tractor mounted piece of equipment. In future if the greens firm up in the slightest this would be the perfect way to scarify greens, collars and approaches in a very short space of time compared to the pedestrian machine.

I would like to suggest that the remaining fairways (10-18) be scarified with the Graden, similar to the front 9. Having said that, I would only be concerned with cutting through thatch layers and set the machine accordingly, this will avoid the removal of soil and not be so difficult to clean up afterwards. I estimate a working depth of 20mm would suffice. I suggest the pass the machine took around the perimeter of each fairway – the clean up lap if you like – be left out. These machines are really only designed for going in straight lines and not for around the contours of a fairway, the result is wider slits that take longer to heal over and possible warping and damage to the machine, which you could argue isn't really my problem, but it could become so if the machine breaks halfway through the job.

Scarifying and topdressing fairways is not a programme that yields enormous results overnight but is rather an ongoing process that will be of great value to the club a season or two down the road. The scarifying will help improve surface levels as well as helping the playing surface drain quicker after heavy or prolonged rain. If you look even further down the road the topdressing will eventually create a sand-cap effect producing far superior playing conditions than are currently in place.

Additionally I would like to suggest that the more often a thin solid-tine can be passed over the fairways the healthier stand of grass you will have. Even a regular run with an 8mm tine to 100mm depth will make all the difference in summer as well as winter.

A number of fairways have low-lying or sunken drain-lines e.g. fairway 18. Such should be lightly dressed and brushed on a weekly basis to help eradicate them. Similarly, drain covers such as those observed on the left hand side of the 12th fairway should also be levelled.

Roughs:

Rough mowing heights & widths were agreed as follows:

- Semi-Rough: - One band approx. 1.80m wide at 32mm, cylinder mower.
- Intermediate Rough: - One band approx. 1.80m wide at 64mm, rotary mower.
- Maintained Rough: - 90mm, rotary mower

The above mowing heights will remain in place around the greens, but as explained on-site we will reduce the mowing widths of the 32mm and 64mm in half to 90cm. This will give us a chance to have more of our 90mm rough inside the spectator rope line.

The 32mm cut is scheduled to be in place before our next visit at the end of March.

The fairway clean-up lap, the 32mm and 64mm cuts will all be mown in different directions during the tournament. But until such time a 'reverse-cut' programme will obviously be favoured.

Bunkers:

As far as bunker preparation goes, there is no such thing as the 'correct' depth of bunker sand that we can apply universally to every type of sand or bunker construction we experience throughout the year that would enable them all to function to tournament specifications in all kinds of weather week-in week-out.

Quite simply what we are looking to achieve is the following:

'½ a golf-balls' depth of loose sand on top of a firm sand base at least 75mm (3 inches) in depth'.

Steep bunker faces, on which a ball could not possibly come to rest, especially those that are facing against the direction of play, should have only a thin layer of sand approx. 1cm in depth. This will create the impression of a sand face, but in actual fact the ball will roll off the face and gather in the bunker base, thus avoiding, as best we can, a plugged ball scenario. If this is not possible due to the sheer depth of sand on the bunker face, then it should be suitably compacted.

One point we must remember is that when we reduce the amount of sand on a face to a bare minimum to avoid plugging, the sand must transition back to the regular depth the moment the face is flat enough for a ball to stop on. i.e. at the area of transition from slope to flat.

All bunkers should be dipped and checked for depth and uniformity of sand distribution. Uniformity means within a particular bunker and throughout the course and practice bunker. If for some reason any part of a bunker is short on sand, I am sure sand could be moved and redistributed from within the bunker itself and therefore eliminate the need for any fresh sand.

On a regular week we would have a full field of over 150 professionals, who will all play at least three rounds before Friday evening and a further 140 or so rounds over the weekend. That is approximately 600 rounds of golf. If there is any part of a bunker not properly prepared, experience shows, the players will find it.

I understand all too well that getting the bunkers right for a professional tournament is a very exact and time consuming aspect of course preparation especially when dealing with new sand. But please do not underestimate its importance to the Tour staff and the players.

Machinery/Equipment:

David mentioned his desire to mow all fairways with triplex mowers. This has been done on many occasions in the past and I will just point out that he will need at least 8 good mowers and operators to get the job done. The last time I was involved in that kind of set-up we had 9 triplex-mowers and 1 spare.

Our normal staffing levels for mowing greens by hand for a tournament would be a total of 8 machines and operators made up from 7 on the course and 1 spare machine. You will need the spare machine at some point. Agustin has sent me the list of requested machinery for the tournament and I have forwarded it on the relevant parties. Due to the large amount of machinery requested I would be prepared for a large part of it to be declined. We are informed that it is a tournament back-up/support service and not a tournament replacement service. Let us wait and see what comes out of it and take it from there.

The following equipment will be necessary for hole changing during the tournament:

- 2 x Holecutters, (H.I.O. single-plug cutters if possible).
- 36 x Aluminium holecups, new or painted.
- 2 x Aluminium cup-setters.
- 2 x Hole-scissors.
- 2 x Hole-in-white utensils together with 6 cans of paint.
- 4 x 3m dew brushes ('Dewmasters' or similar) should be onsite to help us cope with a 'secondary-dew' scenario.

Practice:

Despite its name, great care should be taken to prepare the 'Practise Tee' to similar qualities as experienced on the fairways as opposed to those of the tees. The reason being, it is generally the second shot from a fairway lie that the players will be practising on the range. Making it more of a 'Practise-Fairway' if you like.

As discussed on site, the pitching green area should represent the green complexes on the course exactly in all cutting heights and green speed. This requires that all different grades of rough around the practice green, as indeed the sand in the practise bunker, be a fair replication of the corresponding areas on the tournament course.



In General:

I would like to thank Agustin and his staff for their hospitality and look forward to seeing them all again shortly.

If for some unforeseen circumstance any part of the above programme cannot be carried out in full, or if you have any queries regarding this report, please inform Miguel or myself as soon as possible, so we can discuss alternative measures.

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