

Running the tournament from the other side!

On a drizzly mid November day I had a meeting with Lancashire Ladies, the host county, for their tournament in mid June, 8 months later! To say I was shocked with the size of the committee was an understatement, having many years of preparing tournaments, I don't think I have ever dealt with more than three and normally just one on the organising panel. However this was to prove one of the reasons for the successes of the week; as it turned out over six meetings and eight months later, the Lancashire Ladies had covered every part of running a very successful tournament and to cap it all off they won it!

To be involved from the beginning of the planning meetings was great and it should be always done, however a lot of the time it is over looked. It makes things easier and it certainly proved worthwhile as I knew what they wanted right from the start and to be fair the Ladies listened to what and what couldn't be achieved. With the season fast approaching we obviously had the course to prepare and this continued through March and April with the continuation of any fertiliser, aeration, topdressings, and wetting agent applications to name a few tasks that all Course Managers need to do and we are no different from that with our Championship Links here at St Annes.

With us now into mid April, I was looking at the tournament in more detail in regards to the overtime required; this is an important part to running any tournament and therefore plenty of notice is only fair to the staff so they can plan their social time too. Aeration and top dressings were planned well in advance and with flexibility to move with the weather conditions and with this in mind we aerated the greens at the beginning of May with the final topdressing two weeks before the tournament, which helps give and maintain the smooth surface that we require every day. However in between this, we gave the greens a small feed which allowed us not only give the greens their final topdress two weeks prior to the tournament but also maintained the health of the turf through the vigorous tournament conditions itself.

Into the final week before the event, I started to look at green speeds and the weather in far more detail. Stimp meter readings were taken every day at the same time; this allowed me to decide what our cutting regime was to be to maintain the smoothness and speed required. The aim was for a 10.5 on the Stimp.... The same speed as The Open Championship! The Portalos, Flags and Poles had arrived by now (as planned) and we needed to erect them for our final meeting on the Friday prior the tournament, to make sure the committee was happy with them. After a few trials and changes to the cutting regime we had reached the speed aimed for on the Sunday morning.....the practice day... perfect!



The Practice Day is here and after a 4.30am start the greens were now at tournament speed and putting very well. It's was now time to start the course preparation with the Tee Markers going out onto the course as we agreed but were mindful of our members as they still had golf to play. It was here that I took the time to set the pin placements for Monday taking into consideration the weather and wind speed anticipated.....such an important factor when setting pins and the speed of the greens especially on Links courses. We wanted to be remembered for being in great condition, not having the greens too fast that would suspend the competition due to balls osculation in the wind!!

The Ladies arrived for the practice round and with the Opening ceremony later on, the flags are raised and the sun is shining. 5pm and the Greenstaff were back in to cut the greens, tees and fairways... the place is shining and I was feeling very relaxed that we had reached our goal right on time.

The competition week started at 4.30am for us, with hand cutting the greens then a roll; this keeps the speed and was manageable with our staff resources available to us. I changed the holes and marked the pins for the following day armed with the next day's forecast of course! The staff had been briefed on what jobs to do when they came in from cutting greens and this ranged from cutting aprons, divoting fairways, cutting green/ bunker surrounds and raking the 140 bunkers every day. The ladies tee off in sunshine and see the course at its best!

We have a well deserved break but the work doesn't stop there, we have the machines to wash down, fuel up and check heights and quality of cut for the next day. This then gives us time to paint up flag pins ready for next week when our tournaments pins come in and the members see nice fresh pins for their course. Thirty minutes before the afternoon singles and the staff are back out touching up the bunkers to make sure the course is again perfect then it was time for the staff to head home but they had their rotas for the evening shift in cutting greens again, this time it's with the triple mowers due to the overtime costs. The week's pattern went roughly the same for us however with the weather changing, the course started to bite back with the wind, rain and sunshine all showing Old Links in its true colours. The greens held up to running around the 10.5 speed but with no rain over the Thursday night they dried out and by 8am on the Friday they were up over 11 but the weather forecast was for a little wind in the morning and then picking up later on..... We have got there!

The tournament finished with a Lancashire win, and the rain starts to fall from the sky which was what I needed after the tournament but our work wasn't finished. Tomorrow we had two hundred members playing and on Monday we have an Open with over two hundred and fifty playing, yet the flag poles, flags and toilets had to be taken off course and collected on Monday along with the course being presented for our members and visitors.

By Monday lunchtime all was completed, and with everything back to normal it looked like nothing had happened but this event was a tremendous success thanks to all the planning everyone had put in over those eight months and it gave me a great trial run for our big one next July when St Annes Old Links hold the Final Qualifying for "The Open".

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