

Finishing touches

Slick greens, deep rough, modifications await pros

By BOB GROSS

Oakland Hills Country Club members may not recognize the South Course, site of the 1979 Professional Golfers' Association Championship, once the tournament starts.

In fact, no one could blame them if they thought a carnival had pitched its tent on their grounds.

The face of the South Course will be changed for the PGA Championship. Most of the changes, however, will be temporary, and most of the temporary changes will be done for the sake of the spectators and to facilitate television coverage.

Ted Woehrlie, course superintendent at Oakland Hills for the past 12 years, said scoreboards, bleachers and concession tents will be built for the spectators, and that towers will be built behind the greens for television cameras.

Woehrlie said that there will be 200 pairs of telephone wires installed to handle communications. There will be phone lines at every tee and green to link up television cameramen and announcers with their directors.

These phone lines will be permanently installed and will remain in place for use in the next major tournament at Oakland Hills.

There will also be some changes made on the course itself: "We'll let the rough grow one week before the tournament," Woehrlie said. "By Sunday, (the day of the final round), it will be two weeks old."

The maintenance crew will double-cut the greens to speed up the putting surface. Woehrlie explained that double-cutting means cutting the grass twice at different angles.

The maintenance crew will also cut an intermediate rough between the fairway and the rough itself. The intermediate rough will be one to two inches deep, compared to the actual rough which will be four to six inches deep.

The pin placements will be changed daily. Woehrlie said the PGA committee members who handle pin placements try to "make it easy — they don't want to embarrass their own pros."

There have been some permanent changes made to the course that may surprise some of the pros who played in the 1972 PGA Championship at Oakland Hills.

Woehrlie said there is a new fairway bunker on the par-4 eighth hole and four new fairway bunkers on the par-5 12th hole.

The club has also added a bubbler to the lake at the par-4 16th hole for algae

control, but it will not be operating during the tournament in order to cut down on noise.

Perhaps the most drastic changes are on the par-4 seventh hole. The tee area at the seventh has been extended to the left so that club members playing from the standard tees may have a straight line of sight to the green. The green itself has been made smaller and moved back about 20 yards.

Pros playing in the PGA will drive from championship tees at the back of the tee, bringing into play a new fairway trap opposite the bend of the dog-leg. This trap will narrow the landing area of the pros' first drives.

In 1972, according to Woehrlie, the seventh was one of the easiest holes. This year he expects it to be one of the more difficult.

Woehrlie said he did not expect PGA officials to order any major changes made to the course such as the one made during the recent U.S. Open at Inverrary Country Club in Toledo, Ohio, where a pine tree was installed after opening rounds of the tournament.

But, he said, there has been precedent for that action in Oakland Hills' past. In 1951, three fir trees were planted on the 18th tee during the U.S. Open to stop

Ben Hogan, and others, from taking a shortcut down the 10th fairway to the green.

The trees, Douglas firs, are still in place.

One of Woehrlie's major responsibilities will be to make sure no permanent changes are made to the course by thousands of trampling feet. He said that in the areas where the most wear is expected — in back of the greens on the 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th holes — the maintenance crew will scatter seed on top of the grass prior to the tournament "and let the gallery work the seed in."

Woehrlie is also responsible for the North Course, which is being used for parking. In 1972 the North Course was also used for parking. It rained, and "we ruined the the North Course for several weeks."

Woehrlie has already written off the clubhouse lawn as a loss. He said that it will be little more than dirt after the tournament.

But most of the course itself will be in good condition after it is handed back to the club members. Woehrlie said the pros are good housekeepers, that they repair their ball marks and replace divots, and that "the club members will get the course back in better shape than we gave it to them."

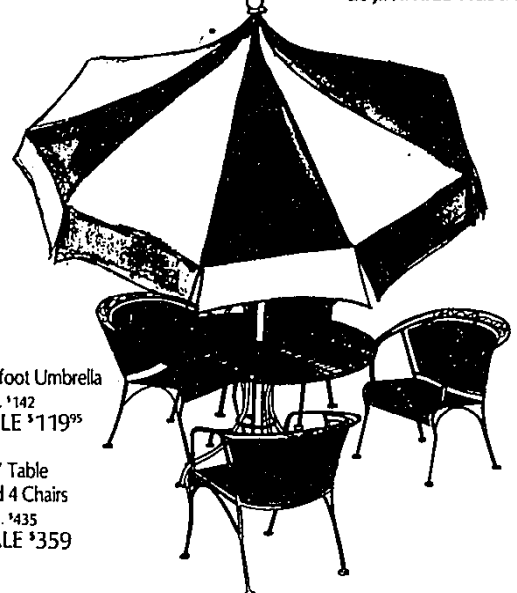
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