

Scared straight



Scott Hollister

Ever have one of those really great ideas that turned out to be not such a great idea once it made the transition from concept to reality?

You know, you tell your boss how great the back nine would look with some new greens, and the next thing you know, you're knee-deep in mud, wondering why you said anything in the first place.

Well, I have too. I let anyone who would listen know what a great story it would be for a golf course management novice like myself to serve a turn on the crew at a professional tournament. Now, I'm just a few weeks away from heading to Pebble Beach to work as a volunteer maintenance staff member at the U.S. Open.

Yep. *That* U.S. Open. The one with all the TV cameras. And the enormous galleries. And Tiger Woods.

And, yep, we're talking about *that* Pebble Beach. The one with the ocean. And the history. And Dirty Harry as part owner ("Go ahead punk. Mow that green.").

Now, don't get me wrong. I completely appreciate the opportunity that is being afforded to me. I know that most superintendents will work their whole careers without even getting a sniff of a U.S. Open. Heck, plenty won't even get a sniff of a U.S. Open *qualifier*. I'm very lucky. I get all that.

But I'm also very, very (did I mention "very"?) nervous. My use of the term "novice" earlier was no mistake. All I know about golf course management I've learned in the last two and a half years as an editor for this magazine. Plenty of good, solid information, to be sure, more than most golfers will pick up in a lifetime.

But enough to make me feel comfortable helping prepare one of the world's most famous golf courses for one of the world's most important tournaments? Still feeling very, very, very nervous.

I can see it now. The final day of the

tournament. A dozen of the world's top golfers all within striking distance of the title. The crowd is on edge. History is in the making. The world is watching. And all anybody can talk about is the idiot who left a big ol' scalp mark in the center of 18 green.

Now do I expect superintendent Eric Greytok, vice president of resource management Ted Horton, CGCS, or anybody else at Pebble Beach to let me anywhere near a greensmower? Do I expect to be doing anything more than raking bunkers or filling divots? Certainly not. But a guy can dream (or is that a nightmare), can't he?

What I've found, though, is that nervousness on this scale can inspire one to action. In short, I've been cramming like I haven't crammed since my freshman year in college.

I've torn into the book "Practical Golf Course Maintenance: The Magic of Greenkeeping," authored by GCSAA members Gordon Witteveen and Michael Bavier, CGCS. I've spent the last several weekends volunteering at Alvarado Golf and Country Club here in Lawrence, Kan., letting superintendents Jon Kindlesparger, Darin Pearson and Dick Stuntz, CGCS, fill my brain with as much information as it can handle.

Has all the cramming paid off? Darn right it has. I can now competently place a hole, start (and sometimes actually use) a greensmower, rake a bunker like an old pro and, yes, I can even fill a divot.

The one thing all this prep work hasn't done, however, is stop the shakes. I'm as nervous as I was when I started, but as a wise man once said, I'm as ready as I'll ever be. So keep an eye on the U.S. Open broadcasts for a jittery maintenance worker, and watch these pages in September for a full account of my experiences. I'll try to do us all proud.

GCM

Scott Hollister is GCM's managing editor.

Coming next month



July

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