

# A day in the life

Pinehurst No. 2's CGCS Paul Jett chronicles his preparations for the '99 U.S. Open in an online diary.

*Editor's note: In the final months before Pinehurst (N.C.) No. 2 played host to the 1999 U.S. Open, CGCS Paul Jett, a 13-year GCSAA member, kept a "Superintendent's Diary" for golf.com's special U.S. Open Web site, [www.pinehurst99.com](http://www.pinehurst99.com). Jett's five diary entries are reprinted with the permission of golf.com.*

**April 21, 1999** — Pinehurst No. 2 is only eight weeks away from the 1999 U.S. Open, the biggest event it has hosted since the 1951 Ryder Cup. Back

when we hosted the Ryder Cup, we didn't have all the sophisticated equipment that we have today, and we didn't water the entire course. We were very dependent on Mother Nature. Today, we can control the conditions of the course much better but are still somewhat dependent on Mother Nature.

Because we have had a matter-of-fact winter and spring with very little precipitation, the bermudagrass is just coming out of its dormancy. With some warmer weather and rain, we would have a much greener and more developed course by this time. No worries though; we have two months left and bermuda grows like a weed when it gets the sun, warmth and water it requires.

We would like to have rain vs. watering because we get much better coverage and the rain would extend to the entire boundaries of the course. However, we can water all we need to water to get the course in fine shape for the U.S. Open. We usually have to water a certain area for half a day and then move the sprinklers to another location for another half of the day. We will continue to water the areas that need it. But rain and sunshine are going to do more for the bermuda than what I can do, so we will wait for both.

Because of the extended time we have had without rain, some would think that some of the protective measures would be to limit play, but play has no bearing on the course growing in, so play will continue until the last day.



Photos by Scott Hollister

Pinehurst No. 2's CGCS Paul Jett led efforts to get the legendary Donald Ross-designed layout ready for the playing of the 99th U.S. Open in June.

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We began to prepare the course to U.S. Open specifications last summer. The fairways have been cut to Open width since last July. During the North & South (tournament), we tested the length of the rough at 3 inches to see its playability; afterward it was determined with the USGA that 4 inches would be the proper height for play at the Open.

The greens at Pinehurst No. 2 will be the story this year. They will be running at 10.5 on the Stimpmeter starting Monday of Open week and may speed up a little by Sunday of the final round. It will be the USGA's call, but I don't see them getting higher than 11.

One of the continuing maintenance issues is the need to verticut the greens and the closely mowed areas. We need to verticut a couple more times on the short-cut areas around the greens and

two to three more times on the greens to get them to maximum speed and playability. Along with the verticutting, we will topdress.

We are also replacing some closely mowed areas with new sod. This process occurs every year in certain areas that don't get enough sunlight or in certain tight areas, where the mower enters and leaves the green and the grass gets worn down. We have already replaced some sod on the third and 10th greens and, as the spring progresses, we may need to replace some other areas if the bermuda doesn't come out of its dormancy. I believe with water or rain and sunshine we will be fine, and very little sod replacement will occur.

**April 29, 1999** — From last week to this week, the weather has not changed much; another week of no rain. But the

warmer nights and added daylight have borne some fruit. The bermuda is showing increased growth in those areas that were thin. In those areas still requiring assistance, we have created mini-greenhouses to heat up the ground.

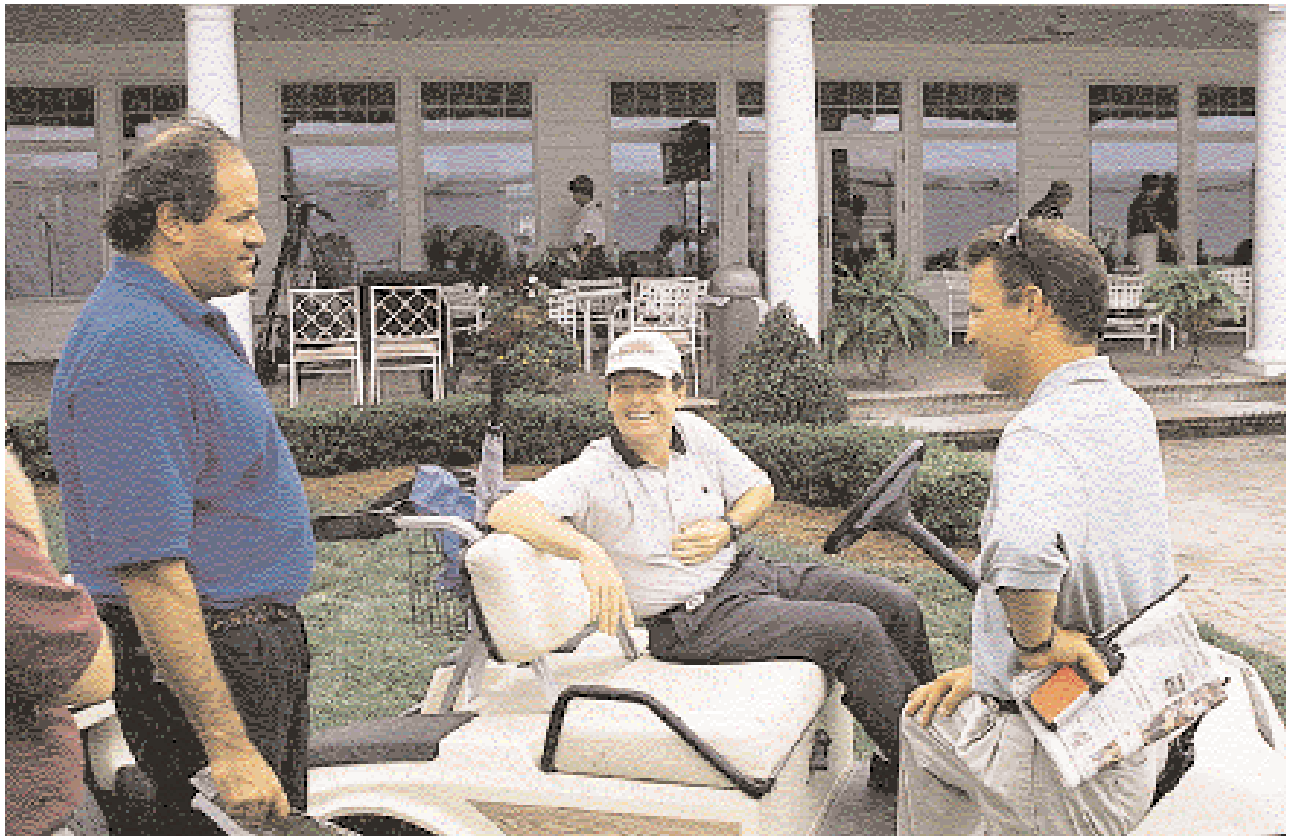
A mini-greenhouse is basically a tarp stapled to the ground. The sun beating down on the tarp will build up and generate heat in the ground. The areas where these greenhouses were built are around the greens that have north-facing slopes — the back of No. 4, No. 5, No. 17 and No. 12.

We are continuing to replace sod around bunker faces that have not fully recovered from the winter. The sod is being replaced in areas that had weak bermuda going into the winter or in

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Jett had a crew of nearly 80 workers — almost 50 of them volunteers from around the country — at his disposal during the Open.



With Pinehurst No. 2 ready for the start of play, Jett was able to take a few minutes to chat with ESPN broadcasters Chris Berman (left) and Jimmy Roberts (center) on Tuesday of Open week.

## The cost of perfection

What does it take to prepare a golf course that meets the expectations and demands of the world's best golfers? The golf course maintenance staff at Pinehurst (N.C.) Resort and Country Club, which hosted the 1999 U.S. Open, documented the costs — both in dollars and man hours — involved in such preparations in a news release, "A comparative analysis: Maintenance labor hours and costs for standard course conditioning activities vs. those for the 1999 U.S. Open venue."

In labor costs alone, the price tag was nearly \$1 million more than normal, if the facility was to be maintained all year in a similar manner.

The release, prepared by Pinehurst director of golf course maintenance Brad Kocher, CGCS, with input from assistant director of golf course maintenance Bob Farren, CGCS, and Pinehurst No. 2's CGCS Paul Jett, can be found in its entirety on GCSAA's Web site at <http://www.gcsaa.org/media/releases/kocher.html>



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areas where the sand washes up on the faces during normal play and inhibits the growth of the bermuda. In either case, replacing sod is part of our normal maintenance program, and all these areas will be in optimal shape for the Open.

One of the unique features of Pinehurst No. 2 is the natural or "love-grasses" we have on the course. These are like large clumps of grass with a sand base. Holes No. 3, 4 and 18 are some of the holes with large areas of lovegrass. We burn these areas every February to scale down the grass clumps and to eliminate the dead matter. Six or seven days before the championship begins, we will trim these grasses

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down to a uniform height and leave them alone. Hopefully, this will allow the seedheads to come out and provide a unique look for the week of the championship.

Last, we will talk about the rain or lack of it. We have had very little rain, so our options are limited: We must water. On the greens and the surrounding 6-foot areas, we water by hand. This allows maximum coverage and provides maximum control; the greens and the surrounding areas are not of concern going into the Open. The areas I am most concerned about are the tees, fairways and rough. We have a computerized watering system that waters these areas, but as I said last week, rain is the best. A good rain will get every inch of the course wet and give maximum coverage.

Ideally an inch of rain every week would be what we are looking for. Hopefully next week we will be talking about the rain, which is forecast for the coming week.

**May 6, 1999** — We finally received some rain this week, and it was certainly welcome. Any time we can get rain, we will take it, except the week of the championship. This week's rain was a couple of inches over four days and will serve a valuable purpose if we can get some warm weather to heat up the ground. I may have mentioned before that rain and warm weather in combination are needed to promote maximum bermuda growth. Generally, the best or maximum bermuda growth is a couple of weeks away so we are in a favorable position, but the rain is always welcome.

Last week we created mini-greenhouses around certain greens. Those areas where we were trying to promote growth are showing signs of improvement, and we will need the remaining seven weeks to fill in those areas. The areas should be fine for the championship from a playability standpoint and will look pretty green as well. Again, the important thing is to get warm weather to heat up the ground.



The greens at Pinehurst No. 2, featuring the new G-2 bentgrass, drew rave reviews before and after the U.S. Open.

Bunkers are a big issue for this championship and are a USGA focus. We continued to re-sod this week around the bunker right of the 15th green and the bunker short right of the 16th green. Each should fill in nicely before the championship. The USGA also has a big concern about distinguishing the bunker from the fairway or rough, so we have been spending a lot of time on bunker edging. This should be the last week of edging and will add definition to the bunkers.

Tom Meeks and Trey Holland of the USGA visited and played No. 2 this weekend. Their overall impression was that the course is in good shape and will be a fine test. They were especially excited about the condition of the greens and the short-cut areas around the greens. These areas are the most important focus because this will be the definitive factor in determining the winner of this year's championship.

We verticut the greens again last Monday and will verticut in about two weeks. This is part of our plan to verticut the greens two or three more times.

The greens are an area of particular focus this year, and that focus is squarely on the new G-2 bentgrass. We seeded the greens in the second week of September 1996, and each year we have learned more and more about the grass. This spring has been the best spring with the grass; it has reached a new level of maturity and should be perfect for the championship. One of the knocks on the grass previously was that it showed ball marks because of its upright growth and density of the grass blades. This year the ball marks are of minimal visibility, which I believe is part of its maturity. We are extremely happy with how the G-2 grass is performing.

**May 16, 1999** — We have had seven to eight pretty decent days of weather in a row, with nights in the 60s, and the course has reaped the benefits.

As I have talked about before, bermudagrass needs water and warmth to grow. With this last stint of relatively warm weather, the bermuda rough has grown to a point that we could top it at 2 inches this week. We will let it grow for the next week or 10 days, and then if all is well, we will top it at 3 inches. We top it to keep it uniform in length so that when the Open starts, we don't have high spots.

Our last topping will be just before the week of the championship at 4 inches.

We are still replacing turf around the greens. Tim Moraghan of the USGA was here this week and made suggestions on turf that needs to be replaced. We have replaced turf on the following holes: back of the fourth and second greens, a small spot on the third, the seventh and the back of the 17th. That will be all the turf replacement we will do before the championship. The remaining areas that are dormant should be fine by the week of the Open.

Most of the dormant grass is around the greens in the closely shaved areas. One of the ways we are trying to pro-

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mote growth in those areas is to allow the grass to grow a little higher. We are leaving a strip 3 to 6 feet wide around certain greens to help promote growth. If the grass in those areas is not so closely shaved, the dormant grass will be able to recover more quickly.

Most U.S. Open sites focus a tremendous amount of time and energy on the greens. Pinehurst No. 2 is no different, but the new G-2 grass is doing so well that the greens are fourth or fifth on my worry list. I could not be happier with the texture and feel of the greens and honestly believe these greens will be some of the best to ever host an Open. The only issue we have is to maintain them from now to the Open. We will verticut the greens next week as part of our maintenance program, but will not topdress. Two weeks after that, we will do our final verticutting and our final topdress. Because we control the environment around the greens, I feel confident of their condition for Open week.

The lovegrasses are growing fast and furious, and we have topped them at 6 inches this week. We will top them one more time just before the week of the Open. It is important that we keep an eye on those areas so the grass doesn't get too thick.

Weather, specifically the lack of rain, is still an issue. The other night it rained at Country Club of North Carolina, which is very close to here, but we didn't get a drop on No. 2, because of what we call the Pinehurst Dome effect. Hopefully, the dome will be penetrated in the next couple of weeks and we'll receive the rain we desire.

**June 7, 1999** — It is the Friday before the U.S. Open, and everything we have done over the last 12 to 18 months should shine this coming week. Over the last month or so we have really worked on maintaining the course. All of the real work has been done months ago.

The last little change occurred today when the USGA made the decision to



Despite cool, damp weather during the week of the Open, the crew at Pinehurst was able to keep the No. 2 course in near-perfect playing condition.

bring the rough down to 3 inches from the 4 inches that was agreed upon last August. The reason is simple: The rough got too penal. With the warm weather we have had, the bermuda rough has grown well and is a very full bermuda. Because of its fullness, the 3 inches was a fairer length. I was surprised by the decision at first, but after talking it through with the USGA representatives, I was and am in complete agreement.

One thing you may note when seeing No. 2 in person or on television are some brown spots around the greens. These areas are a discoloration from a herbicide we applied back in February of this year. The herbicide was applied differently, and it just came out wrong. Much has been made of these spots, but let me assure you that they will not affect play at all. In 99 percent of the cases, the spots are in areas where the ball is not going to stop because all the areas are on the edge of the green and the ball will never come to rest there. The bottom line is that the spots will not affect play. You will see these spots

primarily on the second, fourth and 17th holes.

This week we got warm weather early, rain two nights in a row and today it is in the 70s and cloudy, so we have gotten all types of weather this week. Luckily, the course is in perfect shape, so the differing types of weather have not been difficult to deal with.

The fairways are perfect, and the rough has grown in perfectly, which is why they have taken it down to 3 inches. The greens are in perfect shape; we will water them all through the week unless it is in the 70s and cloudy like today. We won't let them turn brown.

If I had a concern, it would be being able to manage the greens to maintain the speed and the firmness, to get them through the week. The beginning of the week the greens will be at 10.5 on the Stimpmeter and most likely will get to 11 later in the week.

Pinehurst No. 2 is ready for the final Open of this century, and whoever wins will have played on one of the best-conditioned U.S. Open courses ever. ◉