

‘In the Ropes’

A NCAA championship is only as special as the men and women who make it possible

Sitting shotgun alongside Carol Reep in a shaded golf cart is the next best place one can be when it comes to fleeing Georgia’s hot, humid climate while also working the NCAA women’s golf championships.

Reep, Associate Director of Championships and Alliances for the NCAA, sits driver side. Enjoying the shaded garage, she proceeds to outline the process of what it takes to host a NCAA women’s golf championship.

“The bid was awarded to Georgia probably about two and a half to three years ago,” says Reep, “and then the proximity kind of planning takes place starting a year before.”

Reep worked alongside the UGA athletics department in 2007 and 2008 when Athens hosted the men’s and women’s NCAA tennis championships when they were in Athens. Her work with the department made it easy to communicate with familiar faces, however, Reep makes every effort to be in touch with tournament coordinators throughout the week.

“As the administrator I have full responsibility for the championship from beginning to end,” says Reep, “it’s my responsibility to work with the hosts, to get them organized, and to try to troubleshoot and to do all the planning.”

Reep is on the course before six each morning talking with NCAA and UGA directors getting updates. With the exception of storms hindering play on day two, Reep believed the championships were progressing successfully.

“It’s been great, the course is outstanding,” says Reep regarding the tournament, “the hospitality from the UGA staff, the people here at the golf course and the Athens community has been tremendous.”



It's nice to hear about how well the players are doing, how clean the course looks at 7am tee times, but more individuals come into play to keep the championships on track just as Reep does. When asked, Reep gave one name as to who would be the person to talk to about how all the behind the scenes work gets done: Christie Purks.

She smiles, she laughs, she gets along with everyone in the room, and she the boss woman.

Christie Purks, Director of Events for the UGA Athletic Association and current Championship Director for the tournament, walks swiftly with her phone in her right ear. Instead of yelling at the other person on the line because they're bothering her, she is laughing and saying she'll be right there to help or direct whomever is in need of her assistance.

"The attitude that I have spills over to the staff," says Purks, "when I need a moment to do something, usually we have five other things need be done, so when I have a spare moment, I'm like let's go."

Purks comes into work as if it's another day at the country club sporting a summery, white tank top with thin green and yellow lines and bright green shorts. Maybe it helps her stand out amongst the other staffers and their "NCAA" logo'd visors, polos and khaki shorts.

Each day of the tournament, she arrives on site a little before 5:30am to greet volunteers and staff coming in around six.

"The walking scorers are constantly coming 45 minutes to an hour before tee times," says Purks, "we try to have them come in that early so they get a chance to eat and be very inclusive to them."

Even on the first day of the tournament, while she is running around to get everything together, Purks is requested in a NCAA committee meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to talk over adding amendments to the tournament rules, media are not permitted entry.

Oddly enough, on day two the parking arrangements have changed for media and patrons. For the Web.com tour event a few weeks earlier, spectators parked at the soccer/softball complex half a mile down the road. Now, the shuttle service is closed and patrons are asked to park in the "pecan lot" at the entrance of the golf course.

This may or may not have been the main talking point at the meeting, nonetheless Purks is

certain the decision made helps economically and for convenience reasons.

“None of the three lots, main lot, driving range lot, or the pecan lot were full yesterday,” says Purks, “we felt like we could accommodate everyone, it also would cut down costs by stopping the bus transit service, but mainly it was for making the parking situation easier for the people.”

With that issue resolved, she slips in and out of the tournament headquarters throughout her day escorting other NCAA associates around the course.

Then just as her day is about to end, the weather interrupts play. Players and parents wait in rain shelters patiently, some trying to stay focused, others enjoying the break in play. Finally near eight in the evening they call it, and Purks uses her phone to communicate the delay to all of the teams.

“We have a text messaging system with all the coaches,” says Purks, “it’s used to get the word out on a weather problem.”

As the next day begins, she’s off and moving.

“As you can see, I don’t really stay in one place,” she says as she is off to take some NCAA associate on a cart ride around the course, no tagalongs sadly.

As Purks leaves to continue her work behind the scenes, there are dozens of individuals who make their work here known by walking up and down the 7,240 yard course each day of the tournament, and do it for free.

For the love of the game

The age range between tournament volunteers varies from teenagers, to college students, and even retired seniors.

“It’s fun being out here ‘in the ropes’ so to speak,” says David Field, who has volunteered the past two days straight.

Field has been a walking scorer since the Web.com tour was held at Jennings Mill Country



Club, previously known as the Athens Regional Foundation Classic. Today he is walking with the leaders, No. 1 Stephanie Meadow and No. 2 Annie Park, excited, but hot. He is in his early 60s and the humidity is on full blast.

“It’s a tough walking course,” he says,
“I get caught up in the golf though, then time just passes and then we’re done.”

He enjoys the game, he looks at the golfers and compliments their shots, they reply back with a “thanks”.

“I’m hoping maybe I can improve my game by coming out here,” he says.

McKenzie Hedrick says “nice shot” more than many of the other scorers, she hangs on every move of the collegiate golfers.

“I play right now for my high school team,” she says referring to her being a junior at North Oconee High, “I come out here and see this one girl post up a worse score on a hole than me and it excites me and makes me think ‘Hey I have a chance’.”

Hedrick, 17, is much younger than Mr. Field, yet she’s out here for the same reason, to watch, enjoy, and learn.

For the tournament, hundreds of volunteers signed up and have been following players from seven in the morning until play is done near the six o'clock hour. Mike Gates, is walking up the hill on 14, wishing he had a golf cart.

“I’m out here with my golfing buddies actually,” he says, “one is right behind us over on twelve.”

Gates, 65, isn’t a local Athenian and has to make the 15 to 20 minute commute from Winder, Ga for the few days he has been there walking the course doing scores. He’s here nonetheless and intends to stay through the duration of the week.

Without them this wouldn’t be possible.

Retired with nothing else to do, working on improving their play, or perhaps their love of the game brings these hundreds of volunteers to the University of Georgia Golf Course.

Nevertheless, with the enthusiasm of people like Christie Purks, the organization of Carol Reep and the volunteers who do the hands on work, the NCAA women's golf championships finish out the week a success. It's been over twenty years since the University of Georgia last hosted a national collegiate golf championship, and a tournament is as only great as the people who work to make it a reality.