



### If you go

- > **What:** AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am
- > **When:** Thursday, Feb. 7 through Sunday, Feb. 10
- > **Where:** Pebble Beach Golf Links, Spyglass Hill and Poppy Hills golf courses
- > **Practice Rounds:** 8 a.m. Monday through Wednesday on all three golf courses
- > **GoGirlGo.com Charity Shoot-Out:** 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, Pebble Beach
- > **3M Celebrity Challenge:** 11 a.m. Wednesday, Pebble Beach
- > **First three rounds** of the tournament start 8 a.m. Thursday through Saturday on all three courses
- > **Final round** starts 7:30 a.m. Sunday at Pebble Beach only.
- > **Tickets:** \$60 for all three practice days Monday through Wednesday; \$60 for each tournament round Thursday through Sunday; Military Day Wednesday, law enforcement, firefighters and military plus one accompanied guest admitted free.

### Parking shuttles

- > **From CSU-Monterey Bay:** Free Wednesday through Sunday
- > **From Monterey:** \$10 per day 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday from Portola Plaza (downtown) and the Cannery Row garage in Cannery Row. Parking in Monterey Municipal garages \$5 all day.
- > **From Carmel:** \$10 per day 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, 6 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Thursday through Sunday. Free parking at Vista Lobos at Junipero and Third. Parking at Sunset Center and Carmel Plaza underground garage \$20 per day.
- > **From Pacific Grove:** \$10 per day 6:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday from Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History. Free parking on city streets.



Paul Vermeulen, PGA Tour director of agronomy, left, talks with Manny Sousa, Poppy Hills superintendent, at the 17th tee. DAVID ROYAL/The Herald

## Last-minute tweaks for AT&T

By LAITH AGHA  
Herald Staff Writer

**Poppy Hills Golf Course** maintenance crew members generally work five days a week, though theirs is far from a typical American work week.

When most people are finishing lunch, the Poppy Hills guys are usually getting ready to head home after a workday that began at 5 a.m.

"They've gotten so used to that, it's old hat," said Manny Sousa, course superintendent. "Golfers love it because they don't have to deal with this guy (on a ride-on lawn mower) going down the middle of the fairway."

"And getting off at 1:30 p.m. is a beautiful thing," said Kregg Bush,

### GREENS CREWS ENSURE COURSES ARE IN TOP SHAPE

assistant superintendent.

But with the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am coming to the Peninsula this week, crew members have had less free time in the last couple of weeks, as they ramp up efforts to make sure the course is ready for its biggest week of the year.

"We're working extra hours," said Rosendo Vazquez, a groundskeeper at Poppy for 20 years. "It's every day before the tournament."

Five-year crew member Manuel Vazquez — unrelated to Rosendo —

said the routine does not change much for the AT&T. They just increase efforts to fill in divots and ensure the course is clean.

They do have some additional responsibilities. The biggest one is putting up the ropes that separate the spectator areas from the course.

With AT&T week officially beginning today, the crew spent Sunday making final preparations. But a steady downpour threatened to alter their game plan.

"If it keeps raining, they'll put on their rain gear and go out to clear pine needles and check the drains, make sure they're not clogged," Sousa said



From left, ground-keepers Rogelio Rojas, Abel Alvarez and Manuel Castaneda set up ropes around the driving range at Poppy Hills.

DAVID ROYAL/The Herald

## Golf

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about 5:15 a.m.

As the crew members waited for Sousa to make a decision on whether they would perform their normal duties, they hung out in the maintenance shed kitchen, sipping coffee and snacking on jicama doused with hot sauce.

By 6 a.m. the rain had ceased. Sousa gathered his 25 crew members outside the shed and divvied up the morning's tasks — including the normal winter chore of clearing pine needles and other tree parts.

Fallen debris from trees is not nearly as abundant at this point in the season, not after Monterey County's strongest storm of the decade hit last month. On top of all the debris the crew had to clear from January's torrential downpours, they had to deal with 24 fallen trees, Sousa said.

"There's not much left" to fall,

he said.

Sousa has been Poppy Hills superintendent for 18 years, which just happens to coincide with the number of years the course has been part of the AT&T.

Teeing off starts as early as 5:40 a.m. on the year's longest work days, he said.

"Our players want to tee off," Sousa said. "The sun's not up, but if they can see, they want to tee off."

During the winter, golfers are usually scattered throughout the clubhouse restaurant, eating breakfast or coffee.

At 6:30 a.m. on this wet winter morning, as crew members mowed the course and finished putting up the stakes and rope, no golfers had yet shown up.

But the crew had a special guest Sunday morning: Paul Vermeulen, PGA Tour director of agronomy. He makes sure the

course is suitable for competition.

"Maintenance of this course is very good, so not a whole lot of adjustments have to be made," Vermeulen said.

His primary focus is making sure the putting greens for Poppy Hills and the tournament's other two courses — Pebble Beach Golf Links and Spyglass Hill — play at the same speed.

This is tested with a stimpmeter, a yard-long rod that is set on the putting green at an

angle. A ball rolls down a groove in the stimpmeter, and however fast it rolls on the grass determines the playing surface's speed.

If this were the U.S. Open — which comes to Pebble Beach in 2010 — the course's specifications would be different, Vermeulen said, but because this

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week's field of competitors includes amateur players, the course is a little friendlier.

"It would be inappropriate to have (U.S. Open) conditions for amateurs," Vermeulen said. "It would be like taking your Little League team to Yankee Stadium and having them run around on the 90-foot base paths."

For the record, Little League's bases are 60 feet apart.

The course has not undergone any major changes in about 15 years, but minor tweaks are made year to year, Sousa said.

The 14th hole was realigned, and two of its sand bunkers were closed. The 4th hole is 53 yards longer this year and No. 15 was extended 28 yards, he said.

Making course adjustments is a welcomed challenge for the crew.

"It's fun," Sousa said, "as long as it's not the whole course."

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