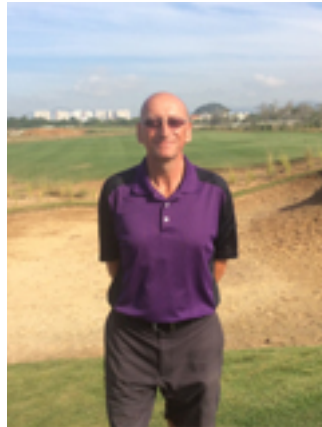


Golf course superintendent Neil Cleverly tackles Olympic task in Brazil with sense of adventure

Former British military man prepares Rio golf course for world stage in 2016 Olympic Games

by Craig Smith, GCSAA

Neil Cleverly welcomes a challenge. His calm demeanor belies an adventurous nature that leads his friends to call him the Indiana Jones of the golf course management business.



Neil Cleverly

When he was hired in May 2013 to be the golf course superintendent for the Olympic course in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, he initially thought there was plenty of time to get things done. He had tackled start-up golf course constructions in remote areas before many times – Egypt, Dominican Republic and Mexico, to name a few. But nothing had prepared him for the challenges in Rio.

“I don’t panic. I am a thinking person,” said Cleverly, a 16-year member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. “But when I saw the equipment I had and the novice workforce I had, I thought, ‘Oh my God, are we really going to do this?’ It has been insane. But I love this job.” Now two years into the job, there is no question in Cleverly’s mind that the golf course will be ready to host an Olympic event in August 2016, despite numerous challenges.

“Neil has been dedicated to this project above and beyond what any

superintendent should be asked to do,” said course architect Gil Hanse. “I can’t imagine we could have found anyone better for this project. His passion, tenacity and discipline have really been invaluable.”

“You have to embrace the culture around you,” Clevery said. “It is what you make it. You can’t import Florida into Rio. It just doesn’t work that way. You have to be resourceful. There is no outlet here where I can go to buy everyday golf course maintenance items. Everything has to come from overseas.”

It will be the first time golf will be part of the Olympic Games in more than 100 years. The plan is for individual competition, with 60 men and 60 women competing in two 72-hole events, and the whole world will be watching and judging.

“I never felt like we weren’t going to make it,” said Hanse. “The project is too important to not get it finished. But, it took twice as long as it should have taken to build it.”

The course is located on the coast outside of the country’s second largest city, with saltwater tolerant paspalum greens and stiff zoysia fairways. The first test will come tentatively in November when the course at Reserva de Marapendi will host a PGA Tour LatinoAmerica event.

“We will really be testing the golf course,” said Clevery, a 56-year-old Londoner who served in the British military before turning to golf course management 25 years ago. “We want to see how it plays. If we have to make minor changes, we’ll have a year to get it done.”

And after the Olympics, the course will become a public facility for Brazil, which has grown over the last decade to become the second largest golf-playing nation in South America, behind Argentina. Brazil has more than 100 golf courses and 25,000 golfers.

About GCSAA and the EIFG

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) is a leading golf organization in the United States. Its focus is on golf course management, and since 1926 GCSAA has been the top professional association for the men and women who manage golf courses in the U.S. and worldwide. From its headquarters in Lawrence, Kan., the association provides education, information and representation to nearly 18,000 members in more than 78 countries. The association’s mission is to serve its members, advance their profession and enhance the enjoyment, growth

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