

SHANNOPIN GOLF

A RENEWED FOCUS ON EXCELLENCE

HOW A FRESH VISION IS MAKING SHANNOPIN EXCEPTIONAL



Pittsburgh native and Penn State grad, Sam Lobaugh, has a clear vision as the newest Grounds Superintendent for Shannopin Country Club. Since beginning his tenure in the Spring of 2023, Sam has attracted attention from members, staff, and visitors for impressive results and a renewed passion for Shannopin’s course.

“I feel like we’re doing something bigger than maintaining grounds,” says Lobaugh. “We’re putting on a show for the whole Pittsburgh area. We want to make noise. And we’re on the rise.”

To be sure, the 103-year-old club had a promising foundation when Sam started. Having an XGD drainage system in our native push-up greens, for instance, was a great support to the course’s conditions. Plus, the course’s



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topography and firm greens have really helped define the club’s signature golf experience for years.

But the results from this year’s hard work and developments have garnered recent acclaim for having some of the purest, most well-kept conditions in the area.

Along with a massive, pre-planned construction project to implement all new bunkers, Sam also quickly identified his own goals for course improvements as soon as he began the job.

“Continuous implementation of cultural practices such as aerification, topdressing, and water management, have improved our greens tremendously,” says Sam, “but it’s going to be something we continue to do to make them better and better. Maintaining cultural practices on fairways and tees to continue to lower our heights of cuts will also be key. The bunker project is going to make an immense impact on the course. Our new bunker liner and sand will improve the playability and drainage of our bunkers so they behave more consistently. Introducing new turf-type tall fescue on our greens surrounds and bunker areas with the new project is going to improve playability and also the aesthetics of the golf course.”

As vitally important as the standards of the

membership are to Lobaugh, his own passion presents an even more challenging mission, perhaps: aiming to meet his own standards.

“Personally, I feel a lot of my motivation comes from feeling competitive. I’m never satisfied with the way things are. Always striving for better.”

Prior to joining Shannopin’s team, Sam was part of the esteemed grounds team at Oakmont Country Club, where he won Agronomist of the Year in 2019. Following that, he served as Assistant Superintendent for Longue Vue Club. He cites this valuable professional experience as one of the fundamental factors that helped shape his elite standards and passion for the work.

And this passion, it seems, is contagious. Sam believes his highly motivated staff was a significant part of the year’s success. “Being passionate about your job makes your employee morale higher and improves their passion for what they do --- which then improves the overall condition of the golf course.”



In a typical season at Shannopin, the course is at its peak condition during the days leading up to the annual Men’s Invitational in July. This past season, however, the crew began to experience a resurgence of motivation after noticing that the course was now meeting those standards every single week.

Knowing there is still much to be done, Lobaugh feels some sense of accomplishment in his young tenure. “I think the conditions speak for themselves. The greens are maintained at an elite level. Although we’re still going to strive to make improvements through our cultural practices, the overall beauty of the golf course, apart from just the playability, is immensely enviable.”

To be clear, this is only the very beginning. The team at Shannopin Country Club has only scratched the surface. And with his first off-season approaching, the new Superintendent is eager to finalize a full year’s to-do list.

Lobaugh detailed many of the current and upcoming projects on that list already, but then summed it up with one overarching mission: “Improving the course to meet elite standards, and striving to create championship playability day in and day out.”



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Projects like accentuating the beloved view of the Pittsburgh skyline and enhancing irrigation practices are ultimately helping the club graduate into a higher tier of reputable golf courses. And while projects like these are worth noting, the evolving conditions of this course are far better to experience than to describe.

Shannopin feels a definitive sense of gratitude for Sam’s immediate dedication to excellence, the hard work of the Grounds Crew, and for others before Sam who helped lay the ground work for continued thriving conditions on the course.

The club is excited about the future. And it is becoming evident that anyone who gets to experience the beauty of Shannopin in the coming seasons will see the reasons for excitement.



JORDAN SCHULZ