

MATT'S GOT A LOT ON HIS PLATE AND PLENTY OF SPIN

Matt Kamienski is good with analogies. He likens his job as executive director of the 2011 Presidents Cup to the guy in the circus with the spinning plates. And he describes the problem with his own game of golf as “plumber’s syndrome”.

As the Presidents Cup at Royal Melbourne draws ever closer to its November 15-20 deadline, Kamienski has plenty of plates to keep spinning. There’s a plate representing the State Government, another for Royal Melbourne, one for the Bayside Council, for event partner IMG and lots of little saucers for ticketing, sponsors, vendors, volunteers, travel operators, contractors, media.

There’s so many aspects to this massive sporting event that it is no wonder his own game is suffering.

Many people make a clichéd assumption that senior golf administrators spend much of their time out on the course doing business with potential sponsors or clients. And having lived in prime sandbelt country in bayside Melbourne for two years preparing for this one event you might think Kamienski has had plenty of opportunity to work on his swing. He wishes!

“I don’t play very often,” he says. “I was single digits at one point but now I’m out to 12. I refer to it as plumber’s syndrome The plumber has everyone else’s house fixed but his own house has the leaky faucet.”

As the US PGA Tour’s appointment to oversee all aspects of the Presidents Cup, Kamienski is naturally good at spin, plates or not. But when he talks about the spirit of the event and Melbourne’s ability to showcase it, you can’t help but find his enthusiasm infectious.

“I don’t think there is a better city in the world to host an event like this,” he says. “I have worked a lot of places all over the world but from top to bottom no city does it better than Melbourne. From the government down to the contractors, everybody ‘gets it’. Everybody works together to showcase this great city and great state.

“They put on the best product. It’s evident from the spring racing carnival, the grand prix and it was evident last year with two Grand Finals. I can’t think of the Super Bowl being able to play twice in a week.”

Kamienski saw first-hand how the city gets behind a major event when he arrived in Melbourne with his wife Stacey and daughters Sydney, 7, and Tyler, 5, to start his Presidents Cup stint in the week of the 2009 Melbourne Cup. Virtually his entire career has been a rehearsal for this tournament, although when he was fresh out of University a life in golf was unimaginable.

Growing up in Akron, Ohio, he seemed destined to follow his father, a heart surgeon, and step-mother, a nurse, into a career in medicine until his head was turned by an internship with

the Cleveland Cavaliers NBA team. That's when he knew he wanted to work in sports event management.

Not long afterwards his father was at a party talking to an official with the World Series of Golf tournament at Firestone in Akron and he rang his son to tell him there was a chance he could get an internship at the golf tournament.

Kamienski's immediate response was: 'Why would I want to do that, Dad? I am working in the NBA.'

"But I ended up going to the interview and I fell in love with the game and the people involved."

Kamienski's boss at the Firestone tournament was Jim Cook, father of tour player John Cook. And while he began on the bottom rung of sports administration, Kamienski was in the right place at the right time when the tours around the world started talking about developing the world golf championships concept and the PGA Tour decided Firestone was going to be one of the events converted.

Since then he has worked on every world tour championship and the last six Presidents Cups. This is the first one, though, where the buck stops with him and he's clearly thriving on the challenge.

While the Ryder Cup is owned jointly by the PGA of America and the European Tour, the Presidents Cup is solely owned and operated by the US PGA Tour. The tour owns 15 events from top to bottom including the World Championships, the Tour Championship and the Players Championship. "But this is the biggest event we have by far," says Kamienski.

"I'm not saying it is as big as the Ryder Cup, which has been around a long time. But its potential to reach new markets for golf is greater than the Ryder Cup. And we are very proud where it has come – the Presidents Cup has raised \$23 million for charity, including \$4.2 million from the last event in 2009. That's a pretty good number."

Kamienski is content that everything is on track for the most successful tournament in the 17-year history of the event. The Royal Melbourne course had an autumn from heaven for the growing of its new turf, ticketing was launched in April without a major outcry about price and overseas tour packages have been moving well despite the high Aussie dollar.

But there's still plenty to do. "A lot of people have asked why did I have to be out here so early but it was a matter of building relationships and solidifying relationships." The big sponsorship deals have already been done but hospitality packages are still available and there's all sorts of other things to sign off, including some opening ceremony fine tuning, the traffic management plan and finalising some agreements with vendors, contractors and tour operators."

Kamienski works from an office in South Melbourne with a sales manager and a couple of assistants. "We run mean but get a lot done." During the tournament the staff will swell to

100 not counting another 60 coming out from broadcaster NBC and another 40 from the Golf Channel.

The teams, of course, haven't been announced yet but apart from that the biggest query is whether the Presidents Cup will be attended by a President.

The Honorary Chairman will be Prime Minister Julia Gillard (provided nothing untoward happens in politics in the meantime) but Kamienski is also hoping that President Barack Obama will attend. There's no news yet but still plenty of time. "I think if they told us the week before we would accept it and be happy he is coming – but I think they will give us a bit more notice than that."

The teams are announced in September and Kamienski expects that will be the trigger to an explosion of interest in the event. He's in no doubt the final days of the Cup will be a sell out and confident all days will fill the course to capacity. At \$130 including GST for the final day, the event compares favourably with the final of the Australian Open tennis at \$339, the final day of the Ryder Cup at \$220 or the AFL Grand Final at \$161.

The Grand Prix in Melbourne is \$110 but there's no comparison to how close you can get to the competitors. "Look at the level of players – 24 of the best players in the world and they are there for a guaranteed six days.

"I don't think there is a better city in the world to host an event like this than Melbourne but the fact is, it was held here in 1998 and to be returning as quick is probably not as likely again. It will probably go to South Africa again before it comes back here and there's Japan and Korea.

"So you are going to see some unbelievable golf and some of these players you might not see here again. So I think it is very well priced.

"This year we have got Greg Norman and Fred Couples back as captains and they are just two of the greatest ambassadors. And the matchplay concept is so unique. Golf is such an inherently individual sport but when you get this team thing, it is the best."

In all of the decision making for the event, the only thing Kamienski doesn't have any control over is the team selection with the captain's picks of Norman and Couples. He says his money is still on Tiger Woods to make the team, despite his latest injury worries. "Freddy has said that barring injury Tiger is going to be here."

What he's certain about is that every player in contention to make the team is desperate to do so. In the early years of the Presidents Cup there was scepticism about just how important the US players viewed it next to the Ryder Cup but Kamienski has been at every one since 1998 and is adamant the desire is there.

"They want to make the team as bad as they do the Ryder Cup. It was evident with what happened in 2003 when the Presidents Cup finished in a tie. We had two great captains and it was not about who wins or loses.

“It was about the game. Sportsmanship, camaraderie, honesty and integrity. That is what the game of golf is all about.

BREAKOUT: How the teams are picked

The top ten players in both teams will be decided on September 18 in the US (Monday morning our time) after the BMW Championship.

The US team is based on the PGA Tour money list with the top ten earners from the Barclays tournament in 2009 through to the BMW Championship. Dollars earned in 2009 and 2010 will be worth one point and dollars earned in 2011 will be worth two points.

The International team will be based on the official World Golf Rankings after the BMW.

Both captains will announce two additional picks on Monday September 26.