

# A TRIP TO FLORIDA'S GOLF COAST

IT WAS at a Christmas Eve 1984 drink with the committee that the captain of my late club, Thorndon Park in Essex, asked me if I would like to visit Florida to see some of the golf courses.

The offer had been made by William Regan, a member of Thorndon Park, whose company Globe International builds houses in Britain and America. Mr Regan had brought some friends over from the States and I was fortunate to meet Tom Fasio, the designer of The PGA National. It was thought that a reciprocal visit would be of benefit to Thorndon Park and interesting to my American counterparts, who would welcome an Englishman's view of their courses.

So, it was with some anticipation that I awaited my first sight of America! I was to visit The PGA National, JDM Country Club, Jupiter Hill Golf Club, Boynton

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**By Robert Hornegold of  
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Beach Municipal, Seminole Golf Club, Frenchman's Creek Country Club and Loxatchee Golf Club.

On arrival at The PGA National, where the Ryder Cup was held in 1983, I was introduced to Colin Wright, the course administrator. Colin is English and has worked in the States for ten years. He explained that most new courses in the area are linked to real-estate projects and at The National there are some 2,300 acres of building land. Most of the housing is single-storey accommodation with large, well-landscaped gardens.

As you drive through the main entrance towards the hotel and administration area, on the right there's a large grey building that houses the headquarters of The PGA of America.

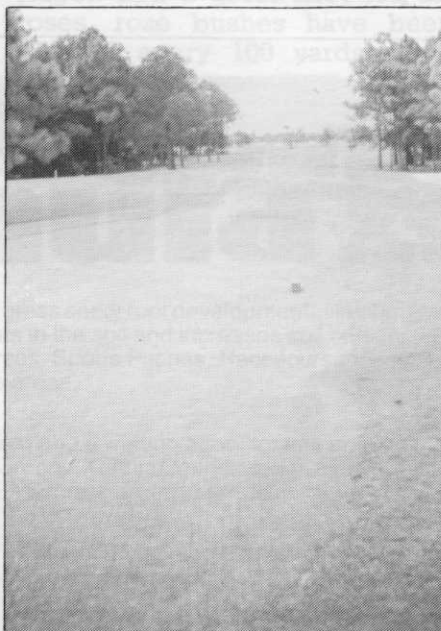
I was struck by the high standard of maintenance and design. The huge car park, which can accommodate thousands of cars,



Bob Hornegold (left) and Luke Majorki.

does not intrude or interfere with the parkland image.

Within this area, there's a tennis centre with 19 clay courts. The hotel has 200 bedrooms, banqueting halls, restaurants, swimming pools and numerous other facilities. A short distance from the hotel is one of the many practice grounds - some 500 yards in length, with large raised tees (100



Oval and kidney shaped tees are used on all four courses at The National.

yards wide by 50 yards deep) at each end.

As the weather in Florida is usually good, with temperatures of 70°-85°F in the winter and 80°-100°F in the summer, over 300 caddy cars are required to speed up play and with 800 to 900 rounds per day on the four courses, speed is essential to prevent traffic jams!

Luke Majorki, the golf course superintendent, told me that there are four courses at The National - The Haig, The Squire, and The Champion, being Tom Fasio designed, while The General, the newest course, is an Arnold Palmer design. The first course to be built was started in 1979 and the fourth course is just over a year old. Because of the climate, it is possible to sow a green and have it to putting condition within six weeks.

Luke has an assistant superintendent and other assistants who are in constant contact via a two-way radio. There is also a secretary to cover the office duties and 'man' his office in the main depot. The budget for course maintenance is in the region of 1.6 million dollars.

There are approximately 600 acres of golf course and an equal



The Everglades, from which the golf courses were carved.

amount of water to maintain. Luke has 60 staff, who are split into four groups with one chargehand and nine men for each course. There are also two large depots, each with a fully trained mechanic and assistant to service all the machinery. There is an irrigation team, a spraying team and a landscape gang, who deal with specialised tasks, but overlap and work together when needed.

Soil at The PGA National is nearly pure sand, as is most of the region. Everything has to be irrigated if it is to grow. A Toro sprinkler system is used and a great deal of time is spent checking soil moisture for accurate timing of the system.

Greens vary in construction - two of the courses had tile drains, 12in - 14in sand/peat top mix of 80:20 ratio with colloidal phosphate (a phosphatic clay added to retain moisture). Unfortunately, Luke has run into trouble using this mixture - the water retaining qualities of colloidal phosphate have caused water-logging.

I should say that Florida has a great deal of heavy rain and it is not unusual to get 15in of rain in one storm and 70in - 80in in a short period of time during the rainy season. To cope with this, there are huge pumps capable of pumping 50,000 gallons per minute into The Wetlands.

They raise the water to an elevation of some 18 feet above sea level and from there it drains into a C18 canal. Originally, the whole site was a swamp and the

complex now has large banks surrounding it.

The greens on the third course are constructed as the others, but without the colloidal phosphate and the fourth course is built to the USGA suspended water table specification. There are also two acres of putting greens.

Bermuda grass is the main species used in Florida and there are many different varieties. At The PGA National, greens were originally Tiffdwarte Bermuda. However, this is difficult to keep through the colder periods so, in recent years, this has been over-seeded with Penncross Bent to a point where the greens are now 60 per cent Penncross Bent and 40 per cent Bermuda, which has

made the greens much faster than before. Fairways and tees are 419 Bermuda grass and the rough is Bohia.

Height of cut is varied with each season. At the time of my visit, the greens were  $\frac{1}{2}$ in, approaches  $\frac{3}{16}$ in -  $\frac{1}{4}$ in, fairways  $\frac{3}{4}$ in - 1in, semi 1in -  $1\frac{1}{2}$ in and the rough 3in - 6in high.

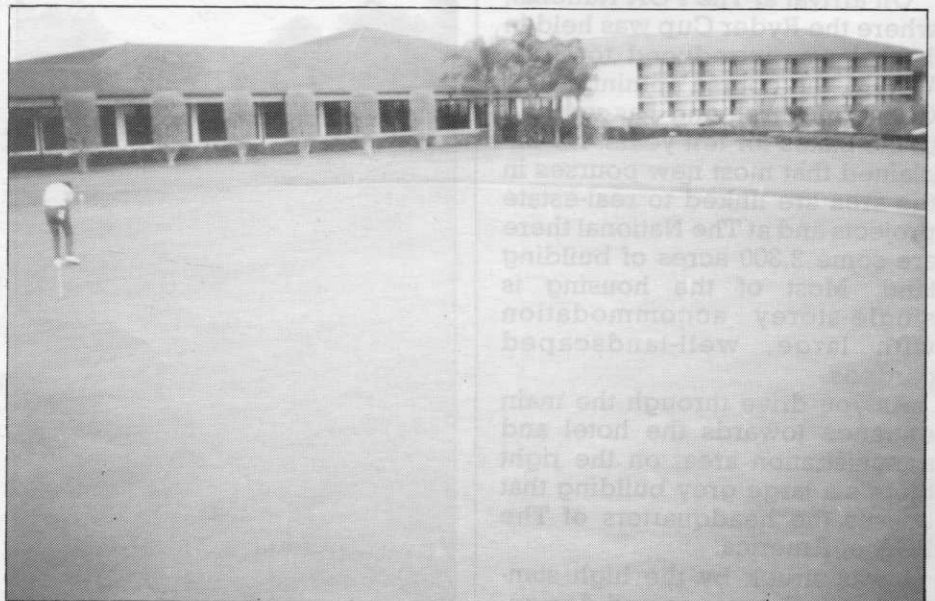
Greens are cut daily throughout the winter with Jacobsen Walkers (hand mowers) and this was common practice at all eight clubs I visited. The only time they use a triplex is in the summer and then only at weekends. Jacobsen Triplex (Greens King) and Toro Greensmasters are used to cut the tees and approaches.

Surrounding and ornamental areas are cut with Allan Nationals, Ransomes 513s, Ransomes 350s and Jacobsen Trim Kings. Fairways are cut with Jacobsen F5s using seven or nine blade reels. These are power driven and give a very fine cut.

For competitions, Luke is now using the Ransomes three and five gang ride-on machines, which he is very pleased with. Sweepers, suckers and blowers are used to collect loose cuttings on all mown areas.

There are just too many pieces of equipment to mention, but at one depot I counted 11 Jacobsen Turf Kings and eight Ryan hollow tining machines.

Bunkering on all four courses is superb - there are over 100 bunkers on The Champion course, which are mainly raked by machine. They appear to have done away with normal tines and



Practice putting greens, with part of the complex, hotel and administration centre behind.



**Tee Markers.** An overall plan of the hole and individual bunkering around the green is given. There are also iced water containers and ball cleaners.

replaced them with fan rakes, which give a very good finish.

Numerous pests, diseases and weeds thrive at The National – spraying machines are kept in constant use. One insect that is proving a problem and causing a great deal of damage is the mole cricket. To combat this, they spray orthodyn at night so that it is absorbed by the plants and then, when eaten by the mole cricket, it affects the nervous system and makes the cricket move into the open where it is eaten by birds.

Records of spraying are held in Luke's office, as are records of all work carried out. These records must be kept meticulously and, Luke hopes to be using a computer soon, not only to store information but to work out the frequency of spraying, applications

of fertiliser, etc.

It has to be repeated – the golf courses are beautiful. Flowers such as begonia semperflorens and impatiens grow and flower for many months of the year. There are Australian pines, slash pines, fine leaved oaks, palm trees, malucas and eucalyptus, as well as the common flowering shrubs bottle brush and oleander.

At the base of trees and shrubs, they spray Roundup, a total herbicide. Once the vegetation dies, the tree or shrub base is mulched with wood bark chippings, which are dyed green if there is a competition. This dye is also used when spot spraying. As Walter Hagen had a great affection for roses, rose bushes have been planted every 100 yards along The Haig's fairways.



**Bases of the trees sprayed with Roundup.**

Just before my trip, there had been three frosts, unheard of in this part of America, which caused extensive damage to trees and shrubs. Many hundreds died and these are costing the golf courses a great deal of money to replace. Fully mature trees, such as the native cabbage palm, at between 15 to 20ft high, are being planted for an immediate effect where large trees have died.

After a most enjoyable day, I realised how useful it had been to see grooming of such a high standard. I returned home with renewed enthusiasm.

While in America, I promoted EIGGA and, hopefully, there can be further exchanges of opinion between British and American greenkeepers.

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