

A photograph of a golf course green, likely the 18th green, viewed from an elevated position. The green is a vibrant green, contrasting with the surrounding brownish-green grass and the light-colored sand of a trap on the left. In the background, there are several trees, including a large, prominent one on the right, and a clubhouse building is visible through the foliage. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

Cypress Run... Professional and

The 18th green from the Clubhouse
Photo by Daniel Zelazek



Personable

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

I grew up in Tampa, and my memory of the trip to the Tarpon Springs area was of miles of flat, slash pine and palmetto savannas broken up by oak hammocks and cypress bayheads until you reached the sandy ridge along the coast.

Civilization has spread north from the Tampa Bay area since then. The area east of Lake Tarpon has become a mini-mecca of golf communities along the East Lake Boulevard corridor. One of the best groomed courses in the area is Cypress Run.

In the early 1980s seven members of the Innisbrook Golf Club and Resort decided they didn't want to compete with resort guests for tee times anymore. They purchased 328 acres of old dairy farm and hired Larry Packard, who had designed Innisbrook, to design Cypress Run.

Wadsworth Golf Construction Company built it, and the course opened in 1982. The result is a gently rolling, 18-hole private course that wends its way through graceful oak hammocks. The course is challenging yet very playable and member-friendly, as attested by the

waiting list to join. The club has a very professional feel, but in a very personable and comfortable way.

That is the same way I found the superintendent, Michael Swinson, CGCS.

Each visit I make to cover courses is unique. Each operation has its own energy, excitement and direction. Cypress Run is no exception. There's a lot going

on. Lots of projects. Improvements planned and carried out in an organized manner.

With 13 full-time and six part-time employees including the superintendent to maintain the course, Mike does a great job of balancing daily grooming practices and working in the projects to keep the course moving forward and improving.

One of Mike's continuing challenges is managing healthy turf where the course runs along those beautiful oak hammocks.

"I love trees and I love wildlife and the members pay me to grow good turf, so I have my work cut out for me," said Mike. "When the sunlight is scarce and the tree roots are thirsty, the turf usually comes in second place in the competition for moisture and nutrients.

"We are on a long range plan to thin out the underbrush and prune the trees to give the turf a fighting chance. We have

made significant improvements on several greens, tees and slopes with this approach."

But Mike isn't stubborn either – he's practical.

"On one hole we have these great oak trees guarding the right side as you approach, but it is also the cart path side of the hole and we just couldn't keep any decent turf growing here. So, we removed the turf and created a sandy waste area under the trees and eliminated an ugly problem."

Along the south side of the course, the low winter sun and the increased winter play spell trouble for the turf. To help his "problem child" tee snuggled up against the woods, Mike and crew have thinned out the adjacent tree canopies and sodded the tee top with more shade-tolerant zoysia grass.

More time and evaluation will be needed to declare the solution a complete success. The point is, rather than excuses,

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Mike is trying an alternative to solve the problem.

There is another problem Mike has to deal with this year, but it isn't unique to Cypress Run. This has been a remarkably warm winter, as Florida winters go.

With the exception of that mid-January freeze of 20 degree temperatures for six or seven hours, Florida hasn't had much cold weather. On a lot of days in January and February it was downright warm! And windy! The rub comes when we all have tried to get our winter overseeding established during such warm conditions. The bermuda turf didn't go dormant and it competed quite easily with the immature ryegrass. The success of the bermuda was painfully obvious as it turned into golden straw colored patches amongst our thinner-than-usual rye stands after that hard freeze.

As Mike said, "This year's overseeding has been a coin flip! Grow rye or grow bermuda?" Even attempts to reseed were almost always futile because the weather stayed too warm overall for even the reserve seed to be very successful. We will

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all try and keep what we have (rye and bermuda) green and growing through the spring!

Cypress Run seeds greens, tees, collars, approaches and fairways. Mike also seeds all turf in view from the clubhouse and from the roadways bordering the property.

Since the roughs are not seeded except in those select areas, Mike applies a split application of Surflan to the roughs to control volunteer rye germination in unwanted places.

"We go with a 1-1/4 quarts per acre rate in October and then follow that up 90 days later with another 1-1/4 quarts in late December or January depending on how the weather has been," says Mike. "Hopefully, that will take us past the crabgrass and goosegrass germination period. Another 90 days and we apply 1-1/2 quarts per acre to see us through the summer."

Summer, spring and fall find Mike managing the 15-year-old Tifdwarf greens and Tifway 419 fairways with frequent foliar sprays recommended by his turf consultant, Ralph White.

The solutions of potassium nitrate, iron sulfate, magnesium sulfate and liquid urea are sprayed weekly. This liquid program is combined with slow-release granular fertilizers like 8-0-8 or 17-1-10 blends. Coupled with the prescription feeding comes prescription watering in the form of hand watering hot spots and stubborn mutation areas.

Mike said, "We have found that if we stay on top of these problem areas and catch them early on with the deep hand watering we can maintain an acceptable and dependable putting surface."

Mike introduced hand mowing of the greens and fairway overseeding as new standards for Cypress Run, and the improvement in conditions was well received by the membership.

Overall grooming and course conditioning are foremost on Mike's mind. He continually asks Jon Treglown, the head professional, for comparisons of Cypress Run with other courses he plays in North Florida PGA Section events.

Today was no exception as Jon reported on the appearance of the unoverseeded fairways of a nearby course.



Cypress Run Golf Club

Location: Tarpon Springs, Florida.

Ownership: Member Owned.

Playing policy: Private.

Management Team: Club President, William R. Still; Green Chairman, Earl F. Malloy; Club Manager, Mike Pelno; Head Golf Professional, Jon Treglown; Golf Course Superintendent, Michael Swinson, CGCS; Assistant Golf Course Superintendent, Michael A. McNeil.

Designed by: Larry Packard. Construction by: Wadsworth Golf Construction Co. 18 holes. Par 72 at 6,981 yards. Opened 1982.

Course/Slope/Rating: Gold = 73.9/138; Blue = 71.9/133; White = 69.7/124; Red = 72.4/126.

Acreage under maintenance: 110 acres.

Waterways: 13.4 acres of lake surface.

Greens: 3.5 acres. Average size = 7,500 square feet. Turf type = Tifdwarf. HOC: .140" - .156" winter and summer. Overseeding: *Poa trivialis* (Sabre) @ 12 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Green speed goal - 9.0 - 10.0 feet.

Tees: 6 acres. Turf type = Tifway 419. HOC: Winter .500" - .562". Summer .437" - .500". Overseeding = 250 pounds per acre of a perennial ryegrass blend.

Fairways: 30 acres. Turf type = Tifway 419. HOC: .500" - .625". Overseeding = 250 pound of a perennial ryegrass blend per acre.

Roughs: 70 acres. Turf type = Tifway 419. HOC = 1.0" - 1.25". Not overseeded.

Irrigation: Source = 100% Effluent (Reclaimed water). P.S.I. pump station w/ Two 60 h.p. vertical turbine pumps and one 25 h.p. jockey pump. Controllers: Toro Varitime II. Heads: Greens - Toro 680 series. Tees, fairways and roughs - Toro 670 series.

Staff: Total of 19 including superintendent. 13 Full time. 6 Part time. Equipment Technician, Robert Stalter; Pest Control Technician, Doug Deshazer; Administrative Assistant, Sherry Barker; Landscaper/Horticulturist, Brenda Webb.

Equipment: Greens - Toro Greensmaster 1000s; Tees - Toro Greenmaster 3000s; Fairways - Toro Reelmaster 5100s. Roughs - Toro Pull-behind rough unit.



Scenic pond next to the clubhouse. The practice green is in the background. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



The 18th hole as seen from the fairway bunkers. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Mike strives for neatly edged bunkers and cart paths and course cleanliness daily.

"To be neat and clean every day isn't easy," he said. "It takes consistent, dedicated manpower and that can be a budgetary concern. However, it separates your club and your operation from some of the others."

Maximizing the assets of the club doesn't stop with the managing of turf for Mike. He showed me his attempt to revitalize some slash pines suffering from pine tree decline.

They were being treated with a Systrex injection program. Mike will try to reduce the stress on these trees by redesigning the irrigation system coverage in the area to put less water on the pines.

The Cypress Run staff also rebuilt the tee on the par 3, 8th hole to yield more teeing area and pin point the white-tee yardage. They enlarged the usable surface of the practice tee from 1/3 of an acre



The par-three 18th hole receives extra attention because of the shady conditions. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



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Michael Swinson, CGCS

1. **Originally from:** Stony Brook, Long Island, New York.
2. **Family:** Wife - Helen. Married 8 1/2 years.
3. **Education:** St. Leo College, Business Administration. Hillsborough Community College, Ornamental Horticulture.
4. **Employment History:** 1992 to present, Superintendent, Cypress Run G. C.; 1991-1992 Crescent Oaks Golf & Country Club. 1987-1991 Seville Golf & Country Club; 1982-1987 Assistant Superintendent, Cypress Run Golf Club.
5. **Role Models:** People in or out of the industry who have influenced my life and career: Sid Brown and Pete Bass (See sidebar)
6. **Goals/Accomplishments:** The most important accomplishment to me has been becoming a Certified Golf Course Superintendent. I am also proud to be one of the original seven founders of the Seven Rivers Chapter of the FGCSA.
7. **Personal Philosophy:** Don't make excuses for why you can not do something until you try. Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.
8. **Advice for prospective superintendents:** Watch, listen and learn. Learn from your superintendent. Take the good with the bad. Learn how to interact with people. Take numerous courses to stay abreast of the industry.
9. **Professional affiliations:** CGCS member of GCSAA; Current Vice President of the Seven Rivers Chapter of the Florida GCSA; Past External Vice President/Board of Directors FGCSA.
10. **Hobbies and interests:** Restoring and working on old cars.

Two mentors

Sid Brown, who worked for 30 years at the St. George's G & CC in Stony Brook, NY., was my first boss. I was fifteen years old when I started working for Sid — hand raking bunkers and walk mowing greens.

One day I asked Sid what it would take to become a superintendent and he said, "It will take a lot of hard work and determination and never give up! Work your way up the ladder and pay your dues. It will pay off in the long run."

The year before I landed my first superintendent's job, Sid died of a heart attack during his first year of retirement. I wish he had known that I had become a superintendent.

Peter Bass, currently superintendent at the Innisbrook Resort in Tarpon Springs, was the superintendent at Happaughe G & CC on Long Island, NY.

He and Sid Brown were good friends and I met Pete at our Christmas party one year. He told me he was moving to Florida to grow in a new golf course in Tarpon Springs.

Coincidentally, I was moving to Florida also, so Pete told me to look him up when I arrived. Some time later I moved to Florida and within six months I became his assistant superintendent.

During the next five years that I worked for Pete I gained much knowledge of the golfing industry and a lot of respect for Peter Bass, and now I longed to become a full superintendent.

In 1987, a new position opened at the Seville Golf & Country Club. I was hired for the position upon Pete's recommendation. Today Pete and I are still close personal friends and we have a mutual respect for each other.

I thank Sid and Pete for their tremendous help to me during my career.

Tips from Cypress Run

Photos by Joel Jackson

THINNING OUT tree canopies and installing shade-tolerant zoysia are two ways to improve this shady tee.



These pine trees suffering from decline are being treated with Systrex. Note the injection containers at the base of the trees.



Improved water cooler stand dispenses water, ice, two kinds of cups and has a trash receptacle built in. The rear access door is padlocked for security



Traffic control stakes at Cypress Run are made from old flagpoles and irrigation hydraulic tubing.



Practical alternative — This former weak, shady, high-traffic turf area was turned into a sandy waste area.

Strategically placed divot sand bucket (left) and broken tee caddy (center) help keep Cypress Run par-three tees neat and playable.





The second hole shows off neatly edged bunkers and graceful oak trees. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

to 3/4 of an acre by eliminating the wasted transition areas between the original three tiers and making one large tee.

This spring Mike and company will extend the 18th tee to give more members a chance of getting home in two shots on the spectacular and challenging finishing hole.

All of these projects and the attention to daily grooming details require Mike to spend most of his day on the course, which suits him just fine. Mike is quick to praise his crew and supporting staff.

"Sherry Barker is a computer genius and she takes a lot of the paperwork out of my hands so I can concentrate on the course. I'd say my office time is down to about 5% and my course time up to 95%

thanks to Sherry's expertise.

"My mechanic, Bob Stalter, is a small engine magician. He completely rebuilt our Sand Pro, saving us money in our capital budget. No superintendent is worth his salt without a good assistant, and Mike McNeil is my right hand.

"We have a pretty good team here. Most of the full timers have been here seven or eight years and even the part timers average about three years of service."

I was impressed by the teamwork of the entire club. The well-used divot sand buckets, the full broken-tee caddies, the raked bunkers and the repaired ball marks all gave evidence of a well organized membership who had a proud stake in the

club's success.

I was equally impressed by the Cypress Run Foundation. The Foundation was a way for members to bequeath or contribute financially to the Clubhouse Fund, Arbor Fund, Cart Path Fund, Irrigation Systems Fund and the General Purpose Fund for continuous improvements to the course and club.

Planning. Organizing. Achieving goals. That's what good management is all about. From my visit, I'd say that's what Mike Swinson and Cypress Run are all about. Cypress Run, a 15-year-old dream that just seems to be getting better with age.