


Number 3
Par 3
177 yards
Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



At Olde Florida Golf Club, the mission statement is

*Don't worry.
Be happy!*

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

The Olde Florida Golf Club is located east of I-75 at the end of the Vanderbilt Beach Road Extension. Seven years ago the Olde Florida Golf Club was a lonely outpost on the northeast fringe of the Naples growth boom. Now, nearby Immokalee Road is fast becoming Golf Central with six to eight courses open or under construction along its corridor.

The name of the club says it all. From the “cracker style” clubhouse with its high-pitched roof and wrap-around porch to the 18-hole Rees Jones golf course

situated in a slash pine forest festooned with cabbage palms and bald cypress with an understory of saw palmetto, Dahoon holly, wax myrtle, red bay, muhly grass, cordgrass, lantana and grape vine. In short, a slice of old native southwest Florida landscape.

The 25 founding members envisioned a golf club that would embody the finest traditions of golf combined with a commitment to excellence in every aspect of the daily operations and maintenance. They wanted a golf-only facility with an adequate but modest food and beverage operation. No swimming



*A rare sight in Naples – no limestone boulders on a lake bank! The par 5, 580 yard 10th hole.
Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

There are only three rules at Olde Florida.

Rule number one – There are no rules.

Rule number two – Be happy. Rule number three – If you can't be happy here, maybe you should be somewhere else.

pool. No tennis courts. Just golf. They wanted to avoid all the pitfalls, politics and parties of the traditional country club setting and just have a place to come and enjoy the game. A Bobby Jones quote printed on the Olde Florida scorecard sets the tone for the club's laid-back style of operation, "Few written rules are needed amongst a club of ladies and gentlemen."

That very prominent statement is backed up by an unwritten philosophy that goes something like this: "There are only three rules at Olde Florida. Rule number one – There are no rules. Rule number two – Be happy. Rule number three – If you can't be happy here, maybe you should be somewhere else." Superintendent Darren Davis says the club strongly adheres to that philosophy.

Davis joined the Olde Florida team in 1992 when the only employees were Lynn Josephson, the man who had the original concept, and the controller. Josephson,

a former local golf professional, guided the project through five years of planning and permitting with the Core of Engineers to get the full extent of the uplands and wetlands defined so that development could proceed.

As Josephson assembled the original 25 founding members, they discussed the design of the golf course as well as the simplified details of operation. The course was going to have a more northern look compared to the typical Naples golf course. There would be no limestone rock walls and lake banks, so common to the area. No paved cart paths except where absolutely necessary. There would be no signage or unnecessary posts, poles, fences etc. The native setting was to be preserved and there would be no flower beds or non-native landscaping used around the clubhouse or on the course. All accessories on the course would be natural.

In his extensive travels to prominent



Olde Florida GC

Location: Naples. Ranked No. 20 in Florida in 1997 and No. 6 Best New Course in Private Club Division in 1994 by *Golf Digest*.

Ownership: Members (250). The 15 founding members of the club govern all daily operations represented by an executive committee consisting of a president, vice president and secretary/treasurer. All members can vote on issues affecting the equity of the club. Fewer than 20 members call SW Florida their permanent home.

Playing policy: Private. Single membership.

Designed by: Rees Jones. Constructed by Wadsworth Golf Constructions. Opened: in 1993. 18 holes - Par 72. Championship Tees (7055 yd.) Course Rating: 74.1 Slope: 132; Back Tees (6734 yd.) Course Rating: 72.9 Slope: 126; Middle Tees (6393 yd.) Course Rating: 70.8 Slope: 119; Forward Tees (5597 yd.) Course Rating 71.5 Slope: 121.

Management: Manager/Head Professional, Tom Wildenhaus; Golf Course Manager, Darren Davis. Both report directly to the club president, Mr. T. J. Kukk of Akron, Ohio.

Major Renovations/Projects: Ongoing projects include installing surface drainage and maintaining a "clean look" between turf and native woods that border every hole. Drainage installation is a top priority since there are no cart paths on the course and cart use is restricted under only the most severe circumstances. Our goal is to get the entire course draining as well as a USGA green.

Acreage under maintenance: 105 acres of turf.

Greens (1-18): 2.5 Acres. Average size: 6,130 sq. ft. Turf type: Dwarf bermudagrass from Quality Grassing. HOC = .147 - .180" with Wiehle rollers and groomers. Overseeding: None. Green Speed Goals = First and foremost is consistency. In season: 9-10. Tournaments slightly higher. Off season: No less than 8. Double cut, roll, light verticutting, grooming and light top dressing to achieve speed while keeping HOC relatively high for healthier turf.

Tees (1-18): 3.1 acres. Turf type: Tifway 419. HOC = .425 - .550" Bunton walk mowers 75% of the time. Overseeding: None.

Fairways: 25.5 acres. Turf type: Tifway 419 with 27 and 36 chromosome "off type" patches. Overseeding: None.

Roughs. 69.5 acres. Turf Type: Tifway 419 with "off type" patches. HOC = .75 - 1.75". Overseeding: None.

Staff: 23 including superintendent. Assistant superintendents Jim Whalen and Trevor Brinkmeyer; Shop and equipment manager Kim Ellis; Office manager/administrative assistant Stacey Gray.

golf courses around the country, Davis borrowed ideas from Augusta National, Pine Valley and Black Wolf Run to outfit the course with native materials. The tee markers are short sections of pine tree limbs sitting vertically on the tees. They are not color coded. You play from the set of tees that suit your game without the stigma of traditional markings which might prejudice age or gender.

Ball washers and trash containers are mounted on posts made from logs of downed trees on the property. The only concession to manmade materials is the occasional use of cart directional signs to guide traffic flow during wet conditions. Landscape timber sections are used as movable barriers to direct heavy cart traffic in the winter season.

"Our primary golf season is from October to April," says Davis, "and only about 20 of our 250 members are local residents. So when a member comes to town any time of year, we make sure the course is available and in playable condition at all times. We never close to walking golfers and golf carts are restricted only for the most obvious adverse flooded and saturated conditions."

One inescapable geological fact of Collier County is the existence of limestone bedrock near the surface. Just because Rees Jones and the founders decided not to use the rock to decorate the course doesn't mean that it didn't have an impact on the construction and maintenance.

"This site had very limited topsoil cover, Davis explained. "We stockpiled what soil we could scrape from the cleared areas. The lakes were blasted and excavated and the rock used to build the rough shape of the course with the exception of the greens complexes. Then the soil was pushed back over the rock to an average depth of two feet.

"Often this soil cover was contaminated with scattered rocks, which created some problems after grow-in when we started aerifying. We destroyed a lot of tines the first few years finding and removing those rocks. Essentially what we have now with this underlying bedrock is an 18-hole perched water table, making traffic control our number-one maintenance challenge.



Sunrise on the 412 yard, par 4, 14th hole. Lake and aquatic plant management is performed in house. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Our second-biggest ongoing maintenance challenge is maintaining a clean but natural look along the interface between the maintained turf areas and the native woodlines.

“Installing the irrigation system and drain lines was and is a monumental task. The trenches have to be excavated with jack hammers. However, we are committed to eliminating the chronic water holding areas around the course to make the course as playable as possible. To date we have installed an additional three miles of 4-inch perforated drain tile.

“Winter is devoted to grooming the playing surface daily for the members, and summer is when we do our major cultural work on the course. Up until this year we were always closed on Mondays and Tuesdays in the off season to do our cultural maintenance practices.

“This year the club has asked us to close only on Mondays. Therefore we work from dawn to dusk to get aerification cores and clippings cleaned up as much as possible. We finish cleanup on Tuesdays ahead of play, but with only 5–10 players in the summer, it has not been a problem for us or the members thus

far. Prior to this year they had never seen an aerification core.”

One look at the Olde Florida maintenance schedule reveals that the greens will be aerified monthly from May to September. The tees will be also be done monthly through October. The fairways will be aerified in May, July, August and October and verticut in June and July. The roughs will be aerified in September and October.

“Our second-biggest ongoing maintenance challenge is maintaining a clean but natural look along the interface between the maintained turf areas and the native woodlines,” Davis says. “We have checked all our part circle heads to prevent impacting the native areas and encouraging invasive plant material. We use some pre-emergents on the cleared areas and we trim with a rotary mower and weed trimmers and hand-pull obvious plants.

“I can recall riding the course once with the club president and the only

comments on course conditions on 14 out of the 18 holes dealt with these perimeter areas. If that was the only thing we had to talk about, we must be in pretty good shape. He agreed.

"We have three big events each year. The club championship, the member-member and the member-guest. The member-guest is a sellout within minutes by return fax as soon as the reservations are sent out. Recently they have gone to double shotgun starts instead of

tee times so we have had to adjust. We work split shifts during the tournament. We have two diesel-powered portable light towers that can light up an acre to help us in the dark.

"We start at 4:00 a.m. and double cut and roll greens every morning and evening and mow the tees, collars, approaches and fairways every morning. We usually finish the front nine by daybreak and hustle to get the back nine done before the shotgun. We come back

at 5:00 p.m. after play concludes and do it over again. During the event on the night of the cocktail party, the members wander outside and watch in amazement as our crew finishes up the putting green under the lights."

Davis gives full credit to his entire staff for making things flow smoothly and producing the desired results.

"We live and breathe the club's commitment to excellence. We operate on a philosophy of 'no excuses' with high expectations for perfect conditions, while still doing the required cultural work."

"My two assistants, Trevor Brinkmeyer and Jim Whalen are super managers. Like all our assistants, they are turf school graduates. Every assistant we hire has done at least one internship at Olde Florida so they start with a familiarization with the staff and the course. We don't have a senior/junior or first/second assistant hierarchy. The key duties like pest control, irrigation, projects, routine scheduling are divided up based on preference, experience and just plain sharing."

"My policy is to not have long-term assistants, but to send them on their way as soon as they are ready to assume new duties. For example, Jason Gerlach has just moved on to become the superintendent of the project we are building next door. It is quite rewarding to know that 11 former Olde Florida assistants are now superintendents elsewhere and one is the director of grounds (landscape) at Pinehurst. Overall, I find this method works very well for me, because I am kept on my toes mentoring, training and breaking in new people with their own unique strengths and weaknesses."

"My equipment manager, Kim Ellis, has been with us since day one in 1992. He is very versatile and extremely talented with his mechanical skills and innovations. Unlike some shop personnel he enjoys being out on the course when given the opportunity. We train one of the crew members to assist Kim in the shop when he needs an extra hand.

"Stacey Gray is our office manager and administrative assistant. She also assists the clubhouse staff on a part-time

IPM and Stewardship

- The best defense against a pest is a healthy stand of turf. Our philosophy is to grow healthy turfgrass every day of the year in all locations so that our pest problems will be minimal. We attempt to core aerify every inch of the golf course 5 times a year. We also deep vertical mow fairways, tees and approaches twice a year.

- If needed pesticides are applied on a spot treatment basis. No preventive applications of any kind are made to the golf course except a Ronstar preemergent/fertilizer combination applied twice a year to eliminate the need for post emergent chemical applications. Most post emergent weeds are removed by hand. This year we treated 90 acres with Chipco Choice for mole cricket control.

- We have six lakes covering 26 acres. We have managed the lakes with in-house labor for the past three years to minimize the impact to water quality. These lakes hold all normal amounts of surface runoff water. When the lakes occasionally reach capacity they are designed to stage and flow off site through only one large area with wetland plants to filter the water before it flows into the adjacent Big Cypress Canal.

- When landscaping the course only native plants that already existed on the site are used. These plants are used sparingly to create cover and wildlife corridors in the interior of the course. Out of play turf areas have been converted to native plantings to conserve water and electricity; reduce the amounts of fertilizer and pesticides needed; save labor and fuel and provide additional habitat for wildlife.

- Dead trees (snags) are left in place whenever possible as food and nesting sources for cavity nesting birds. They are "limbed up" to improve their appearance. The limbs are then used to make brush piles to provide cover for small animals. Nesting boxes for ospreys, bluebirds, American kestrels and purple martins have been erected along with several feeders near the maintenance area and clubhouse to increase everyone's awareness and knowledge about the variety of birds that frequent the golf course.

- Recycling: Olde Florida retains 100% of the organic wastes that are generated by the maintenance practices on the property. All storm debris and tree trimmings are used for brush piles. Since Olde Florida is a nonresidential golf facility there are numerous areas where grass clippings can be spread out with no negative side effects. Both members and employees are actively involved in recycling as many materials as possible – aluminum cans, white paper, used oil, tires and batteries.

- Olde Florida is a Certified Audubon Sanctuary and received the GCSAA 1996 Environmental Steward Award in the Private Club Division.



Darren Davis

Originally from: Huntsville, Ala. Lived there one week. Grew up, lived and worked in Titusville, Jacksonville, Jupiter and Naples.

Education: 1991 - Penn State University. Two-year technical program certificate in turfgrass management. Recipient of Technical Writing Report Award and Penncross Growers Association Scholarship.

Employment history: 1992 to present, superintendent, Olde Florida Golf Club, Naples; 1991-92, assistant superintendent, Loxahatchee Club, Jupiter; 1990-1991, apprentice superintendent/spray technician, Augusta National Golf Club, Augusta, Ga.; 1988-89, spray technician, Golden Eagle Country Club, Tallahassee.

Professional affiliations: FGCSA (1991); FTGA (1991); GCSAA (1989); Current president of the FGCSA. Extensive committee service in all three organizations.

Honors: 1997 GCSAA Leo Feser Award for best written article in *Golf Course Management* magazine. 1996 GCSAA National Environmental Steward Award.

Goals: I have attained the goals I set for myself for the early part of my career. Therefore, as I will continually do throughout my life, I am in the process of establishing and recording in writing a new set of goals. A close friend once told me, "You are the author of your own destiny. If you want something badly enough, write it down, strive to accomplish it, and it will happen."

Philosophy: On life – "Work like you don't need the money. Love like you have never been hurt. Dance like nobody is watching." On work – "To be a successful manager surround yourself with quality people and provide them with an enjoyable, fulfilling work environment."

Advice: To future superintendents – Obtain a formal education. Do not get wrapped up in titles. Set goals and plan your future. Do whatever it takes to obtain those goals regardless of the personal sacrifice. Once you become a superintendent, don't forget those who helped you get there. Don't walk around with blinders on. Travel (even if just locally). Meet and get to know your peers. Don't be afraid to share your knowledge and experiences. Expand your horizons whenever possible. Make yourself a well rounded golf course superintendent.

Hobbies: Reading fiction, traveling, spending time outdoors experiencing nature, writing, yard work, photography, cooking, mountain biking, relaxing or strolling on the beach, spending time with good friends.



basis since they have no clerical personnel. Stacey is my computer whiz and does a lot of scanning of photos for me, besides keeping our paperwork flowing through the proper channels.

"The rest of the crew — our greensmen — do a fantastic job. Most are Hispanic, but two of my longtime employees are from Haiti. They have been with us since 1993. In fact we have very good longevity with most of our employees, which is critical with the labor trends these days.

"I think we offer good competitive incentives for our staff by providing a decent wage, clean uniforms, and a safe, clean place to work. They work a 37- to 40-hour week Monday through Friday and we cover weekends with volunteers on overtime. We have never had a problem finding the people to work. I think it is also very important to understand the personal needs of our crew."

"Since many of our crew members have families back in Mexico, they want to go home for visits and these may last longer than the typical two-week vacation. I have found that by accommodating our really good workers with some extended time off, we can count on them coming back when we really need them.

"And in our daily work we like to have fun. They get a big kick out of me trying to speak Spanish, but they appreciate the effort. We have a crew lunch once a month, and I learned a long time ago that it means more to them if we go where they like to go. The current restaurant of choice is the Rancho Grande.

"Another positive aspect about working at Olde Florida is the attitude of the members and the organizational philosophy. The club is run by the founding members under the leadership of an elected club president. The club manager/head professional and I as golf course manager report directly to him. But what I like best is that the members seem to truly appreciate and respect what we do. I try to do my part by communicating regularly to the membership individually all year long with updates and reports of what we're doing on the course in terms of improvements and interesting facts and information.



The flag on the par-3, 5th hole flies taunted in the breeze from an approaching storm. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



Olde Florida's overseeded greens turn purple only for a short time in Naples.

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Everglades Chapter

History: In 1968 superintendents in Charlotte, Collier and Lee counties had to drive either to Miami or Tampa on the two-laned U. S. 41 to attend superintendent association meetings. Collier County Extension Agent Don Lander and Bob Sanderson in Charlotte County began to gather superintendents together informally for discussions of common turf problems. By April of '68 both groups got together in Fort Myers at the Lake Lawn G.C. and decided to begin the Everglades GCSA. In the spring of 1969 a joint meeting was held with the South Florida GCSA on Marco Island and the ensuing golf outing gave rise to the Poa Annuu Golf Classic.

Founding members: Bob Sanderson*, president; Dempsey Brown, vice president; Dutch Vaughn, secretary/treasurer; and Paul Nevers*; Paul Frank*; Clem Stuart*; Joe Huckleby; Ralph Settles; Dwight Wilson*; Bob Cappeli; Cecil Johns; Ken Willis; Bill Baker; Sam Scherer; Bob Ahrons; Win Gibbs; and Jim Farnsworth. (* Indicates FGCSA President's Award winners)

Activities: The annual Poa Annuu Golf Classic moved around among the Lehigh, Mirror Lakes and Oxbow courses in the early years and has been played at Lely Resort and the Audubon CC, but traditional and current home base is the Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club. This event remains one of the premier golf, social and educational highlights of the FGCSA calendar. Proceeds from this event have helped finance turf research and scholarships. Recently, the EGCSA has hosted a Spring Seminar bringing in leading figures in turf research and industry for a daylong educational conference.

Officers for 1999-2000: Rick Tatum, president; Steve Durand, vice president/treasurer; Gary Grigg, external vice president; Matt Taylor, secretary.

"It is gratifying when notable members like Mike Ditka or Marty Shottenheimer remember your name and go out of their way to meet and greet you when they see you on the course.

"Coach Ditka is a real golf fanatic. He may only get to visit a few weeks out of the year, but when he's here he is on the course from sunup to sundown. He usually takes a caddie and walks the course always playing more than 18 holes a day, often 36 or more. Even though he sometimes beats the walk mowers around, he never complains. He just loves being out there on his golf course enjoying the game and the peaceful environment."

Because of his performance and professionalism on the job and the back up provided by his staff, Olde Florida has encouraged and supported Davis's participation in professional organizations and his travel to leading golf courses and events nationwide. Davis also works with EPIC Productions which produces training videos for the golf maintenance industry.

Davis has worked as a volunteer at three Masters tournaments, a U.S. Open and a U.S. Senior Open. He is hoping to make it to Pebble Beach for the 100th U.S. Open to help out his old pal and superintendent, Mark Michaud.

"I have known all of these superintendents as friends and colleagues and it was a tremendous learning opportunity to be involved in course preparations at the highest level. Just being part of a work force made up of dozens of superintendents in that kind of atmosphere is networking of the highest order. But I also consider each one of those trips, as well as others, as work-related business. I have gathered lots of useful ideas that we have incorporated here at Olde Florida. I use a lot of photos and tips I have picked up in my travels for articles for the Super Tips section in the *Florida Green*."

Davis has been very active in the FGCSA, the GCSAA and the FTGA, serving on a myriad of committees. He has served through the chairs on the execu-

tive council of the FGCSA is now president, having been elected on July 31. He has traveled a lot, seen much and earned much respect for his devotion and leadership in his profession at a relatively young age. How did he get into this business?

"In high school I realized my basketball skills were not going to provide me with any type of career. After two years of community college, I still did not have a handle on a major or career path. I liked the outdoors and hunting and fishing. I considered marine biology or being a park ranger or wildlife officer.

"During and after community college, I was managing hundreds of acres of Christmas tree farms for several owners. I finally enrolled at FSU in civil engineering, but did not enjoy the quantity or type of math involved.

"A good friend mentioned some school in Pennsylvania that taught you how to build golf courses. I would need experience to enroll so I took a job at Golden Eagle C.C. and learned that the program at Penn State was actually in turfgrass management. The rest is history."

Effective superintendents today don't just happen. They are the sum total of not only formal and on-the-job turf education, but the also the intangibles of curiosity, a love for the outdoors and the traditions of the game of golf. Successful superintendents don't sit idly waiting for things to come to them. They get out and seek knowledge and new ideas. They interact and participate. Relationships with other people in the industry are key factors in the making of a good superintendent.

Davis cites several key relationships in his own development.

"First and foremost, Dr. Joe Duich, professor emeritus at Pennsylvania State University who not only taught me a great deal about the profession, but also educated me on several things that made me a better manager and person. He has continued to be there throughout the years providing valuable support in tough times.

Equally important, a loving mother and father who have supported me through thick and thin and forced me to become an



Thousands of aerifier tines were sacrificed finding buried rocks on tee tops.



Logs from downed trees are used as accessories



Limestone bedrock makes drainage installation a necessary but tough job.



In 1995 it rained cats and dogs and FISH!



School tours are part of Olde Florida's Audubon Certified Sanctuary.

Olde Florida Snapshots by Darren Davis



Nearly 100 yards of bunker faces the members on the par 3, 13th holes as seen from behind the green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

independent thinker and self-supporting.”

“Then in the business itself, I have a lot of people to thank for helping me along the way. There is Jeff Vietmeier, my first boss at Golden Eagle in Tallahassee who steered me to Penn State, and Marsh Benson at Augusta National who taught me valuable lessons in organizational techniques and professionalism.

“Then there was Phil Shoemaker at the Loxahatchee Club, where I learned what a good assistant superintendent should be. Also at Loxahatchee, Kurt Kuebler, the general manager, gave me valuable input on how a GM and the membership perceive a golf course superintendent. From him I also learn good interview skills.

“You can’t survive very successfully in this business without making good friends. I have been fortunate to have made a few who have remained trusted friends over the years. I thank Matt Shaffer currently at the Country Club of Cleveland for having the wisdom for “not” hiring me in the

frigid great white north at the Hershey Country Club, knowing it was the best thing for me at the time. Paul Latshaw, Sr., Winged Foot G.C. for being a true friend and confidant.

“Locally, Tim Hiers, CGCS, Colliers Reserve and Gary Grigg, CGCS, Royal Poinciana G.C. have been my “go-to guys” when I needed advice on turfgrass problems, a membership question, association volunteer challenges, or employment issues.

“Then there are Tom Burrows, agronomy consultant, and Frank Dobie of The Sharon Club of Ohio, who have provided advice on a multitude of issues from the perspective only those who have been in the business for a long time can provide. Finally, I’d like to thank Tom Wait of TRW Enterprises for being a good travel companion and for continually bringing me innovative ideas, products and techniques. There are many others to whom I am indebted for their ideas, comments and

opinions who have helped me become a better golf course superintendent.

“I am humbled and yet proud to think about how we have been part of the development of a lot of methods and procedures to produce a certain look and feel at Olde Florida, and to know that the results have been so successful and desirable that the members want to recreate that experience at the new club being built next door.”

The new club will be called The Golf Club of the Everglades. It will have a different look because most of the trees on the site were destroyed by a wildfire sometime ago, but it will have the same architect, Rees Jones, and the superintendent Jason Gerlach is coming from Olde Florida. Davis will be the project manager and consultant during construction and grow-in. Based on their track record at Olde Florida, when they get ready to open, I hope their scorecards read: “Don’t worry. Be happy here too!”