

BENHAM'S BEAT**Why No Media
Respect for Florida
Golf?**

Don Benham

It is amazing how much Florida and Michigan have in common. Both states are almost surrounded by water; Florida by saltwater and Michigan by freshwater. Freshwater lakes heavily populate both states. Each state is also a golfer's paradise with many types of golf facilities. In the last 10 years, the two states have led the nation in the number of new golf courses being built. Is that good or bad? Well it depends on whom you are talking to in each state.

Water is one of the main issues in each state. Would you believe that, around the Detroit area in the suburbs, strict water restrictions are in place? No washing cars or watering lawns. Some cities are on a twice-a-week watering restriction. There really isn't a fresh water shortage in Michigan, but the city of Detroit supplies much of the water to the southeastern part of the state and the further you are from the water source, the less pressure you have. During the morning hours in some areas, the pressure is so low that flushing toilets can cause lack of pressure for your shower. It is recommended that you wash clothes after 9 p.m..

If you are still with me and wondering, "So what!" Why are you telling me this?" You have your own watering problems with restrictions and times you can water. The percentage of water used on golf courses, recreation and home lawns is about the same for each state. Advisory groups in both states recommend "natural plantings". Ok, what is your point Benham?

The point is, in Michigan I have not read a single article attacking golf-course use of water. Not one! The media does not blame golf courses for water usage shortages. In Florida golf is always the main target of the media. What do you think is the reason for that difference? Is it because there is more golf played by out-of-state golfers in Florida? Is that the reason? I don't really know the reason. Do you have ideas for the reasons? If so e-mail me your thoughts.

Both states have strong turfgrass associations and major university turfgrass programs. I do think that Michigan has had a stronger connection between the Legislature and Michigan State University and the Michigan Turf Grass Foundation. I think Florida Turfgrass Association needs to do a better job with the Legislature and I need to do a better job as public relations director.

Michigan turfgrass does not have a lobbyist but has depended on Gordon LaFontaine to get

the message across. He has a ten-year start on me, but I need to catch up fast! I have Joel Jackson on my side and that is a big advantage. We also have a huge commitment from the University of Florida to sell our message with great research done here in Florida. The GCSAA has signed an educational contract with only two states they felt had a solid turfgrass association, a great partnership and strong support from the state GCSA. Guess who? Florida and Michigan.

For information about the author, see inside cover.

PLAYABILITY VS. AESTHETICS Can Expectations Of American Golfers be Met in the Future?

By John Foy

Golf course conditioning has steadily improved. Around Florida and across the lower South, the introduction of the ultradwarf bermudagrasses has raised the bar with respect to putting green quality. These new cultivars can be mowed

average rainfall for two to three years, lake and aquifer levels reached record lows, and in a large portion of the state, the alarming reduction in potable water supplies created a crisis situation. Water management districts around the state were forced to impose - or further expand - landscape irrigation restrictions. For the first time at many courses, it was necessary to manage with significantly less water. While this presented challenges to course managers, they found that it was possible to survive.

By midsummer, it began to rain with a vengeance, and the opposite extreme developed. Though much needed, periods of prolonged and/or extremely heavy rainfall during the late summer and fall resulted in a new set of course management challenges. By year-end, total rainfall amounts for most of the state had reached at least average levels, and in some locations were as much as 10 to 12 inches above normal. Naturally, this brought an end to the drought, and irrigation restrictions were either completely lifted or reduced by the water management districts. With a rapidly growing population in Florida, however, it is a fact that water has become a limited resource,



Like the Old Course at St. Andrews, the New Course at Grand Cypress in Orlando is not always lush green, but it always has great presentation. Photo by Joel Jackson

routinely at 1/8 inch or less, which was unheard of just a few years ago. Golfer expectations have risen, and in some cases the standards for daily conditioning are equal to or better than what was expected of tournament courses just a few years ago. However, environmental extremes and increasing governmental regulations result in limitations on the use of basic resources such as water, pesticides, and fertilizers. Thus, the question arises as to whether golfer demands and expectations can be met in the future.

Successfully managing golf courses in Florida in 2001 meant dealing with environmental extremes. During the winter and into the early summer, a severe drought occurred. This is the normal dry season in Florida, but with below-

and less will be available for course irrigation in the future.

The drought and irrigation restrictions of 2001 were a wake-up call for golfers at facilities throughout Florida. Due to demands for a lush green color, over-irrigation of golf courses has been one of the most common mismanagement practices encountered. The base bermudagrass turf of Florida golf courses does have good drought tolerance, and we found that it was indeed possible to maintain turf coverage and good playing conditions when irrigation restrictions were in full effect. Although adjustments in management programs were necessary, the golfers found better playing surfaces and in particular a lot more roll on their tee shots. Some golfers finally began to