



Number 5
Par 4 , 353 yards
Seminole G.C.
Photo by Daniel Zelazek



SEMINOLE GOLF CLUB

Rebuild It and They Will Come

By Joel Jackson, CGCS Retired

Well, they didn't really have to rebuild the Seminole Golf Club to attract a lot of customers. The course averages between 60,000 to 70,000 rounds per year, but the renovation did receive rave reviews in the local

paper and the local golfers seem to be quite pleased with the changes.

There is no question that the resulting Don Veller Seminole Golf Club on the Florida State University campus in Tallahassee and the Don Middleton Golf Complex, which is home to the school's

premiere Professional Golf Management program, is a state-of-the-art learning laboratory for future golf professionals.

The new two-story brick building with two wings houses offices, classrooms, clubhouse, pro shop and the new Renegade Grill. The facility would be a standout



There isn't much water on the course, but an acre's worth challenges approach shots to the 416 yard, 14th hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

at any golf course in the state, and the new golf car fleet even comes equipped with GPS units. There is a separate teaching/practice building with roll-up doors and the latest swing analysis equipment so FSU golf team members and golf program students can practice and learn during inclement weather.

The old practice range has been retrofitted and re-contoured to provide

all sorts of playing conditions and shot-making situations with the addition of greenside bunkers, severe slopes and chipping areas for practice and proficiency in playing and teaching the game.

The course itself underwent some major renovations to the greens and tee complexes four years ago, when architect Bob Walker provided more

challenging contouring to the enlarged greens much to the delight of the golfing public of Tallahassee. The putting surfaces were converted from Tifgreen 328 to TifEagle ultradwarf making it possible to skip overseeding and maintain speedy greens year round. Only the routing of one hole, the 14th, was measurably altered by creating a dogleg around a new one-acre pond to

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COURSE FACTS



Seminole Golf Club

Location: Tallahassee

Ownership: Florida State University. Open to the public.

Number of Holes: 18; 7,147 yds; Par 73; Slope/Rating: 131/74.3

Designed by: Bill Amick. Opened: 1962. Redesign by Bob Walker in 2004. Work done by Quality Grassing & Services

Management Team: Tim Melloh, PGA Professional, club manager; John Forbes, PGA Professional, head golf professional; Doug Abbuhl, Class A GCSAA Member, golf course superintendent; Russ O'Quinn, Class C GCSAA Member, assistant superintendent.

FSU Golf Alumni: Hubert Green, Jane Geddes, Paul Azinger, Colleen Walker, Kenny Knox, Jeff Sluman, Lisa Walters and Nolan Henke.

Major renovations or ongoing projects: In 2007 added a new 21,000 square foot chipping green. We are growing in new 10-acre practice facility to be used by the FSU golf team and students in the PGM program. In 2003, rebuilt greens changing turf to TifEagle, added double row irrigation system and added 11,000 linear feet of cart path. Project architect Bob Walker.

Total acreage under maintenance: 120

Greens: TifEagle; avg size: 10,000-12,000 sq.ft. total 5 acres; HOC .125 winter, .140 summer; green speeds: 9-10; no overseeding.

Tees, Fairways and Roughs: Tifway 419; tees 4.5 acres, HOC .375, overseeding this year with intermediate ryegrass, previously used 3-way perennial ryegrass;

fairways 40 acres, HOC .375, overseeded with intermediate rye; roughs 20 acres, HOC 1.25; deep roughs bahiagrass, 40 acres; HOC 3 in. to 12 ft.

Bunkers: 39, white sand over lined bunkers with drains, hand- and machine-raked with Toro Sand Pro.

Natural areas: 5 acres on 14th hole. Many beds with crape myrtles and pinestraw mulch.

Waterways: 3 ponds with aeration fountains, total area 2 acres.

Irrigation: 3 wells; two 100-hp VFD pumps and one 7.5-hp submersible pump to maintain line pressure; 792 heads at 75-foot spacing; Rain Bird Cirrus System; fertigation: two 1,000-gallon tanks.

Water Management and Conservation Practices: Northwest WMD. 500,000 gpd, 30,000,000 gpm. Restrictions – cut back range, roughs, fairways, tees, slopes and then putting greens during shortages.

Staff: 30 including superintendent (16 full time and 14 part time – mostly FSU students).

Key staff specialists: Assistant Superintendent Russell O'Quinn; Pest Control Technician Tony Norton; Project Supervisor Ron Kammel; Horticulturist Ray Johnson; Senior Operators Jilian Bradley and Pemon Hamm. We had an OJT turf student from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Ga. this summer. We would like to have more turf students in the future.

I would like to pay tribute to our longtime Irrigation Technician Sip Collins. Sip passed away this past summer after 45 years at the course.

the left side of the green's approach.

The addition of multiple tee boxes kept the rolling course playable for all handicap levels. The course is just under 7,000 yards from the back tees, but the hilly terrain and five par-five holes means giving the future pros and top amateurs plenty of opportunity to let out the shaft.

In obviously striving to produce the best Professional Golf Management program and facilities I only hope the improvements don't stop at the top of the hill overlooking the rest of the golf course. Tucked away at the bottom of the hill is the 45-year old golf maintenance facility. It sorely needs upgrading to have a complete state-of-the-art operation from top to bottom for the whole property.

Future golf professionals should also be given tours of a model facility that serves as the center for golf course maintenance and environmental

stewardship - two keywords at the heart of issues facing every golf course in the state.

Without ample covered equipment-storage space or paved parking and service areas in maintenance compounds, the wear and tear on equipment from dirt and dust is accelerated which affects the life and performance of the turf grooming equipment. Investing in infrastructure like covered pump stations, etc isn't eye candy but it does pay such dividends as holding down maintenance and repair costs and keeps the irrigation system online during turf-stressing drought conditions.

Two investments that have paid off are a Sand Silo for storing topdressing material and two stand-alone self-contained storage buildings, one for fuel and oil and the other for pest control products. The Sand Silo keeps the sand dry, easy to apply and easy to brush in to minimize disruption to the

greens surfaces.

Every golf club benefits from friendly, up-front customer service, a functional clubhouse, a well-stocked pro shop and restaurant, but maybe even more so from well-conditioned turfgrass areas, and a functional, well-designed maintenance facility with new turf equipment on a capital replacement program to help deliver those desirable playing conditions.

It is a cooperative blend of all of these factors that make a golf club truly effective and successful. Abbuhi's name and the GCSAA logo are listed on the club's scorecard as part of the management team with PGA professionals Tim Melloh, the GM and director of golf and John Forbes, head golf professional. That's a good token of recognition of the importance that golf course maintenance plays in the success of a golf facility. I wish all golf clubs would do that simple gesture and then back it up with a sound maintenance

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A split rail fence and pine straw area borders the cart path down the left side of the 168-yard, 8th hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

budget and facilities.

Because the Seminole GC is such a popular public golf course (60,000-70,000 rounds per year) — thanks in part to its excellent condition, affordable rates and discounted greens fees to university faculty and students — the course almost never closes.

Abbuhl and his staff are required to do the cultural practices in a three-hour “tee time gap” on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. He understands the pressure for the course to be accessible and earning revenue, but there is often a flaw in the gap plan. He said, “If we get a slow foursome going off at 10 o’clock and the 1 p.m. group is a fast foursome or worse a twosome, our ‘gap’ shrinks rapidly, going from three hours to 30 minutes on some of our maintenance days.”

I have covered a lot of golf courses doing these cover stories, and I have to confess I can’t recall a golf course

SUPERINTENDENT FACTS

Doug Abbuhl: Class A Golf Course Superintendent

Born: Willamsfield, Ohio near Pymatuning Lake

Family: Two sons: Austin is 21 and enlisted in the U. S. Army. Noah is 11 and goes to Cobb Middle School

Education: Ohio University (2 years), Kent State University (2 years), University of Guelph, Ontario Turfgrass Program.

Employment: 1992-present, superintendent Seminole Golf Club; 1988-92 assistant superintendent Golden Eagle CC; 1986-1988 foreman/spray tech at Golden Eagle CC.

Professional Affiliations: Member of the USGA, FGCSA and GCSAA. Served on Coastal Plains GCSA board of directors as external vice president and now a past president of the chapter.

How did you get into the business? I was raised on a dairy farm in Ohio. I learned the value of hard work

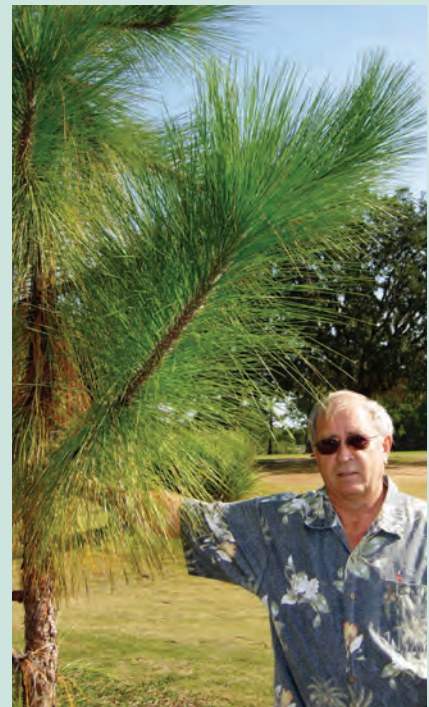
from my parents and I loved being outdoors. Now Master Greenkeeper and consultant Terry Buchen, CGCS was my first superintendent. From him along with my next two bosses Dave Gardner and Jeff Veitmeier I learned different and important life and work lessons about the business.

Goals: I want to take our course to the “next level.” Not just a pretty course but a course where golfers of all skill levels will enjoy playing.

Work philosophy and advice: I never ask someone to do something I wouldn’t or haven’t done on the course myself. I try to tell people that it takes a very high level of commitment to do this job and don’t get into it unless you are willing to put in the time. But, it may be possible to put in too much time. My divorce may have been the result of spending too much time at work and not enough time with my family.

Memorable moments: Viewing wildlife on the golf course.

Hobbies: Swimming and snorkeling.



Superintendent Doug Abbuhl plants longleaf pines instead of slash pines on the course to restore the true native plant palette. Photo by Joel Jackson.



The course plays down hill, 529 yards to hole No. 1, shown here with passing storm clouds looming nearby. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

literally not closing some holes sometime to get necessary maintenance done. It is yet another example of an adaptable maintenance department doing whatever it takes to get the job done and provide acceptable playing conditions.

Downtime and weather became an issue with this year's overseeding program. Abbuhl said, "We had to overseed around play, but the weather was either too windy or rainy to do the proper job, so we had to keep postponing our dates. On the back end, we had the Bowden Golf Classic coming up so we had to get the seed down so it would have time to pop and get established so the course would look

good for the event.

"Finally, we got a clear day and we hopped to it. With four guys on rotary spreaders, two on tractors with Lely spreaders and five carts and a truck and trailer we worked from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. and put down 11.5 tons of seed around tees, greens slopes and fairways. The real challenges after overseeding is trying to keep the golfers from driving wherever as the new seedlings emerge. We put out 'No carts' signs in critical areas, but they often aren't very effective in curtailing wandering golfers."

Also escaping the golfers' awareness is the fact that Abbuhl is trying a new seed blend this year to improve turf conditions during spring transition.

"Typically, the newer ryegrasses seem to be more heat tolerant which might be good for some folks," he said, "but when the overseeding hangs on into late May and early June, we often end up with thin spots in the fairways and slopes when the winter grass checks out in a heat wave.

"This year I am trying Transus 2200 from Pickway Seed. It is an intermediate rye. It has a darker green color and is very cold tolerant which can be a good thing in Tallahassee. The 'intermediate' means it is not as heat tolerant so hopefully, we can groom it out more easily in the spring. I say hopefully, because we are experimenting with it for the first time."

Right now Abbuhl is working under the added pressure of not having an equipment manager on staff and recruiting a new one hasn't been easy. "Our long term benefits are great," he said, "but our starting salary ranges aren't very competitive with the better clubs in the area, so finding a savvy, experienced turf technician willing to set up in an outdated shop built in the 1960s is tough. We get some outside help with reel grinding on the mowers, but routine preventive maintenance can get behind."

Abbuhl has the patience of Job. He knows things must get better. "When I came here 16 years ago, I had to rebuild the Cla-valves and pressure control valves just to get decent coverage from the irrigation system. We had patches of green down the fairways because the heads wouldn't overlap. Once I turned

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on a green and stood in the middle and never got wet. With increased pressure and better coverage came the leaks in the old pipes and fittings. It would take four or five employees to operate and maintain the system, but we got decent coverage. When IGM came in to manage the course, we got a new Rain Bird® double row system installed. When new VFD pumps were installed on two wells over 1,500 feet apart, I could see there would be a problem because the wells couldn't communicate with each other. When one would ramp up the other would shut down. Finally we got them talking to each other so they work in harmony."

Working in harmony with Abbuhl is Assistant Superintendent Russell O'Quinn who has been at Seminole for seven years. He helps shoulder the administrative load with Abbuhl to keep the department running smoothly. O'Quinn is originally from Louisiana, but grew up in Graceville, just across the state line from Dothan, Ala. He attended FSU, studying accounting and economics but ended up graduating from Florida A&M along with classmate Andy Maguire who is the superintendent at the Marsh Creek GC in St. Augustine. O'Quinn got a job at Capital City C.C. in Tallahassee in 1990 and worked his way up from crewmember to assistant in 1998. He moved over to the Seminole G.C. in 2000.

For all the pressures, Abbuhl does appreciate the profession, especially the opportunity to work outdoors. "I was raised on a dairy farm in Ohio. I learned what hard work was from my parents and I enjoyed being outside with nature. Isn't it ironic that part of this property was once a dairy farm? This profession allows me so see nature coming alive every morning out on the golf course. Not many jobs give you the opportunity to work in such a beautiful setting.

"With all the redesign and improvement projects the past several years I have missed one of my favorite jobs on the course – walk-mowing greens. It is good exercise and a time



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Storm clouds linger over the 17th green, a 199-yard, par-3 hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

when I can clear my mind of daily clutter and think about planning.”

Abbuhl keeps improving the 120-acre environment he manages beyond the playing conditions of the greens and fairways. His stewardship includes the stands of native pine trees and live oaks. He has an arborist annually survey the trees on the course to evaluate which ones might be diseased need to come down for safety reasons. When he plants pine trees in the roughs, he plants longleaf pines which are native to the area.

He also planted a number of Leyland cypress trees which are fast-growing, bushy evergreen to provide visual and safety screening between greens and adjacent tees. The addition of beds and specimen plantings of low maintenance native flowering grasses have provided additional color accents to the course that has open parkland feel. Abbuhl says there are roughly five acres of native areas on the course. I saw a couple of

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these dense cover areas on the 14th hole.

You may have heard of people who are called “horse whisperers.” These folks seem to be able to connect with horses in a positive calming way. I can’t explain it beyond that. After my trip to Seminole, I’m dubbing Abbuhl the “hawk whistler.” He did a darn good imitation of a Red-tailed hawk as he tried to whistle one up for a photo during our course ride-through. I commented that I found hawks to be a very skittish. Abbuhl said, “We have a very large red-tailed population on the course and I can easily get within 15-20 feet of them as we whistle back and forth to each other.”

Abbuhl said that a young black bear had been reported on the course early that morning, but he never saw him. The wildlife sightings on this urban golf course include eastern bluebirds, crows, ibis and spoonbills, pileated and

red headed woodpeckers and all of the common songbird species. In the four-legged critter category there are fox, squirrels and rabbits an occasional white-tailed deer and if you can believe it, an alligator in the pond on No. 14. I would think that would be against school policy.

These natural wonders are a real plus to the setting, but as noted earlier good turf maintenance is at the heart of any successful golf course. Abbuhl has learned a few new tools along the way to help his program at Seminole. He said, “Because of the heavy play demand and our older equipment, mowing and clippings cleanup can be a challenge.”

“The past two or three years we have been on a Primo program, and it has been a lifesaver, reducing clippings and allowing us to reduce mowing frequency. We spray fairways, collars and cutouts around greens with Primo at 16 oz/A. Greens are sprayed weekly

in summer with Primo at 2-3 ounces per acre. With reduced clippings we can clean up quicker with the fairway blower and I have to say I think the blowing program has helped to keep our fairways more weed free by perhaps blowing weed seeds into the roughs where the taller grass might shade out the weed seedlings.”

Abbuhl uses Round-up® as a growth regulator in the 40 acres of bahiagrass predominant in the deep roughs. He said, “When the grass is actively growing in the warmer months we apply an initial application of 6 oz per acre, then five to six weeks later we follow up with 4 oz per acre and then, in another five to six weeks, we apply 2 oz per acre. This usually holds down the seed head and leaf growth until the cooler months when the growth naturally slows down on its own.”

His basic cultural programs include aerifying greens five times per year;

FUN FACTS

The Cool Abbuhl

- Vehicle:** 2001 Dodge Dakota
- Last good movie I saw:** Hero?
- I stay home to watch:** The History Channel or PBS Specials
- The book I’ve been reading:** The Five People You Meet in Heaven
- Favorite meal:** Sushi, fish
- Favorite performers:** The Who and Andy Pratt
- Prized possessions:** My two sons, Noah and Austin
- Personal Heroes:** My oldest son Austin in the Army.
- The one thing I can’t stand:** Mediocre employees who just barely get by
- Nobody knows that I:** Play video golf games late at night
- I’m better than anyone when it comes to:** Doubles in ping-pong
- I’d give anything to meet:** Arnold Palmer
- If I could do it over:** I wouldn’t change a thing
- My fantasy is:** Living in a cabin in the mountains with Rhonda
- If I could change one thing about myself:** I’d lose weight
- My most irrational act:** Taking the key out of a golfer’s cart after he drove up onto a green.
- Most humbling experience:** Looking into the eyes of my newborn sons



Obviously from the numerous golf cart tracks in the new tender ryegrass seedlings, someone didn’t get the message. Overseeding establishment takes cooperation from everybody. Photo by Joel Jackson.


- Words that best describe me:** Extrovert (on the inside) and introvert (on the outside)
- My best fish story:** When my assistant Russell and I won first place in the FTGA Fishing Tournament this year.
- My most amazing/lucky/important golf shot:** Still waiting for that one
- My dream foursome would be:** Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Lee Trevino and Old Tom Morris.

pulling cores three times with 5/8-inch tines during growing season and using solid tines two times and a Hydroject during the cooler season; and verticutting two directions and topdressing with Red Bay sand every other week during growing season. The sand is stored in a sand silo.

Integrated Pest Management is accomplished by using Chipco Choice® for mole crickets although this year he sprayed Alectus® at 9 quarts per acre for crickets and grubs. He uses Talstar® to control worm outbreaks, especially when growing in new turf like our chipping green and practice facility this past season. On the new practice facilities he has had to control smutgrass and bahiagrass, which he does with applications of Princep® and Blade® applications.

High traffic volume and wear is a primary site challenge, but he says the soil profile, a sandy-clay mix called Orange Marlburg can dry out quickly in drought conditions but handles wet weather pretty well, allowing them to open up sooner than most other courses after a rainy spell. A good aeration program is important to keep the soil opened up for good percolation.

Every golf course has two stories to tell. One story is centered on playing the game of golf and the other is about managing the turf conditions that provide those all-important playing conditions. In the best of all worlds they both have interesting characters and story lines and most of all – happy endings.



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This view from the back tee shows the new two-story classroom and clubhouse buildings. The small brick building to the left is used for teaching and analyzing golf swings. Photo by Joel Jackson



Superintendent Doug Abbuhl stands next to the new self-contained chemical storage building by the old maintenance building. Photo by Joel Jackson



The new sand silo, above, holds dry topdressing stands beside a traditional open sand storage bin. Photo by Joel Jackson



The new 10-acre practice facility with its greens, bunkers and swales will require more equipment and labor than the old 5-gang, pull-behind mower. Photo by Joel Jackson



Wooded upland and native grasses on the 14th hole provide excellent wildlife habitat. Photo by Joel Jackson