

Miami Beach Golf Club – A Piece of Florida History

By Joel Jackson

During the Florida land boom of the Roaring '20s, some of our historic hotels and golf courses were constructed, including — among many others — the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables and the Miami Beach Golf Club.

Our cover story course began its existence in 1923 as the Bayshore Golf Course built by developer Carl Fisher as part of his Alton Beach subdivision designed to attract wealthy winter residents from up North. It was still the Bayshore Golf Course in 1965, when I was a young commissioned officer in the U.S. Coast Guard stationed at Base Miami Beach on Terminal Island just off the main ship channel into the Port of Miami.

My wife and I lived just a couple of miles south of the golf course on Jefferson Avenue in an efficiency apartment during the first two years of my Coast Guard service. Back then an efficiency apartment on South Beach was going for \$85 a month, but on a \$295 monthly salary, I guess it all balances out. So, while serving as base administrative officer for six months and a year and half as the operations officer on the Coast Guard Cutter Hollyhock stationed at Miami Beach, I played quite a few rounds of golf on the old Bayshore course; so this

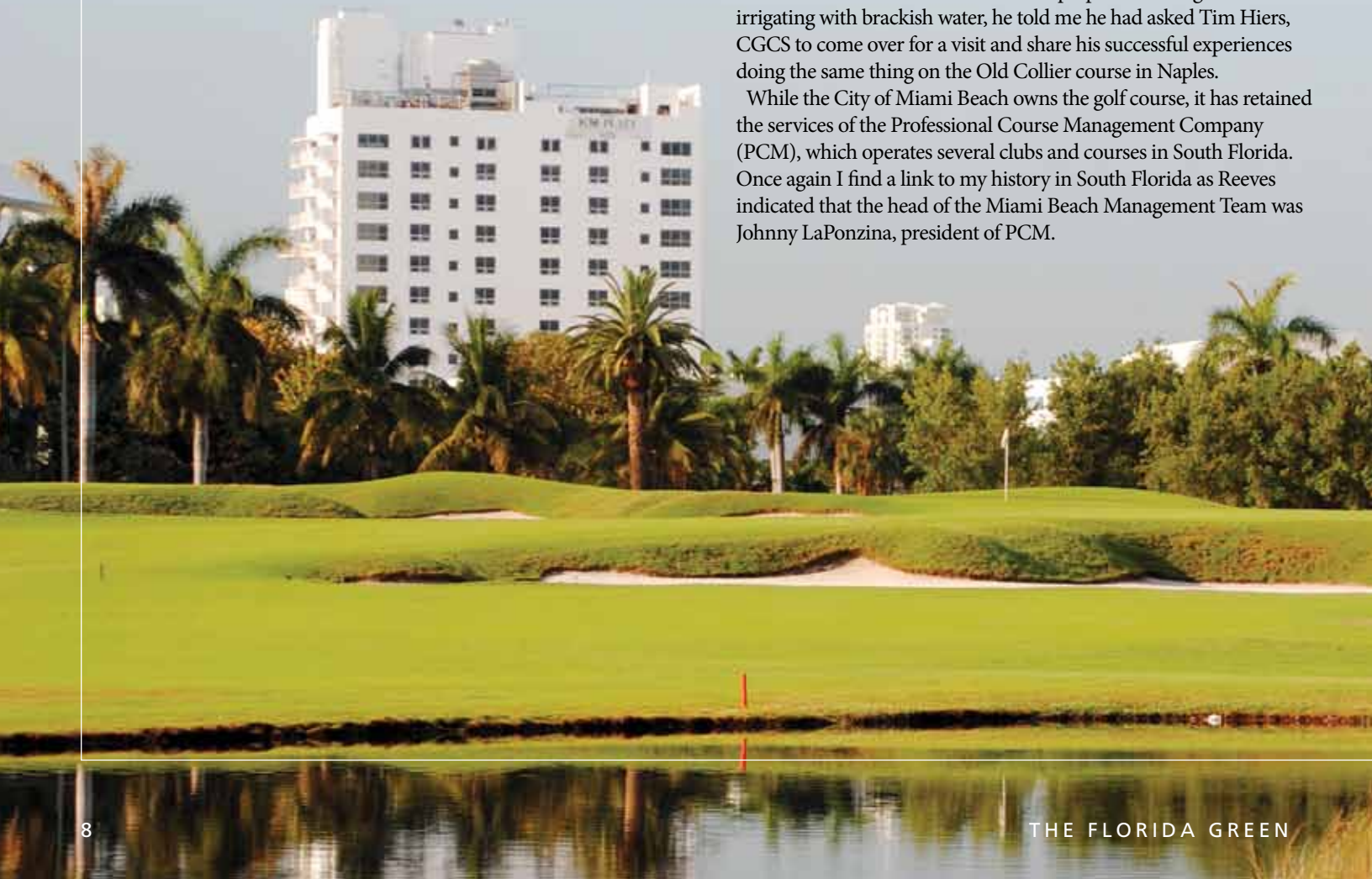
assignment was a bit of a homecoming.

Going back to the early 1940s, the old Bayshore course was rented by the U.S. Army for \$1 a year as a training ground and armed soldiers executed maneuvers amid smoke screens from grenades. Things haven't changed much as our host superintendent, Ricky Reeves, related a story about a golfing couple he observed one day "hitting the deck" and heard screeching tires as shots rang out during the filming of an episode of the TV show, "Burn Notice."

In 1944, after a failed attempt by some Chicago investors to convert the land to 650 upscale home sites, the city condemned the land and took over the golf course. In 2001 the whole golf course was stripped of grass and most trees, mounds were flattened and lakes were drained. Even the old clubhouse was razed and everything was redesigned and rebuilt from the ground up by Arthur Hills and Steve Forrest. The new Miami Beach Golf Club opened for play in 2002.

In 2005 Reeves, the current superintendent, came on board to maintain the 120-acre property and oversaw the recent conversion from hybrid bermudagrass to seashore paspalum. The Salam variety is used on the greens and the rest of the course is planted in SeaIsle 1. As Reeves learns the ins and outs of paspalum management while irrigating with brackish water, he told me he had asked Tim Hiers, CGCS to come over for a visit and share his successful experiences doing the same thing on the Old Collier course in Naples.

While the City of Miami Beach owns the golf course, it has retained the services of the Professional Course Management Company (PCM), which operates several clubs and courses in South Florida. Once again I find a link to my history in South Florida as Reeves indicated that the head of the Miami Beach Management Team was Johnny LaPonzina, president of PCM.



SUPERINTENDENT FACTS



**RICKY REEVES, Class A,
Golf Course Superintendent.**

Photo by Joel Jackson.

Originally from: Born and raised in Plantation.

Family: Wife Pam, daughters Chelsea and Taylor.

Education: AA degree in business in 1983 with heavy elective horticulture course load.

Employment history: 2005– Present, Superintendent Miami Beach GC;

1996–2005 Superintendent Normandy Shores GC;

1993–96 Assistant Supt. Lago Mar CC.

1988–93 Landscape supervisor Lago Mar CC.

Professional affiliations: SFGCSA all aspects of the Board currently VP. Will become President in July 2012. FGCSA Board 2010 – Present. GCSAA member for 12 yrs.

Goals/Accomplishments: Continuously try to get better at what I do. There is always room for improvement.

Personal philosophy of work: Work smart, Be honest and communicate with those around you.

Personal memorable moments: Three moving and monumental dates to remember. On the good side, there's the birth of my kids. On the regret side, the untimely death of my lifelong friend in 2010. It is a reminder to me that you never know your life might end, so live it to the fullest the best that you can.

Hobbies, interests, involvement: Fishing, camping, golf and ping-pong. *(Ed Note: Reeves says he thought he was a pretty good self-taught table tennis player until he joined a local club and found out he was really still a rank amateur.)*



View from behind the 15th hole, a long dogleg par 5.

At left: 13th hole Miami Beach Golf Club. Photos by Joel Jackson.

LaPonzina became the first head golf professional at the Pembroke Pines Golf Club in the early 70s when I first got into the golf maintenance business. I helped finish construction on the course and stayed on the maintenance crew after it opened, eventually becoming a foreman before moving to Orlando and beginning my career at Disney World in 1974.

Meanwhile LaPonzina went on to found PCM in 1971 and built the portfolio of courses that included over 20 well-known public, semi-private, municipal and resort golf properties in South Florida. His goal was and is to make golf more affordable and enjoyable for the average golfer and help golf properties achieve their business goals. Recently LaPonzina was inducted into the South Florida PGA's Hall of Fame to recognize his business savvy, ideas, marketing strategies and influence in the South Florida Golf industry.

Reeves began his golf maintenance career literally at the grass roots level. He earned his AA degree in business from Broward State College, but had taken many horticulture classes along the way. After school he was working for a nursery that by agreement would use out-of-the-way areas on golf courses as tree nurseries. One day in 1988 while harvesting and moving trees for sale to a client, the superintendent of the Lago Mar CC said to Reeves, "I need a landscape supervisor for the course!"

In 1993 he moved up to assistant superintendent at Lago Mar and then took the superintendent position at nearby Normandy Shores GC in 1996, and in 2005 he came to the Miami Beach GC.

Reeves credits his parents with teaching him a good work ethic and Lago Mar superintendent Russ Jaynes and his assistant, Jeff Dodd, for lighting the fire in him that still burns today for working in the golf maintenance industry.



View of the 8th hole from one of many native areas on the course. Photo by Joel Jackson.

A couple of challenges Reeves faces with the conversion to paspalum is bermudagrass encroachment and maintaining healthy turf on the high side bunker edges. The bermuda encroachment in the far roughs is not much of a concern but some areas that are more in play have to be dealt with. Says Reeves, "Since we try to use as much brackish irrigation water as pos-

sible to keep costs down, some bermuda patches can't stand the salt build up and we have run some fresh water cycles in those zones to keep it green and playable. We are on a constant program to spray out and replace the bermuda when and where we can."

Reeves says that the bunker edge problem only kicks in when the higher-cut

turf on the bunker faces reaches close to 4 inches in length. They lose their vigor due to spotty irrigation coverage on the steep faces and so they have installed irrigation mist head systems on over 99 percent of the bunkers so far. This seems to help overcome the stress in those locations.

Since paspalum is an aggressive grower, Reeves maintains good ball roll on the greens by utilizing a combination of aggressive warm-season aerifying, verticutting and topdressing and a slightly more moderate version of the same during the cooler months. In conjunction with those activities, he spikes and or needle-tines biweekly year around, and triplex rolls five to six times per week as well. He applies 10 ounces of Primo per acre weekly except after aerifications until the holes are covered over.

The tees and fairways are also aggressively groomed and sliced as often as possible to keep the thatch under control and provide a good playing surface. Reeves primarily utilizes a foliar spray and fertigation program to apply the bulk of the nutrients for the whole course.

As for insect problems Reeves said, "We

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have mapped out areas that we annually treat for grubs with Allectus. Mole crickets, sod web worms and aphids are spot-treated as needed. We use Acephate® for those pests, and baits are also used for the mole crickets.”

Even though the golf course is in the middle of a dense, urban environment on a narrow, coastal barrier island, Reeves says they have lots of wildlife, including red-shouldered hawks, ospreys, iguanas, mallard ducks, coots, moor

hens and sea gulls. I also spied a lone Egyptian goose. These geese have now been mentioned in the last three cover stories. They must have found a niche along the east coast.

A couple of other rare sightings, according to Reeves, include Matt Damon and Toby Keith. Damon reportedly has a home on Miami Beach and has played several times over the past few years and Keith can be seen teeing it up if the Oklahoma Sooners are in town for the

Orange Bowl or playing the Miami Hurricanes during the season.

The down-to-earth Reeves is a dedicated, hard-working superintendent who is also serving as a director of the Florida GCSA and an officer of the FGCSA's oldest chapter, the South Florida GCSA, which was founded in 1939 back in the heyday of Miami Beach and the Bayshore Golf Club. Now Reeves is also part of the long and rich history of the Miami Beach Golf Club.



Not quite a double green, but holes #1 (background) and #10 (foreground) do share the same water hazard. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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REEVES FUN FACTS



Ricky Reeves holds up dead python he and his buddies found while camping at Big Cypress in the Everglades.

Vehicle: 2008 GMC Canyon

The last good movie I saw: "Bourne Supremacy" starring Matt Damon

I stay home to watch: Little League World Series, Major golf events, Miami Dolphins

What I've been reading: *Golf Maintenance* magazines

Favorite meal: BBQ ribs and collard greens.

Favorite performer(s): Hank Williams Jr.

Prized possessions: Family

Personal heroes: Mom & Dad

Nobody knows that I: Have 5 grills that I cook on. Not all at the same time unless I have to.

I'm better than anyone else when it comes to: Grilling

If I could do it over: Try to play better golf.

I'd give anything to meet: Hank Jr.

My fantasy is: Travel and fish the Amazon River.

The one thing I can't stand: People not using a turn signal.

If I could change one thing about myself: Keep the weight off.

My most irrational act: Hanging out in the water with alligators in the Big Cypress National Preserve, but not in too deep.

Most humbling experience: Birth of my kids

The words that best describe me: Dedicated, honest, thankful.

My dream foursome would be: Matt Damon, George Lopez, Toby Keith and me.

My best fish story: First sailfish I caught on a drift boat out of Miami Beach marina.

My most memorable golf shot: Eagle on a par-4, dogleg left hole on the Spring Tree GC, now known as Seven Bridges GC. The ball came to rest 2 feet from the hole. I made the putt.



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MIAMI BEACH GOLF CLUB



Photo by Joel Jackson

Location: Miami Beach
 No. of Holes: 18; Yardage: 6,813; Par: 72 ;
Slope & Rating: 73.1 / 131
Ownership: City owned. Managed by Professional Golf Management, Inc. (PCM)
Playing Policy: Resort. Daily fee.
Average rounds per year: 47,000.
Designed by: Original 1923 designer unknown. 2001 Redesign: Arthur Hills & Steve Forest. Opened: 2001
Management Team: PCM President Johnny Laponzina; Club Manager Steve Farrell; Head Golf Professional Mike Booch; General Manager Alberto Pozzi; Food & Beverage Manager Jim Norse; Superintendent Ricky Reeves.
Ongoing projects: Re-sodding bunker faces and managing bermudagrass encroachment.
Total property acres: 120. Acreage under maintenance: 100
Greens: Turf Type: Salam Paspalum. Average size (sq.ft): 6,500. Acres: 3

Height of Cut: .090 - .100 (.075 - .080 for annual tournament)
Overseeding: none. Green speed goals: 9-10' summer, 10' plus for winter
Tees: SeaIsle 1 paspalum. Acres: 6. HOC: .350 in. Overseeding: none
Fairways: SeaIsle 1 Paspalum. Total acres: 25. HOC: .500; Overseeding: none
Roughs: SeaIsle 1 Paspalum Total acres: 35. HOC: 1.25; Overseeding: none
Bunkers: 59. Sand type: G- Angle; Hand and machine raking? John Deere 1200 Hydro Rake
Waste or Native areas/beds: 15 acres Materials (sand, crushed rock, mulch/straw, native plants and ground covers/ plant material
 How maintained? Trimmed and sprayed seasonally or when needed.
Waterways/Lakes/Ponds: 13 - 9 large and 4 small; 17 acres; maintained by Lake Masters
Irrigation: Brackish water with potable city water back up.

Pumping System: 3 brackish pumps, 2 city, 1 jockey.
Heads: 1,600/ 65-ft spacing
Fertigation: Applying N-Control, Phairway & other liquid fertilizer blends.
Watering restrictions: Common areas 2 times per week. Golf Course - follow CUP permit and any SFWMD water-shortage restrictions that are in effect.
Water Management/Conservation practices: Daily monitoring and computer weather station data with a digital rain gauge that works.
Staff: Total including superintendent: 18. Schedule: 40 hrs. straight time with OT as needed.
Key Staff: 1st Assistant David Pitkins; 2nd Assistant & Pest Control Tommy Knight; Equipment Technician: Steve Jackson; we all do irrigation.
Meetings/ Communications: Morning crew and monthly safety meetings. Bimonthly department head meetings.



These Egyptian geese are getting to quite common on south Florida courses.

Wet and Wild

on the Miami Beach Golf Club

Photos by Joel Jackson



A six-foot iguana strolls across the 13th tee.



Just hanging out in Iguanaville looking for my lost shaker of salt.



A mother Muscovy duck protects her babies from the nosy photographer.

Mist heads on bunker faces helps keep the new Seashore paspalum turf healthy.