

THE BILTMORE HOTEL AND GOLF COURSE: *A Time Travel Adventure*

The calendar on my iPhone said it was March 28, 2013 as I pulled out of the UF/IFAS Research and Education Center in Ft. Lauderdale and headed south toward Miami. I was en route to the Biltmore Golf Course to visit with superintendent Bryan Singleton and research this cover story.

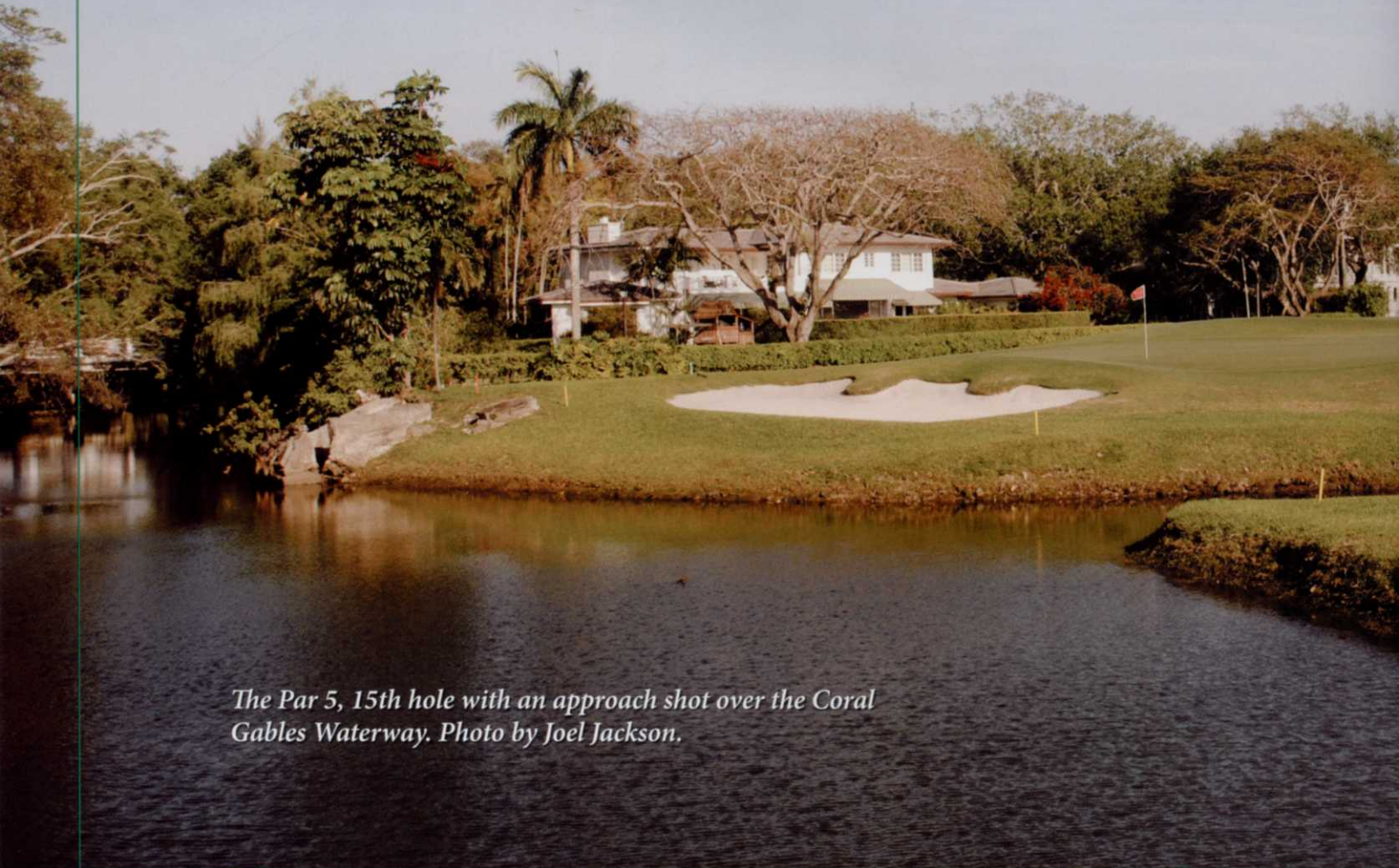
Once on the property, I was transported in time, aided by the architecture of the hotel and golf course. The portraits and photographs of presidents, sports legends, iconic entertainers and other historical figures on the walls made it even easier to turn back the pages of history.

I was familiar with course in general because I had played it a couple of times when it was a municipal golf course while I was in the U.S. Coast Guard and stationed in Miami in 1965 to 1967. The hotel was closed at the time and was acting as a military hospital. But I'm getting ahead of the amazing story of this historic property.

None other than the legendary Donald Ross designed the golf course in 1925. It was originally a 36-hole layout that wrapped around and extended southward from the hotel. Six years later, in 1931, the Miami-Biltmore Open – the richest

professional golf tournament in golf at the time – attracted legends Walter Hagen, Paul Runyan, Ralph Guldahl, Bill Mehlhorn, U. S. Open Champion Billy Burke and Gene Sarazen, who would capture the Biltmore a record four times.

The Tour moved on, but the Biltmore maintained its place in golf history by hosting the Junior Orange Bowl International Golf Championship for 49 years since 1964. Names like Nick Price, Jose Maria Olazabal, Tiger Woods, Craig Stadler, Hal Sutton, Bob Tway, Mark Calcavecchia, Helen Alfredson, Gary Koch, Annika



The Par 5, 15th hole with an approach shot over the Coral Gables Waterway. Photo by Joel Jackson.

SUPERINTENDENT FACTS

Meet Bryan Singleton

Originally from:

Born in Washington, DC. Grew up in Beltsville, MD

Family: Wife Liz. Daughter, Jaqueline. 8-month old Beagle named Birdie.

Education: BS in Agronomy from "The" Pennsylvania State University

Employment history:

1983-1986 superintendent of the North Course, Wilmington CC, Wilmington, DE; 1987-1991 assistant superintendent, Card Sound Golf Course, Key Largo, FL; 1991-2006 superintendent Riviera CC, Coral Gables; 2006-Present superintendent Biltmore GC, Coral Gables.

How did you get into the business: I began working on golf courses as a summer job while in high school. Really, it's the only work I have ever done.

Professional affiliations/awards: 28-year member of the GCSAA. South Florida GCSA and FGCSA member since 1987. SFGCSA sec/treasurer in 1997-2000. SFGCSA president in 2000-01. Served on the Missing & Exploited Children Tournament since 1995. Received the FGCSA President's Award in 2011 for Lifetime Service.

Goals/Accomplishments: To maintain the best golf course I can and to treat others with respect. I have been involved in five major course renovations. I appreciated being recognized by my peers with the 2011 President's Award.

Personal philosophy of work: You have to enjoy what you do and give your best every day. I would advise a young person coming out of college to select a superintendent to work for who has a history of helping place their assistants into superintendent positions. Also, unless you have a pension plan at work start your own IRA account as soon as you can.

Personal memorable moments: Playing the Royal Dublin Club in Ireland with my dad and going to the 1997 Masters with my dad and fellow superintendent and friend Dave Klinkhammer.

Hobbies and Interests: Golf, relaxing at the beach with a good book, and fishing.



BRYAN SINGLETON

Photo by Joel Jackson.

Sorenstam and Paula Creamer can be found among many others in the Junior Orange Bowl Hall of Fame.

For many foreign players like Olazabal and Price, it was their first venture on American soil. They qualified abroad by winning their national championships.

These facts and other anecdotes came courtesy of J. R. Steinbauer, tournament chairman, whom superintendent Bryan Singleton had invited to his office to share the importance of the Biltmore in the history of that premier amateur event.

"We cannot praise Bryan and his staff enough for the outstanding job they do preparing this course to top level conditions required for our



One of the renovated original bridges crossing the Coral Gables Waterway. In the background is the Par 3, 12th green. Imagine a Venetian gondola heading to Biscayne Bay. Photo by Joel Jackson.



Behind the trees on the Par 3, 14th hole and across Bird Road lies the Riviera Country Club which for twenty years was part of the Biltmore property. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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world class players," Steinbauer said.

The Jazz Era: 1926 - 1942

Let's go back to the beginning. Developer George Merrick teamed with Biltmore hotel magnate John McEntee Bowman at the height of the Florida land boom in the 1920s to build "a great hotel." The property would serve the crowds of people thronging to the Miami area and would also serve as a center of sports and fashion.

The architects hired to design the hotel were Leonard Schultze and S. Fuller Weaver, who already had the Atlanta and Los Angeles Biltmores, New York's Grand Central Terminal, Miami Beach's Nautilus Hotel (later the first location of the Mt. Sinai Medical Center). They also did the famed Miami Daily News Tower (now known as the Freedom Tower) downtown on Biscayne Boulevard across from the American Airlines Arena, home of the Miami Heat.

In November 1925, the Ross-designed course opened and, a few months later on January 15, 1926, the hotel opened its doors to its first guests, including socialites from the Northeast who traveled down on trains marked "Miami Biltmore Specials."

Visitors during this era included frequent prominent guests, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Ginger Rodgers, Judy Garland and Bing Crosby. Everyone who was anyone stayed at the Biltmore from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to gangster Al Capone. During the late 1920s and early 1930s during the Wall Street plunge, the hotel still thrived by hosting aquatic galas drawing huge crowds on Sundays to watch synchronized swimmers, bathing beauties, alligator wrestlers and the four year-old boy wonder Jackie Ott, whose act included diving into the swimming pool from an 85-foot

high platform. Johnny Weismuller, the tree-swinging Tarzan of my youth, was a Biltmore swimming instructor and even broke some records at the immense Biltmore pool.

The War Years: 1942 - 1968

In the period covering World War II to Vietnam, the War Department converted the hotel to a hospital called the Army Air Forces Regional

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Hospital. In the conversion, many of the windows were sealed with concrete and the travertine marble floors were covered with government-issued linoleum. It was also the early site of the University of Miami's School of Medicine. This was the Biltmore Hotel I knew during my Coast Guard days in Miami. It was also during this period, in 1945, that the property was cut in half. The 18 holes adjacent to the hotel



From the back of the practice green looking out across the 7th green and the 8th, 5th and 15th holes. A true 1920's parkland layout.

remained under the city's control, while the other half was sold and became and remains the Riviera Country Club.

A New Era Begins: 1983 - Present

In 1973 a coalition of the city officials and residents of Coral Gables lobbied for the city's acquisition of the property and was granted ownership under the Historic Monuments Act and Legacy

of Parks program. Another ten years elapsed before the city initiated a full restoration of the Biltmore Hotel.

Four years and \$55 million later, the hotel reopened Dec. 31, 1987 as a four-star hotel and resort. Three years later, at the height of the economic crisis of 1990, it shut down yet again.

In 1992, the Seaway Hotels Corporation, a Florida hotel

management firm, leading a multinational consortium, became the Biltmore's owner and operator. The company's portfolio also includes the Alexander Hotel on Miami Beach and the Sheraton Sand Key on Clearwater Beach. Seaway embarked upon a \$40 million, 10-year renovation plan that concluded just recently. The City of Coral Gables still owns the golf course

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Photo by Joel Jackson.

property, but Seaway operates it under a lease/owner arrangement. The city spent around \$3 million to restore the historic championship golf course, which included a complete Brian Silva restoration in 2007, but more on that later.

All guest rooms were renovated and other improvements included a state-of-the-art fitness center and spa. The

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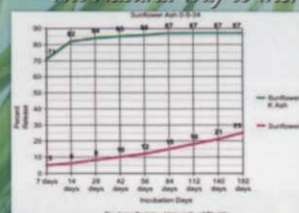
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7.3	780	130	80	184	43	5	6	4	2.9	56.1
7.3	750	194	140	181	28	5	8	3	3.1	57.0
7.1	950	310	64	212	80	11	11	2	4.3	55.2

Acid Extraction Soil Test Taken From USDA Spec Sand, 1/Eagle Green

BILTMORE GOLF CLUB



Biltmore GC Maintenance Staff. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Location: Coral Gables

of Holes: 18 holes Yardage: 6,772 yards
Par: 71 Slope & Rating: 72.1/121

Ownership: City of Coral Gables/
Biltmore Hotel Management

Playing Policy: Public/Resort/
Memberships available. Average rounds
per year: 60,000

Designed by: Donald Ross. Opened: 1925

Management Team: Managing General
Matthias Kammerer, Director of Golf
Justin Bruton, Head Golf Professional
Lara Payloff, Golf Course Superintendent
Bryan Singleton

Special and Ongoing Projects: In 2007,
golf course architect Brian Silva did a
complete renovation of the greens, tees,
bunkers and greens irrigation. He also
redesigned the "short game" and teaching
areas.

**Total property acres under
maintenance:** 145

Greens: TifDwarf. Average size: 6,000
sq.ft., total 3.1 acres; HOC: .125 to .135
inches. Overseeding: none. Green speed
goals: 9.5 to 10.5

Tees: Celebration. 3.3 height of cut: .350
in. Overseeding: Ryegrass @ 15 lbs. per
1,000 sq.ft.

Fairways: Tifway 419 with some
Bermuda off-types. Total acres: 40.
HOC: .550 in. Overseeding: None.

Roughs: Bermuda and St. Augustine.
Total acres: 40. HOC: 1.50 – 2.0 inches.
Overseeding: None

Bunkers: 66. Sand type: G-Angle.
Machine raked. Equipment: Toro Sand Pro

Naturalized/Native areas/beds: 2 acres.
Pine straw under Australian Pine Trees
left of No. 10 fairway.

Waterways/Lakes/Ponds: Acres: 10. The
Coral Gables Waterway runs through the
course.

How maintained: City of Coral Gables
and Lake Masters

Wildlife Inventory: Bald eagles, hawks
and songbirds of all varieties plus coyotes,
red-tail fox, and gopher tortoise inhabit
the uplands. Alligators, otters, turtles,
waterfowl, shore birds and wading birds
find food and shelter in the lakes.

Irrigation: Well water. Pumps: two 75-hp
pumps and a 20-hp jockey pump with

a Flowtronex control panel. Irrigation
Controller: Rainbird Nimbus II. Number
of heads: 752. Spacing: 90 ft.

Water Restrictions: None currently in
effect.

**Water Management/Conservation
practices:** Water greens, tees and fairways
as needed. Water roughs when they show
signs of stress.

Staff: Total including superintendent: 16
with 15 full time and 1 part time. Schedule:
40 hours straight time. Seasonal variation
in labor: Very little. May back off some of
the part-time hours in the winter.

Key Staff: Assistant Danilo Perez; Second
Assistant Ryan Hackert; Head Equipment
Tech Richard Ramos; Assistant
Equipment Tech David Figueroa; Pest
Control Tech Osman Escalante; Irrigation
Tech Chris Lopez.

Meetings/ Communications: Weekly
meetings with hotel general manager.
Monthly crew meeting or as needed for
special occasions.

Special Events: Host Junior Orange Bowl
Golf Tournament. Hosted the Miami
Open back in the early 1930's.

At top: Picture of the Par 4, 5th hole taken back in March when it was still cooler and much drier. Photo by Joel Jackson.

huge 700,000 gallon, 23,000 square-foot swimming pool was emptied and completely resurfaced with polished marble. In fact I saw that renovation in progress during a family outing to the hotel back in August 2012 when we visited our daughter who was on assignment in Miami.

At the 1926 gala opening on the Miami Biltmore Country Club, Dr. Frank Crane, a popular local writer and columnist of the era, predicted, "Many people will come and go, but this structure will remain a thing of lasting beauty." That prediction came true in 1996, when the National Register of Historic Places designated the Biltmore a National Historic Landmark, an elite title offered to only 3 percent of all historic structures.

The golf course came into existence in 1925 and, 14 years later, the South Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association was organized in 1939 near the end of the Jazz Era. The history of this unique property and how the golf course fits into this landscape is one of golf's great stories. Next, we venture out on the course with the superintendent Bryan Singleton.

On the Course

We know the southern half of the property was sold and became the Riviera Country Club back in 1945. Essentially, Bird Road is the dividing line between the two courses. Most all of the holes on the Biltmore course run east-west, while the holes on the Riviera course run north-south to fit the original property lines. Like the Biltmore course, the Riviera course is also a classic "parkland" layout of the 1920's with no holes running between home sites. There is a cluster of homes on Bird Road that also separates the two properties.

I mention the Riviera CC, because ironically before coming to the Biltmore, Singleton was the superintendent of the Riviera CC from 1991 to 2006. He came on board just in time for the major 2007 Ross restoration by Brian Silva. Also ironically, Singleton also worked with Silva at Riviera in the late 1990s to do the renovation to that part of the old original layout. Bryan has been tied to this historical landmark in one way or another for the past 26 years.

In light of the historic landmark status of the property prior the renovation of the golf course, Silva had some interesting comments.

"If the Biltmore were a private club, the course surely would have been changed dramatically through the years," he said. "As it happened, the course was treated as any other underfunded muni would have been treated in tough times – it was left alone. This neglect was a blessing because the property was not planted with intrusive trees, and some of the most spectacular fairway bunkering was allowed simply to grass over."

Silva added, "These fairway bunkers were a real find.

SINGLETON FUN FACTS



Bryan is high-tech. Here he is using a hands-free phone.

Vehicle: 2006 GMC Canyon Pickup Truck

I stay home to watch: The Washington Redskins

Last good movie I saw: One of my favorites is "Saving Private Ryan"

Favorite performers: Jerry Garcia, Tom Hanks

What I've been reading: I recommend a good book by Wally Lamb *The Hour I First Believed*.

Favorite meal: Crab cakes, baked potato and coleslaw

Prized possessions: Family

Personal heroes: My parents

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

Nobody knows that I: Was a good chess player.

If I could do it over: I would have bought the house I was renting on Key Largo

I'd give anything to meet: Pope Francis

My fantasy is: Sail around the Caribbean

The one thing I can't stand: Miami traffic

If I could change one thing about myself: Play better golf

My most irrational act: Doing a bungee jump

Most humbling experience: Having great greens one day and the next day I'm scrambling

The words that best describe me: Loyal

My dream foursome would be: Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Mike Collins (the Apollo 11 crew)

My best fish story: Caught my first sailfish off Miami Beach with Craig and Jason Maret.

My most memorable golf shot: While playing Westview CC in Miami, I hit a driver into a pond. Took a drop and then holed out from 135 yards for a birdie.

These cross-bunkers are a classic Ross feature with the high berms behind them they become deep menacing hazards, and since this is south Florida and relatively flat, they provide dramatic relief on the landscape. This sort of design feature doesn't usually survive. Once again because the Biltmore was a public course, they did."

Singleton told me that when they did just a greens surface/soil mix rehab in 1990-91 they found the center stakes of the original Ross greens. So all the elements were there for an authentic restoration.

Another feature of the course is the Coral Gables Waterway, a meandering canal that separates six holes on the back nine from the rest of the course.

"Back in those early days the hotel actually had Venetian gondolas with authentic Italian gondoliers poling guest from the hotel to Biscayne Bay," Singleton said. During my visit I did see a couple of kayakers plying the waterway and sharing it with a few Egyptian geese and other typical Florida birdlife. Also in 2007 all the bridges that spanned the waterway on the course were upgraded.

Singleton's turf management challenges include goose grass and some St. Augustine issues. He tested Specticle herbicide on the driving range before applying it to the rest of the course and, while it did a pretty good job on the course, he still has someone continuously spot-treating goose grass as a second

job pretty much every day. He says in Miami there's no let-up.

The St. Augustine areas are mainly in the outer roughs, so it's not a real problem affecting playing conditions. His challenge is to make sure it doesn't spread, so he keeps a sharp eye on any encroachment.

The one pest that does keep him on his toes is the hunting billbug. In all my years, I've never heard of people saying they had a real billbug problem. Singleton said he thought only the grubs caused problems, but he swears he found chewed stem evidence from adults. The good news is that Acelyprin® does a good job on them. The bad news – most superintendents have a hard time identifying them. Singleton has become the go-to billbug guy in Miami, when others are having trouble identifying some mysterious damage on their greens.

The Go-To guys in Brian's career were first and foremost his hard-working parents who taught him a good work ethic growing up. Upon moving to Florida in 1987, Lee Van Valkenberg CGCS at the Card Sound GC on Key Largo became his career mentor and southern turfgrass tutor. Singleton also credits others like Tom Burrows CGCS, John Foy and one of his club managers, Bill Wagner, for helping him along his career path.

The Biltmore Golf Club has golf members, but it also caters to resort guests and public play. So for Singleton, his maintenance goals are simple: keep the course in private-

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In this photo looking east to west and left to right, are the 6th, 7th, 17th and 18th holes Photo by Joel Jackson.

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club conditions and everybody should be happy. It is a rare combination of clientele, but then the Biltmore occupies a pretty rare place in the golf world.

Footnote

After doing my afternoon photo shoot that first day and wandering the hotel soaking up the historic architecture and furnishings, and viewing the endless photographs of all the visiting celebrities decorating the hallways and rooms, I enjoyed a quiet dinner and a few libations in the Biltmore Bar listening to the music of a piano and bass duo. I was reminded that this landmark was still a modern-day celebrity hangout when Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell walked in and also sat down at the bar.

I love my job!



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