Suess looks to defend supers championship

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The breathtakingly scenic Pelican Hill Golf Club overlooking the Pacific Ocean features two of the six Southern California golf courses that will host the 1998 GCSAA Golf Championship, a highlight of the annual gathering of golf course superintendents from around the world.

The tournament, part of the 69th International Golf Course Conference and Show, will be held Feb. 2-3. For the fourth consecutive year, The Toro Co. is a co-sponsor of the event. The field is limited to 720 entries.

Defending champion Michael Suess, superintendent at the Wood-bridge Golf Links in Kings Mountain, N.C., will head up a field of as many as 700 golfers who will be divided into several flights based on handicaps. Suess won the 1997 tournament in Las Vegas in dramatic fashion, holing a 15-foot birdie putt on the final hole at Sunrise Country Club's Hawk Course to edge out Bill Martin, superintendent at Marbella Golf & Country Club in Hemet, Calif., by a single stroke. Todd Barker, the 1995 GCSAA champion and superintendent at Fore Lakes Golf Course in Taylorsville, Utah, finished third just two strokes back of Suess. In a classic finish, Suess, Martin and Barker were tied with two holes to play. Defending chapter team winners are Carolinas "A" team in gross and California No. 7 net.

Tournament activities start with practice rounds on Friday and Saturday, Jan. 30-31, with a four-ball championship on Sunday, Feb. 1. For the first time, awards will be handed out in both two-person and four-person teams in the four-ball event. A welcoming reception will follow the four-ball in the evening and post-round 19th hole receptions will be held each night of tourney play. Official tourney play gets underway, Monday, Feb. 2, with different flights playing at different courses.

Following is a brief rundown on the courses that will host the 1998 GCSAA Golf Championship:

— Cypress Golf Club (host superintendent, Pat Gradoville/course rating 72.7, slope 140). Cypress Golf Club is a 6,510-yard par-71 high-end daily-fee layout designed by Perry Dye and featuring a natural look, severe mounding and water hazards. The sloping, undulating course was opened in 1992 on the site of an abandoned park-style golf course. Buffalo grass and other low-maintenance native grasses make up rough areas. Of more than passing interest, a certain young phenom named Tiger Woods lived near the course while in high school and played here regularly. Woods holds the course record with a 63.

— Dove Canyon Country Club (host superintendent, Eric Lover/course rating 75, slope 140). Set in a canyon near the base of Saddleback Mountain, Dove Canyon is a Jack Nicklaus signature-design golf course that's part of a 850-acre upscale development. The par-71, 6,902-yard layout sits adjacent to Cleveland National Forest and the Audubon Society Nature Sanctuary, which provides a rich natural setting full of wildlife (mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, black-tailed deer), a waterfall, canyon features and native plants and trees. Dove Canyon features some tough carry shots and the course overall puts a premium on good golf management skills — a real "keep the ball in play" challenge.

— Pelican Hill Golf Club (host superintendent, Juan Franco Silva)

The Ocean North Course (course rating 71.7, slope 129). One of two Tom Fazio-designed ultra-high-end daily-fee championship courses in the southwestern California coastline venue. Both the Ocean North and The Ocean South courses were built among a series of coastal plateaus and canyons. The Ocean North course is a par-71, 6,656-yard links layout peppered with California coastal scrub. Generous fairways. Stunning scenery.

The Ocean South Course

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GCSAA Golf Tournament team champions: 1946-97

1946 Cleveland GCSA 1972 Midwest Assoc. GCS 1985 Carolinas GCSA (Beach Bums)
1948 Cleveland GCSA 1973 Connecticut Assoc. GCS 1986 Rocky Mountain GCSA
1949 Cleveland GCSA 1974 Connecticut Assoc. GCS 1987 Carolinas GCSA
1950 Cleveland GCSA 1975 Michigan & Border GCS 1988 Carolinas GCSA (Beach Bums)
1951 Cleveland GCSA 1976 Midwest Assoc. of GCS 1989 Carolinas GCSA (A)
1952 Central Ohio GCSA 1977 Michigan & Border GCS 1990 Carolinas GCSA (Beach Bums)
1960 Michigan & Border GCS 1978 Old Dominion GCSA 1991 Carolinas GCSA (Beach Bums)
1963 Michigan & Border GCS 1980 Florida West Coast 1993 California GCSA #1
1968 Heart of America GCS 1981 Florida GCSA 1994 Georgia GCSA
1970 Southern California 1983 Carolinas GCSA (A) 1996 Florida GCSA
1971 Southern California 1984 Carolinas (Beach B) 1997 Carolinas GCSA (A)

GCSAA tourney

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The 6,634-yard, par-70 Ocean South course features tumbling fairways dotted with stands of pines and acres of California scrub. A few of the hole names suggest what you face here: “Sudden Drop,” “Sidewinder,” “Canyon,” “On the Rocks.”

— Oak Creek Golf Club (host superintendent, Ken Coffman/ course rating 71.9, slope 127). The third Tom Fazio design in this year’s tourney, Oak Creek is a 6,834-yard, par-71 course with soft, smooth sloping and subtle elevation changes set amidst towering eucalyptus trees and mountain ranges. Flatter than the Pelican Hill courses — and about 10 miles inland — Oak Creek offers generous fairways, challenging bunkers and greens complexes that put a premium on good second (or maybe third) shots.

— Tustin Ranch Golf Club (host superintendent Steve Plummer/ course rating 72.4, slope 129). Recently named the best-maintained public course in Orange County by the Orange County Register, Tustin Ranch is par-72, 6,736-yard Ted Robinson design with plentiful wildlife including bluebirds, coyotes, mallard ducks and Egyptian geese. Not a lot of nerve-shattering shots required here, but there is an island-style par-3.

Renault

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responded: “I got reaffirmation from the club members that yes they have concerns, but yes I have their blessing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. That’s nice, but at the same time, the guys are paying your salary and you’ve got to serve them first... And then when you get home it’s tough to balance between work and home.

“I wouldn’t do it [be on the GCSAA board] unless I enjoyed it. It’s fantastic. I like being there with a finger on the pulse.”