
GOLF BUSINESS PROFILE

New course owner/builder excludes architects and women

by **Mick Baker**

With the business atmosphere a little shaky in the nation right now, you'd be surprised to find a new country club that doesn't allow women or high handicappers.

But Thunder Hill Country Club in Madison, Ohio, is the latest entry into that club market and according to owner-builder-designer Fred Slagle, the exclusion of female and below-average male players will insure faster, better play.

Begin with the land

Working in landscaping at the age of 15, Slagle became interested in the earth. Today he sells it. He is a real estate broker. When the idea came over him to build Thunder Hill, he designed it himself, bought the

Mick Baker was a GOLF BUSINESS staff writer last year, but has since returned to Bowling Green State University in Ohio to continue his journalistic studies.

necessary equipment, and started construction. Since the course had a large number of lakes and watersheds on the property, Slagle decided to utilize these natural aids to the course's beauty. In all, 15 of the course's 60 acres are under water.

Allowing the water to remain on the course actually saved money, as Slagle would have had to pay to have the areas filled in. Secondly, Slagle saved on the cost of tile, using the watersheds to catch the runoff from the clay soil. In the final analysis, only 10 percent of the tile that would usually be installed at a course was needed. Some lakes were constructed on the site and the excess of topsoil from the construction was used on the tees, another saving.

Slagle claims the tees, which are larger than the norm, were constructed this way to save the turf. Prevention of wear in any particular spot is a real plus. "We also like to enhance the variety of the course, so each hole plays differently," Slagle told GOLF BUSINESS. "At Thunder Hill, a golfer can be playing a whole new course every time he comes out."

Many people were amazed at the condition of the turf when the course opened last May. Although it was only 9 months old, it already had many 2- and 3-year-old courses beat.

Fairways are an eight-way mixture of bluegrass and the greens are bentgrass. Both were double and triple seeded in October, 1975. By the middle of November they had been cut four times, and Slagle played the course himself on November 30.

Approximately 600 soil samples were taken, before and after moving land and before seeding. Each time corrections were made to bring the soil up to standard. The weather also cooperated. "Mother Nature was really good to us," said Slagle, who pointed out that since spring, a week had not gone by without a good rain.

Besides a beautiful course with 13



Thunder Hill's modern-but-rustic clubhouse includes a 400-seat dining room, a lounge/bar with a stone fireplace, and some barn lumber as much as 100 years old.

lakes, 10,000 white pines, apple trees, blackberry bushes, and many other native trees all nestled among rolling hills, there are club facilities just as attractive.

Slagle's creativity can be evidenced in the construction of the clubhouse. It is of rustic design with an interior of hand-hewn barn lumber, some of which is 100 years old. The dining room seats 400 and there is an adjacent lounge with a bar and a stone fireplace. The menu includes Cuban seafood flown in daily

from Florida. Glass doors separate the main floor from a 6,000-square-foot deck lined with artificial turf and used for outdoor dining. The lower level consists of locker rooms, showers, sauna, snack shop, pro shop, and storage facilities for 600 golf bags.

Future additions are also planned. They include 60 two-man cabins, called "acorns," situated along the lakes, and two lodges which will have 100 apartments each to accommodate guests and members who wish to live there for a season at a time. They will include an olympic-size indoor swimming pool, athletic club, and saunas. In addition, a swim and tennis club with six courts and a separate clubhouse is planned.

Not easy

In its infancy, Thunder Hill already is establishing a reputation for itself. According to head professional Steve Head, "Any other course has to be easy compared to this one." Head might have a point since the 18-hole, 7,260-yard layout has 62 traps. Golfers must cross water 14 times and water comes into play on 15 of the holes. There is little margin for error, since the fairways are no wider than needed.

In August, the course received its rating and according to Ed Preisler, head of the Ohio rating committee, "it is the most difficult course in the state." From the back tees, the rating goes at 75.7; it is 73.5 from the regular tees, and 71.3 from the front markers.

As far as excluding women from Thunder Hill, Head agrees with his boss. "I've seen clubs where the women run the show." He says there are a number of courses where the female activities severely curtail the men's chances to even get on the course.

Admittedly, Head feels things will be a lot less hectic without the ladies around. "A pro can get caught in the middle in the battle between club men and women."

Oddly enough, golf is the only thing women won't be able to do at Thunder Hill. They will be able to enjoy social memberships. Eventually, Slagle has plans to build tennis facilities that women are welcome to utilize.

As far as golf is concerned, though, no skirts on the course. □



Aerial view of Thunder Hill course shows extensive utilization of water hazards and narrow fairways.