

REGIONAL REPORT

Southeastern states show steady growth and heavy play

by Larry Smith

The golf business, over its nearly 100 years of existence in the United States, has had its share of "highs" and "lows." On the negative side, forces such as world wars and peace actions, depressions and recessions, restrictive environmental controls, competition from other expanding recreational activities, and fantastic cost increases for land, material, and labor have caused the industry to weather years of trying times and hold still or even pull back. On the other side, however, it had some positive forces such as the post-war boom years and the 1960s, the advent of professional organizations to promote all aspects of the game, the riding golf car, shorter working hours and considerably more affluence and early retirement among a larger segment of the population — forces which in the long run have enabled the industry to become a multi-billion dollar business with close to \$5 billion capital invested in facilities alone.

Of the current events, one that has been slowly emerging over the past 10 years and has to be regarded as a significant "high" is the growth of the game in the six states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina which comprise the National Golf Foundation's Southeastern Region.

NGF statistics show that over the past 10 years these six states have produced 21 percent of the nation's new courses. Surveys and studies currently being carried out show that as a whole, courses in this region play to more rounds of golf than do courses in any of the other seven regional areas of the Foundation. In addition, NGF project files show that this region is still very much on the move as far as golf growth is concerned — it now has 65 golf courses under construction, 67

more in active planning which should get to the construction stage within 2 years, and another 47 that are planned for after 1980.

In evaluating the current and future status of the golf business in NGF's Southeastern Region, the "picture as a whole" can be best shown by dividing the region into areas based upon the factors that effect their current operations and future potential, rather than upon state boundaries. These areas are as follows:

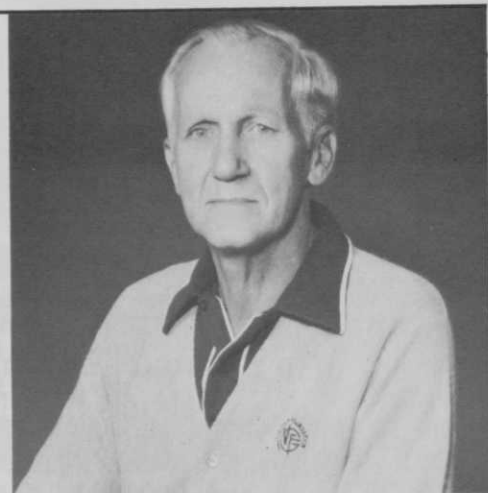
I. The state of Florida by itself

The reason for this distinction is that, in reality, Florida has to be regarded as a separate entity from every other state in the union as far as current golf is concerned.

During the past decade, Florida has produced 257 new facilities, 97 more than the runnerup state (Michigan) and led the nation 4 out of the last 5 years in the production of new courses. Many of its courses that experience capacity play for 5 to 7 months of the year will play in the neighborhood of 85,000 to 100,000 rounds a year.

It is a fact that golf course projects in conjunction with real estate developments are still the main area of course growth in Florida. At the present time over 70 percent of the courses under construction or in planning are part of such projects. It is particularly gratifying to note that problems which plagued earlier golf and home developments have been very well resolved with developers spelling out to prospective buyers what it will cost them as members down the road and what the eventual disposition of the course will be. Also noticeable is the fact that most of the golf course/real estate developments which got bogged down 4 years ago when the recession hit have now resumed construction or will shortly do so — either on their own or as a result of merging with or being taken over by other developer interests.

Municipal interests are also very



much in the picture, with 11 such projects under construction or in planning. This field has been held back by the policy of the former governor, who would not approve any of the Heritage Conservation & Recreation Services (formerly BOR) funds for municipal golf projects. With a new governor now in office, this policy might be changed.

In the private course category, it is interesting to note that whereas the nation's rate of increase during the past 10 years was at the rate of about 16 percent, Florida's private courses went up by 37 percent. While most of these courses stemmed from golf course/real estate developments that opened up as daily fee operations and then converted to private status when they had enough home owner members to support them, a growing number are starting out as private clubs — an example being Broken Sound Golf Club in Boca Raton, which sold 250 memberships at \$10,000 each before it opened for play this past October.

Summing up the Florida golf business picture, it is rather utopian. This state is blessed with an abundance of sunshine, a year-round excellent golfing season, and a population growth of over 1 million every 5 years. Most important of all, it is a growing retirement area of affluent people and a state that attracts over 35,000,000 visitors and/or winter residents each year. It has the country's greatest tourist attraction in Disney World, and that is only in the first stage of building its facilities. Florida presently has 35 courses under construction and 56 in planning, a fact which will continue to promote the playing of more golf within the state.

II. The coastal plains

This area, composed of over 800 statute miles of Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico water frontage, also is placed in a separate category as it has an entirely different set of demographics — including a generally higher economy than most of the

Larry Smith is Southeast Region director for the National Golf Foundation, a post he has held for the past 5 years. For 5 years prior to that, he worked at NGF headquarters.

region. Primarily, these coastal areas are lands of large industries such as the off-shore oil wells, deep water harbors, many large resort and convention facilities, and winter homes of many of the wealthiest families in the nation. A very significant difference is the ready acceptance of minority races as opposed to other areas in the "Deep South."

Golf-wise it is very important to the industry. While it contains many of the country's finest multiple-course resorts along the Atlantic Coast, the bulk of the Gulf Coast's trade is at the 9-hole courses that cater to yearly memberships. These are generally full and are supported by members who use them for social functions as well as golf. Good examples are those in the area of the oil wells. These sites are mostly offshore and workers put in one week on the job and one week

close to the ultimate golf resort as one may find. It has a complete recreation complex and is the home of the PGA Doral Open.

Due to the good economy and the growth of these coastal areas, golf cannot help but grow with them.

III. Major metropolitan areas

These are identified as cities of 50,000 or more population and are again separated from other areas of the deep south as they contain more golf interests and have more potential for the industry. The golf picture in these areas until recent years was generally not too good. For many years there was an exodus of minority groups and other lowly paid workers from these areas to the North — the obvious reasons being low wages, discrimination, and lack of any assurance of a better future. In recent years, how-

daily fee courses are now actively seeking their trade. There is great potential in these metro areas.

Comments made so far are not meant to indicate that there are no problems connected with golf in the cities of the deep south, as such is not the case. A recent survey of the metropolitan Atlanta area showed that although this city could normally be expected to support 18 full-sized courses, it only has seven. And these, with only two exceptions — in spite of having ample maintenance personnel, supplies, and equipment — are very poorly maintained. There is a great opportunity in cities such as Atlanta with a 55 percent black population that includes a great number of people who until recently never had the opportunity to get on a course. This same situation applies to several other southern cities.



Florida boasts "the country's greatest tourist attraction," Disney World, which in itself has several great golf courses. Visible behind the ninth hole on the Magnolia course are the Contemporary and Polynesian Resort hotels.



Doral Country Club in Miami "is as close to the ultimate golf resort as one may find." It includes four beautiful 18-hole courses (including the famed "Blue Monster") and a 9-hole par-3 layout surrounding a luxurious, though somewhat deteriorated, hotel.

off. They use the off week for golf and relaxation, including liberal use of bar facilities.

One of the major negative aspects at the club level at these coastal area courses is the almost universal failure of owners and operators to promote junior golf. It may be that affluent winter visitors or the roustabout type of well-paid oil, ship, fishing, and industrial workers just do not want kids on the course, but in any event the hands of club professionals and other would be teachers seem to be tied.

In summing up the coastal plains, this is a highly productive area for golf. Cash money seems to be more free flowing, and the population is steadily increasing. While inland resorts are on the increase, the bulk of those in the southeast region are still close to the coast or right on the water. One of the world's great golf resorts, Doral Country Club has 90 holes of golf and is located in Miami; it is as

ever, this has changed. Migration is actually being reversed in some urban areas, and these are now able to support all classes in a more equitable manner.

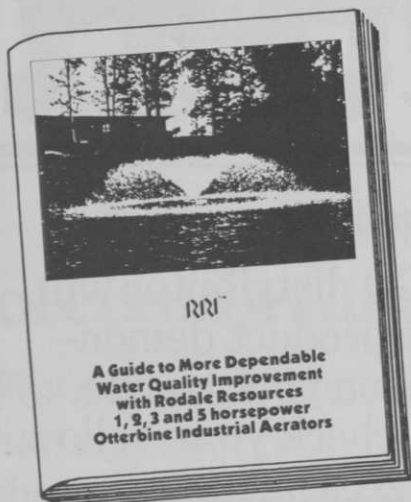
The black population, which heretofore generally worked for low wages and had little exposure or encouragement to the game of golf, is now commanding more livable wages and is taking to golf. Major cities are very much concerned that they get equal opportunities, and because of the availability of federal funds in most southeastern states for courses, municipal courses are very much in the planning to provide places for these golfers to play. In discussions with urban area planners, it is obvious that the former narrow views of the lawmakers and businessmen have changed. Where before a few muni courses were the only ones open to minority groups — and even there they were discouraged — many of the

A very bright spot is golf in the suburbs of these metropolitan areas. As in all large towns, large developments to include courses are springing up, and one can be sure that many of the area's future courses will be built on the outskirts of the towns.

Also of note are the municipal courses and the planning that is going on for more in the metro areas of the southeast states. Major cities such as Shreveport, La., and state offices in South Carolina have appointed full-time directors of golf to oversee and plan for future needs. New Orleans just recently opened a driving range that cost \$500,000 to construct. This, in conjunction with the 81 holes of golf at the city park where it is located, makes for one of the nation's largest golf facilities.

IV. Rural areas of the deep south

This is what is left of the six southeastern states after deleting Florida,



FREE

Pond and lake water quality improvement guidebook by Rodale Resources.

Rodale Resources tells you how to help improve pond and lake water quality naturally. Without chemicals. In a new guidebook that helps you select and properly apply our Otterbine® water quality improvement systems. The naturally beautiful way to treat water.

Possible benefits: More effective algae and odor control; Cleaner irrigation water for better turf and less clogging of irrigation equipment; Sparkling "spray sculpture" displays that enhance the natural beauty of ponds and lakes; Better conformance with "clean water" laws.

Use the coupon to send for the booklet. Or call our pond and lake water quality control technician TOLL-FREE at (800) 523-9484 for advice in helping to develop your water cleanup plan. From Pennsylvania, call (215) 965-6990 COLLECT.

Rodale Resources Inc.
WORKING WITH NATURE



TM—Trademark of Rodale Resources Inc.

MAIL TO: Rodale Resources Inc.,
576 North St., Emmaus, PA 18049.

YES, I'm really interested in cleaning up my pond and lake water this season. Please send me your FREE water quality improvement manual.

Name

Organization

Street Address or RFD

City

State Zip

Signature

Phone

I'd like to talk things over. Please have a water quality technician call me.

the coastal plains, and the major metropolitan cities. It is what can be termed the "Old South" and in general is an agricultural area growing the southern crops of cotton, rice, sugar cane, tobacco, etc. Its population is largely black with lower incomes. Here golf is just not yet to be considered for the minority, and most of the courses are private.

One of the better observations for the golfing industry in this area is the fact that federal funds are available and are being used to put golf courses into state parks. Excellent courses are available and well patronized by all classes. Good examples are Stone Mountain Golf Course outside of Atlanta and Oak Mountain State Park Golf Course in the Birmingham, Ala., area.

There are signs that there will be more courses planned for these rural areas, as in many cases they are main arteries to the South for tourists and winter residents. Most of the six states have plans for public courses to capture some of this lucrative trade. Presently, these rural areas have 25 courses under construction and 44 in planning.

Course maintenance in the Southeast
As an overall observation on this evaluation of the golf industry in the southeastern states, there are major problems that confront golf course superintendents.

In querying Dan L. Hall, superintendent at Imperial Golf Club in Naples, Fla., Lee Todd of Dunedin Country Club, and others, it appears that their greatest concerns are as follows:

Nonavailability of competent labor due to competition with industry and construction. Owners and operators of golf courses, those who pay the bills, must accept the fact that the minimum wage or borderline wages are not adequate. It is much better and will pay dividends in the long run to have six to eight well-paid employees who will turn out better work than 12 to 15 "warm bodies" at a lower wage scale. Superintendents in charge can then demand better performance, and get it, rather than having to deal with slackards and help who may walk off the job if pushed even a little.

Increased research of Southern grasses. Due to environmental restrictions on effective pesticides, pests are becoming more and more a problem in the production of fine turfgrass required for southeastern courses. For example, earthworms are

creating green problems because of the inability of available pesticides to last long enough to prevent future generations from multiplying.

The mole cricket problem, extensive throughout the coastal areas, has almost reached the severity that existed until DDT and Chlordane became available after World War II. These pests are especially hard on the finer courses because of the luscious feeding available. To quote an agriculture service employee, "Until the mole cricket becomes such a pest as to extensively damage agricultural crops other than turfgrass, we can expect nothing to be done."

More research is needed on cold-hardy bermudagrasses as well as heat-resistant bent and bluegrasses. Dr. Glen Burton at the Tifton Georgia Coastal Plains Station is one who has already undertaken studies on cold-hardy grasses.

While this is not meant to be critical of turf equipment manufacturers, it appears that much of the equipment made today does not stand up to the requirements placed upon it for the 12-month season here in the Southeast. Turf maintenance problems here are different from much of the nation, and superintendents do not have the off-season common to the majority of the nation's courses when they can tear down their equipment and put it in shape for the next season. An example is the switch made in a number of cases to the sealed bearing rather than staying with the old standard fittings that enabled the maintenance man to always be sure that parts were lubricated.

Another seemingly well-founded complaint of the superintendents is the time factor in securing replacement parts from southeastern suppliers. Almost without exception, manufacturers of turf maintenance equipment are located in areas distant from the South. During the peak growing season, when it is also the playing season for the rest of the nation, parts supplies are limited. When not on hand to the supplier, they take an excessive amount of time to get from the manufacturer to the local supplier. While these problems that involve the availability of parts in local outlets are starting to be resolved, why does it take so long?

In the final analysis, golf business in the Southeast is certainly as good as — and probably better than — any other area in the nation. And most important of all, indications are that it will continue to be on the rise.