Dodgertown Golf Club, the first public course in Florida's Indian River County, opened in 1965.

THE DODGERS' OTHER MANAGER

If there are calamondins in center field, we must be in Dodgertown.

by Will Perry, managing editor

With a sharp crack of the wood, a baseball is sent tearing through soft Bermudagrass in search of safety in center field. Instead, it will be swallowed in the webbing of Los Angeles Dodgers' shortstop Alfredo Griffin's glove. Moving quickly to his left, Griffin backhands the ball as it hops off the red clay infield and releases a waist-high strike to the first baseman, nicking a few points off the pre-season batting average of a disappointed Oriole.

Twelve thousand sun-tanned hands clap their appreciation of Griffin's defense while Dodger manager Tommy Lasorda looks on without registering emotion. Six rows behind him, Carol Thomas does the same. Neither has reason to get their dander stirred, for everything had gone according to plan.

"When I'm at these games I'm especially attuned to hits like that. I watch closely to make sure it takes a good, natural bounce—no surprises," says Thomas.

For the past three seasons Thomas has been sports complex superinten-

Carol Thomas and Ron Cummins use their combined knowledge of turf and infields to keep the fields at Dodgertown looking good.
The Los Angeles Dodgers play 14 games in Dodgertown in March. Then, the Vero Beach Dodgers begin their 140-game Class A schedule.

Superintendent Thomas encourages wildlife at the Dodgertown courses—a practice appreciated by this fox squirrel, which is dining near a practice green.

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A brief history of Dodgertown

Dodgertown’s 450 acres were formerly an abandoned naval air station. Forty-one years since it was purchased by the Dodger organization, it has grown into one of the country’s superb sports facilities.

1839. Abner Doubleday lays out the first diamond-shaped field with four bases, 60 feet apart, at Cooperstown, N.Y.

1845. Alexander J. Cartwright designs the game of baseball and establishes standard rules. He also organized the first team, the New York Knickerbockers.

1869. The Cincinnati Red Stockings, the first all-professional team, is established. Players earn from $600 to $1,000 a season.

1871. On May 4, Ft. Wayne defeats Forest City of Cleveland 2-0, winning the first all-professional game ever played.

1876. The National League is formed.

1900. The American League is formed but rejected by the National League. Disputes about players defecting to the new league lead to its eventual acceptance.

Around 1900. An eight-team league is formed in the National League. Its members include the Boston Braves, Brooklyn Dodgers, Chicago Cubs, Cincinnati Reds, New York Giants, Philadelphia Phillies, Pittsburgh Pirates and the St. Louis Cardinals.

1948. Eastern Airlines flight and station manager Bud Holman sells the Brooklyn Dodgers on the idea of training in Vero Beach, a sleepy, coastal Florida town of 3,000 residents.

1953. Holman Stadium opens.

1965. Walter O’Malley, president of the Dodgers, purchases 110 acres of land from the city of Vero Beach and opens Indian River County’s first public golf course, Dodgertown Golf Club.

1972. O'Malley purchases another 220 acres, which become Dodger Pines Country Club. Its No. 3 hole, at 660 yards, is one of the few par 6s in the country.

1972-1976. Dodgertown undergoes major renovation. Old barracks are torn down and replaced with modern housing units. An administration building containing dining room, kitchen, canteen, lounge, movie theatre, locker and equipment rooms, medical department, dark room and recording studio is built. An Olympic-size swimming pool, four lighted tennis courts, a basketball court and shuffleboard courts complete the scene.

1977. Harrison Conference Services of Glen Cove, N.Y., is brought in to conduct business meetings and seminars at Dodgertown throughout the year.

Today. Football, too, has a place here. Dodgertown was the New Orleans Saints training camp from 1974 to 1984 and has hosted the Green Bay Packers, New England Patriots, Cleveland Browns, Buffalo Bills, Miami Dolphins and Tampa Bay Buccaneers in recent years.


—Will Perry

much over the course of their lives. The biggest part of my job and the reason I’m successful at it is not because I know everything but I know how to find things. With these people around, I have great sources of information on almost any subject.”

Referred to by one employee as a perfectionist, Thomas is not at all intimidated by the challenges of managing Dodgertown or by being a woman in a traditionally male sport and field. It’s a scenario she’s used to, she says, thanks to her father, who demanded the most of her at all times. There weren’t too many other women studying microbiology at Orlando’s University of Central Florida either, or earning graduate degrees in microbiology at North Carolina State in the mid 1970s. Being a minority has made her work even harder.

Up with the sun

Thomas begins her 12- to 14-hour day by coordinating all the notes she has scribbled to herself at work the previous day. This list of instructions and suggestions will move down the hierarchy of employees via several chalkboards in equipment and maintenance facilities throughout the complex. It’s indicative of Thomas’s philosophy of preventative instead of curative management.

The well-groomed nature of Dodgertown reflects Thomas’s foresight. “Before she got here this place was a real mess,” says an employee in his sixth season here. “You wouldn’t have believed professional sports teams played here. Carol has really got it together.”

Her days are pretty evenly divided between the baseball complex and the golf courses, until the Dodgers arrive in late February. At that time it’s important that the field conditions be fit what one would expect for the world champions.

“You’re talking about me providing a safe place for the $7.9 million man (pitcher Orel Hershiser). If this guy brings to my attention something that he thinks is a problem that potentially could shorten his career, then it’s worth looking into,” says Thomas. “I can’t afford to have even a paltry $2.5 million player have a problem on my fields.”

Thomas’s expertise in turf is complemented by Ron Cummins’ knowledge of clay infiel dfields to provide the quality playing conditions at Dodgertown’s ball fields. Thomas says there are no management practices used here that would differ much from any other facility. Still, because Holman Stadium is so old, there is no underground drainage system, no home
plate-to-center field grade and an irrigation system consisting of "a few Toros, some Rain Bird and other stuff."

"This is a very, very old system here, much like what I have on the golf courses. A lot of it has been piecemealed together," says Thomas. "We've tried to make some alterations but not nearly what we need." A new sprinkler system is on tap for the stadium, though it may get bumped if field expansion plans are implemented next year.

Thomas began covering the mound and home plate area every night, thereby preventing the rain from washing the clay into the turf and eventually choking it off. Stripping and renovating those areas was "a major undertaking" according to Thomas, and it has since been added to her to-be-avoided list. Around the infield, clay is swept or hosed back into the base paths as necessary.

The mound is built with a dense clay packed very hard to absorb the pressure exerted on it by pitchers. "It's a lengthy process of packing, packing and more packing. You want to avoid a layering effect, which will allow it to peel off in pieces over the course of a game. That happens when you use more than one substance to build it," says Thomas.

The mound height is maintained at 14 inches. The Bermudagrass infield is cut at 1/2 of an inch, the outfield at 3/8 inch.

Unless they interfere with play or grow so low that they get in the way of mowing equipment, trees on the course are left alone. As a result, problems with the trees are non-existent.

For the first time this year at a slight increase in cost, the post-game cleanup work has been contracted to an outside firm. The expense is well worth the reduced aggravation involved, according to Thomas.

From bats to clubs
Dodgertown Golf Club is a nine-hole, par 35, semi-private course just up the street from Dodger Pines Country Club, an 18-hole, semi-private, par 73 course that neighbors the baseball complex. Like many places in Vero Beach, the golf courses too are dripping with Dodger folklore.

According to Thomas, former Dodgers' president Walter O'Malley and his players were often seen teeing off at nearby clubs when the team was in town.

"Everything was going well until the Dodgers started to bring in the first black players. In the old South like this, especially at the country clubs, black people were not allowed to play golf. So Walter said, 'I'm going to fix you guys,' and he built the nine-hole course." It became so popular, Dodger Pines was opened seven years later, in 1972.

Both courses enjoy an abundance of Floridian vegetation, challenging water hazards and smooth Bermudagrass fairways. Thomas uses a combination of Tifway 419 Bermudagrass and bahiagrass in the roughs and Tifway 328 on the greens. In the winter the greens are overseeded with ryegrass.

From the Dodger Pines clubhouse you can watch golfers at work on seven different holes. The first, third, fourth, sixth, seventh, ninth and tenth
holes have either a green or tee that abuts the facility.
The courses absorb 250 to 300 rounds a day. That means compaction and cup placement problems, which are compounded by the fact that the tees and greens are on the small side.
To reduce compaction, a lot more hand aerifying at the end of cart paths and on tees is taking place. The goosegrass that inevitably grows in these areas is handled with MSMA.
On greens the cups are moved every other day and a color-coded flag system is used to alert players if the cup is at the front, middle or rear of a green.
Thomas prefers granular fertilizer applications, supplemented with liquids for quick green-up, at both golf courses and at the baseball fields.
Slow-release fertilizers are also used here. In the spring and summer it's sulfur-coated and some methylene-urea products. "In late fall we use IBU because I feel that with the temperatures here I still get some nitrogen release without having to worry about microbial activity," she says. Weak areas, such as cart paths, tee slopes and other sites that endure heavy traffic, will be fertilized even more often. Tees and greens are fertilized on a monthly basis ranging from 1/4 to 1 lb./N/sq.ft.
"I like using fertilizer rates that are high in potassium because potassium provides so much hardiness and drought tolerance. We have plenty of natural phosphorus in this part of Florida," adds Thomas.
The biggest problem
Mole crickets "are by far and away the worst problem here," says Thomas, adding that infestations are worse every year. The scope of the problem limits the preventive measures she can take that will be effective. Oftanol is her primary weapon. An application is made in spring as soon as juveniles emerge from the eggs, usually in early May. After that, spot treatment with Orthene is used on an "as needed" basis.
Another significant problem that many superintendents face, says Thomas, is the franchising network that often makes it difficult to receive the prompt equipment service often necessary in this business. "Equipment-wise there are a lot of really well made things out there. But you can't buy just a piece of equipment any more. I'm actually looking at my second or third choices in equipment because I have to be able to get the service I need from the franchisor."
The pines
The many trees that line the courses are primarily laurel oak, Florida slash pine and sable palms. Unless they interfere with play or grow so low that they get in the way of mowing equipment, they're left alone. As a result, insect and disease problems in trees are almost non-existent. Lightning remains their cardinal nemesis.
Another delightful aspect of the courses is the abundance of wildlife.

Carol Thomas is not at all intimidated by the challenges of managing Dodgertown or by being a woman in traditionally male sport and field.
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Several fox squirrels appeared mysteriously recently. They are joined by otters, soft-shelled turtles, numerous varieties of birds, a family of three alligators and a 5½-foot-long land-locked tarporn that has been on the course for eight years.

"I have a real hands-off policy about killing anything," says Thomas in a tone that leaves little room for interpretation. "I'm real particular about it."

On this morning, she brought to work with her the scraps of an apple pie she prepared the night before—a treat for the squirrels.

"I leave a lot of natural vegetation in my waterways. I won't bottom-clear," adds Thomas. "At my mem-

Because Holman Stadium is so old, there is no underground drainage system, no home plate-to-center field grade and an irrigation system consisting of a few Toros, some Rain Bird and other stuff."