

Nature's Showplace— Banyan Golf Club

By TIM HIERS

Imagine being aroused from a deep sleep and finding yourself in the middle of a dense, lush, tropical forest. Abundant trees and vegetation spring out around you. The limbs and leaves rustle as if to exclaim your presence to the native inhabitants. You begin to walk. As your eyes focus you realize that there is an absence of any other humans. A variety of wildlife; exotic birds, alligators, rabbits, raccoons and squirrels peer at you with relentless curiosity. Finally you realize that you are holding an object in your hand. Maybe it is a weapon for defense. Now you are fully awake because your ill-fated golf shot has disappeared into the ominous woods. You had plotted your strategy on the tee, but unfortunately your strategy and execution didn't see eye to eye and as a result of that less than perfect golf shot suddenly you are brought close to nature.

Normally this would upset the average golfer but you are playing Banyan, a Joe Lee designed golf course. It's a work of art, located west of the turnpike near West Palm Beach, Banyan is a unique and fascinating private golf club. The only things surrounding this golf course are trees, water and myriad number of lost golf balls. This, according to world famous golf course architect Joe Lee, is one of the unique qualities of Banyan. But there are others. Banyan began construction in 1970 and opened for play in 1972. The course was created from 200 acres of uninhabited property, 120 of these acres were comprised of dense natural Florida vegetation. The other 80 acres were owned and operated by a shell pit mining company. Through coordinated efforts the mining lakes were designed to fit the needs of the golf course, beautiful cypress trees were preserved and finally the 80 acres were obtained by the club. The new purchase was deficient in tree numbers as compared to the original 120 acres but Banyan had the solution. Clearing for construction of I-95 was in process at this time and Banyan was quick to recognize the opportunity. A variety of trees including Ficus, Mahogany, Sabal Palms and fruit trees were planted in numbers exceeding 2,000. Most of these were obtained from the I-95 right of way.

The golf course veneration of architects would be described as a "String of Pearls" design. Very few holes are parallel or even close to each other. As Joe Lee explains it, "each hole is its own entity and has its own character." Because of the lush vegetation and "The String of Pearls" you see other golfers infrequently, even if there is considerable play on the course. Ask Joe Lee and he will proudly tell you that Banyan is among his favorite masterpieces. He will also tell you that



Gerry Marlatt (Manager), Bill Simmons (Golf Pro) and Dan Jones (Superintendent) meet daily to discuss golf operations.

playing the golf course is like a stroll in the country, the peaceful kind of native Florida terrain that years ago people could easily find. This terrain is a rarity today. Another rarity is the design of the driving range tees. The main section is divided into three separate tee surfaces and screened by dense trees. This in effect produces three very secluded and private practice tees. On the other end of the driving range is another open tee.

The topography at Banyan is also unusual in light of the elevated tees, especially one par three with an elevation of 36 feet. The design of the golf course was beautifully blended with the indigenous plants and terrain. The total property itself was divided into three main drainage areas, each with its own pump to maintain the desired water levels. The pumps have a float device to shut them on and off automatically according to the water level. they also have P.T.O. capabilities in case of power failure.

From a pro's standpoint head golf professional Bill Simmons can't say enough good things about Banyan. Using superlatives such as great, unique, beautiful, favorite, etc. you get the feeling Bill is a campaign manager and the course is running for president. His favorite attraction at Banyan is its beautiful and strategically placed sand traps. "they really bring out the beauty of the golf course," he echoes much of what Joe Lee had said about each hole having its own character. Bill has been employed at Banyan for ten years and has seen everything from monsoons to one member who has made five aces in six years (playing only six months per year). He will also explain the good working relationship with Golf Course Superin-

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tendent Dan Jones and Club Manager Gerry Marlatt. At least one day every week during the season they meet early in the morning for coffee and communication. Bill is a dedicated and loyal professional who loves his club and is proud to show it.

The men's course record at Banyan is 69 from the blue tees. The course has a rating of 72.7 and 73.0 from the whites. The average green size at Banyan is six thousand square feet. They consist of TifDwarf Bermudagrass. Due to contamination in the original greens all 18 greens were replanted the last two years. Tees, fairways and rough are comprised of TifWay 419 Bermudagrass. One hundred of Banyan's total 200 acres are maintained as fine turf and another 34 acres are deep sparkling lakes.

The soil profile consists mainly of sugar sand and huge deposits of clay. With all its intrinsic beauty Banyan does have a few problems. The lush tropical overgrowth that provides so much landscape also excludes much needed sunlight. To combat this problem Golf Course Superintendent Dan Jones has a program of trimming where necessary and even replacing plant species if trimming is not effective. Poor drainage and excessive rain don't exactly compliment each other so drainage is an ongoing project. Rain is one thing that Dan cannot control. To date Banyan has spent over \$20,000 on drainage and plans to do much more. The results have been of significant benefit to the club. In addition to improving turf quality of poorly drained areas there has been a reduction in the number of days the course was closed due to wet conditions.

Dan Jones has been employed at Banyan since March 25, 1980. Prior to that he was Golf Course Superintendent at Turnberry Isle Country Club, Miami, Florida for five years. At Turnberry he introduced the use of the White Amur for weed control in lakes. He spent another five years at The Dorado Beach Hotel in Puerto Rico before going to Turnberry. In 1965 Dan was a hotel engineer at Estate Good Hope Hotel and Fountain Valley Golf Course on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. The golf club on St. Croix had gone through three Golf Course Superintendents and as a result of this ask Dan if he would be interested in assuming the responsibility. Dan's first thought was "I don't even know a golf ball from a cue ball." Through encouragement from consultant Dr. Max Brown like, "Desire is the greatest factor," Dan accepted his first Golf Course Superintendent's position. And now most of you probably know the rest of the story, Dan has become one of the most popular, innovative and successful Superintendents in America. He is respected by his peers and employers alike. Through his efforts with others The Florida Green has become the standout magazine in its class across the nation. The condition of his golf course? Superb!

Mr. David Fermon, is Club President. He is a man who appreciates the condition of his golf



Greens Chairman Bobby Jacobsen and Dan Jones inspect the Golf Course.

course and the capabilities of his staff. Mr. Fermon informed me that Banyan members are proud of their beautiful club. During our conversation he closely paralleled much of what Joe Lee had said about the course's character. In closing Mr. Fermon's thoughts and objectives were very clear. He emphasized that Banyan was a golf course you could enjoy playing every day and Mr. Fermon is dedicated to preserving its top condition.

And so . . . another day comes to a close at Banyan. As daylight gives way to darkness "Banyan Golf Club" becomes "Banyan Nature's Playground." Owls, rabbits and raccoons act out their daily lives in harmony with man and nature. The wind and the crickets join together to serenade sleepy squirrels to bed. And, if you should be aroused from a deep sleep with a club in your hand, Well . . . be nice to the animals.

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE

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mon to see a comely ms. in a T-shirt, riding down the fairway or weeding a flower bed.

George W. Cleaver, the new President of the Golf Course Superintendent's Association and himself superintendent at Chestnut Ridge Country Club, Lutherville, Maryland - a suburb of Baltimore - for more than eighteen years, said recently ". . . being a golf course superintendent is a tricky, tough business. It is not something that can be standardized as is a certified public accountant or a certified life underwriter. There are just too many variables, and many of the major factors, such as weather, budgets, golfers' desires are out of the individual superintendent's hands. Golf courses are like living things and no two courses are alike."

Besides keeping the grass green and mowed, superintendents must conform to many new stipulations and regulations that have evolved from recent environmental studies. While custodial images are hard to eradicate, the sophistication of the golf course superintendent's role is gradually bringing him not only the position, but the recognition he deserves. Perhaps that bumper sticker that reads "Have you hugged your dog lately" should have as its corollary, "Have you hugged your superintendent lately"?

EDITOR'S NOTE:

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