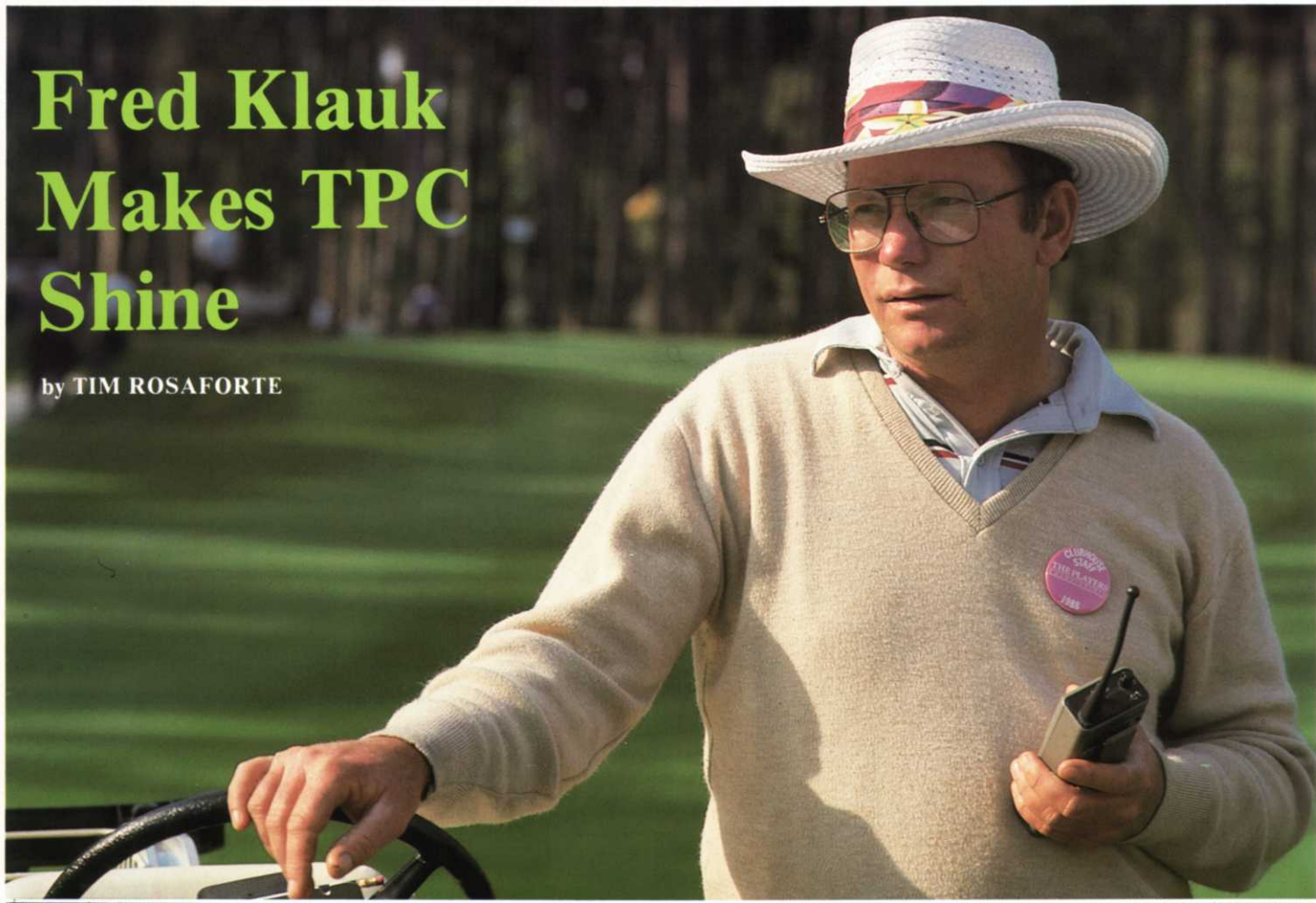


Fred Klauk Makes TPC Shine

by TIM ROSAFORTE



Fred is in constant touch with his key personnel

WHEN Fred Klauk was hand-picked by Deane Beman, the bent-grass putting surfaces on the Players Club greens had become a joke.

“You can’t read dirt,” was Lee Trevino’s description in 1985.

Dirt. Worse than at some of the public courses in Jacksonville, about as bad as you can get.

“They were mostly dead,” Klauk remembers.

Beman would have none of this. This was his landmark course. It was an agronomic atrocity. So the PGA Tour Commissioner called on the superintendent he kept his eye on since working wonders with the TPC-Eagle Trace in Coral Springs, a man who knew Florida grasses, climate, and its terrain.

Fred Klauk grew up in North Palm Beach and came back in 1985 to finish runnerup in the Palm Beach County Amateur Championship. So he is more than just a turf management man. Klauk

is a player, and he thinks that’s the most important credential in his rise through the ranks of America’s golf course superintendents. Beman now calls him the best in the business, and while that’s subjective opinion, it certainly comes from a qualified source.

Beman was sold on Klauk after his work on the TPC-Eagle Trace course drew rave reviews from the Tour pros during the 1984-85 Honda Classic tournaments. But it was also Klauk’s background that first got him hired with the Tour.

Klauk’s first job after graduating from the University of Florida with an ornamental horticulture degree was the grassing and maintenance of the John’s Island course in Vero Beach. Now 38, he worked with Pete Dye on that project, and then moved on to Pine Tree, where he interviewed with Sam Snead before he was hired to the exclusive club in Delray Beach. So besides having the experience of working under Dye (MD) who de-

signed both the Players Club and Valley courses on the Sawgrass property (MD) Klauk could handle the pressure of working for a demanding course like Pine Tree.

Those factors got him hired for the job as TPC-Eagle Trace course superintendent in 1983, and they would ultimately lead Klauk to the Players Club-Sawgrass; first as a consultant and presently as the man in charge.

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Fred oversees final grooming as the tournament gets underway.

"I'M NO MIRACLE MAN," KLAUK SAID. "I JUST HAVE A GOOD STAFF. PLUS, I THINK IT HELPS THAT I'M A PLAYER, AND I KNOW WHAT THESE GUYS (TOUR PLAYERS) WANT."

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Beman has the final say, but much of it is entrusted in Klauk, who has a staff of 38 working for him. "I've got Deane's ear when it comes to agronomy." Klauk said at the recent Players Championship, won in a tournament record by Mark McCumber. It is no coincidence that the scores in the Tournament Players Championship have been lower since Klauk has given the players something to putt on.

"The golf course is finally playing the way it was intended to be played when Pete Dye designed it," Beman said. "It's in absolutely perfect condition now."

Klauk didn't have any time to sit back and enjoy the compliments during this year's Players Championship. A Saturday deluge flooded the golf course and postponed most of the third round, but Klauk's crew had it back in perfect playing condition by Sunday. Just your typical four-alarm fire in the life of a golf

course superintendent.

"I'm no miracle man," Klauk said. "I just have a good staff. Plus, I think it helps that I'm a player, and I know what these guys, (Tour players) want."

Klauk got into this end of the business almost by default. When he went to the University of Florida, it was just about impossible to make the golf team. This was the NCAA championship era when the players included Andy North and Woody Blackburn.

Klauk was good (MD) but not that good. He loved golf, saw the demand for new courses and qualified superintendents, and went a different route. Rather than playing the game for a living, he decided to learn about providing playing surfaces for the toughest critics in the world.

It's a move Klauk doesn't regret at all, although he's playing less now than ever. Beman has him doing consulting work on other TPC courses, all the greens at the Players Club are being replanted this summer with Bermuda grass, and there's the matter of getting the Valley course ready for the 1988 Senior Tournament Players Championship.

The Valley course is really Klauk's baby, he's been on-site since the ground breaking in 1986. Knowing that the new Sawgrass Marriott was expected to multiply resort business play on the two TPC courses, Klauk sold Beman on the more durable Bermuda grass. With all that traffic, Bermuda was a necessity, and Beman liked it enough to go in that direction on the Players Club, closing down June 15 to rebuild the greens.

The Valley course wraps around behind the Players Club, and has shot up in no time. The first sprigs of Bermuda were planted last summer, but under the direction of assistant Bob Clarkson, Klauk is pleased with its progress and knows it will be tournament ready by June 9.

The Valley is certainly in a lot better shape than Fred Klauk's golf game. Last year, he won the club championship at Oak Bridge, a residential course across the street from the Players Club. With Klauk averaging 12 hours a day on the job, it's doubtful his golf game is up to the same standards as his golf greens.

Deane Beman wouldn't have it any other way. ■

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