

Robert Trent Jones Jr. moved two million cubic yards of dirt at Weston Hills CC in western Broward County to produce a very playable golf course in his first Florida effort.

Jones gets it

BY KIT BRADSHAW

Robert Drake is just about the happiest man you're going to find.

His "office" is Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s first golf course in Florida: Weston Hills Country Club west of Fort Lauderdale.

During his career, he has had the opportunity to grow in three

different Florida courses.

And he is working to get a junior program at Weston Hills using three outlying holes so kids like his sons, Matthew and Thomas, have a place to learn the game.

Things couldn't be better for this Indiana-born golf course superintendent.

He's particularly happy about his involvement with Jones during the



right the first time

construction of Weston Hills. It gave him the chance to make suggestions on the final shaping, and some of the characteristics of the course reflect his input to the architect.

"I'd ask Bobby to gentle a grade so I could mow it easier, and if he could, he would do it," Drake says. "If it interfered with the shot values, then he would keep it the way it was. The important thing from my standpoint is that Bobby took the time to listen.

"Gary Linn (Jones' senior designer) says Bobby spent more time at this course than any he's done in the last three to five years," Drake says. "His dad practically lives in his back yard down here, and Bobby wanted to do this course particularly well. I was lucky to be involved so early in the construction process and have a chance to work with Bobby."

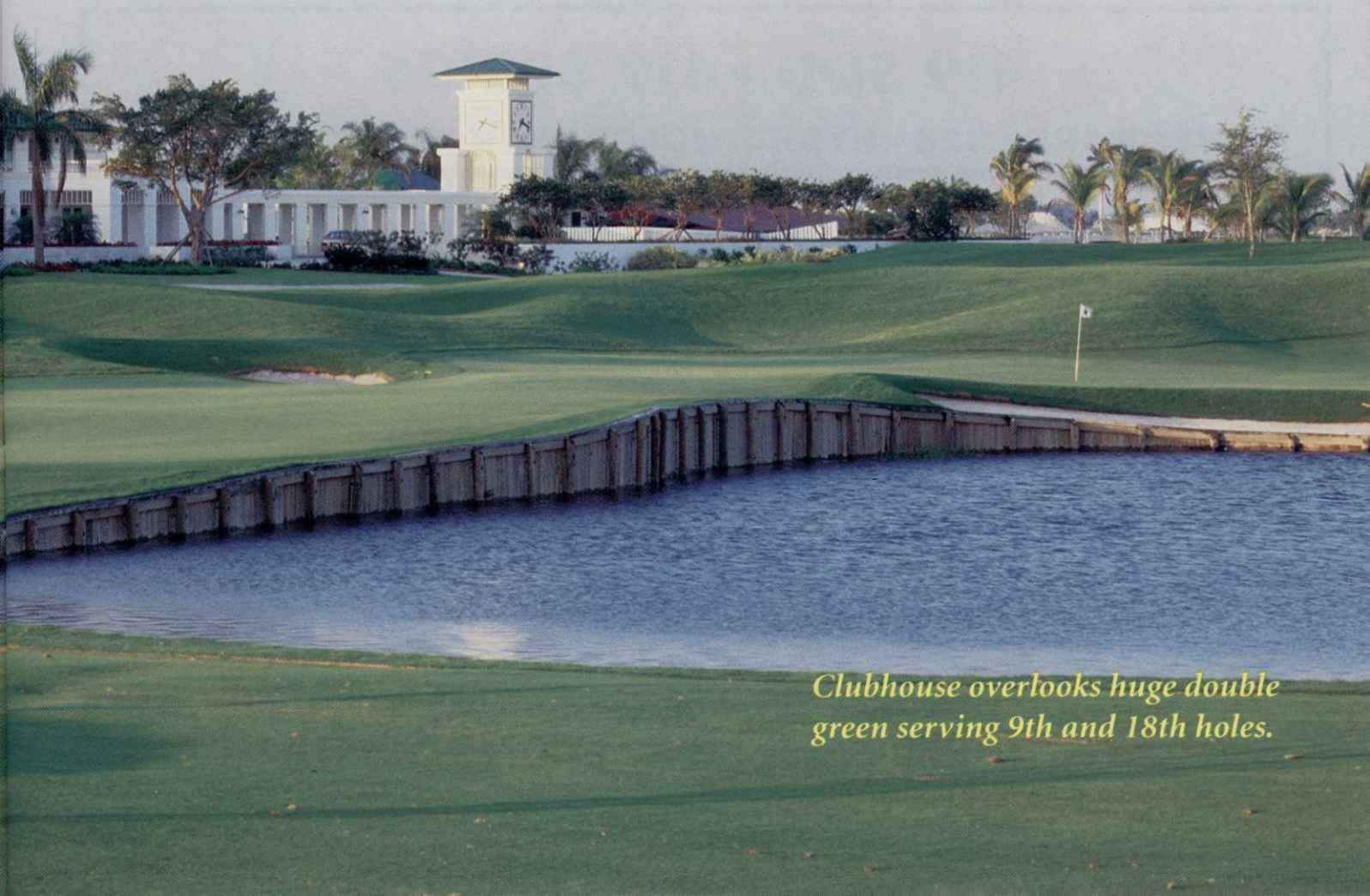
From a golfer's point of view, Drake likes the Weston Hills

course.

"I've been on a lot of golf courses in the area, and on some of them, each four-par looks a lot like the one you played before. Here, every hole is distinctive. It's a refreshing situation to be in.

"And Bobby made this course so people can really play on it. You don't have to carry impossible shots over water like you do on some courses.

"Even though Bobby started with essentially flat property and moved



Clubhouse overlooks huge double green serving 9th and 18th holes.

close to two million cubic yards of dirt, the course looks as though it's been here quite a while.

"We've got 75 sand traps, ranging in size from 800 square feet to about 15,000 square feet and water on 11 of the holes. The course kind of lulls you for the first four holes—there's no water on them—and then there's water on the rest of the nine, and on five of the back holes.

"Actually, the water on 5,6,7,8 and 13,16, and 17 is all the same lake. It's kind of a moat around the property. That makes the course really interesting."

Weston Hills is Drake's third opportunity to be involved with construction of a course. After attending Purdue University and then graduating from Lake City Community College, he worked briefly at Deer Creek Country Club before helping to build the executive course at Boca Del Ray in Delray Beach.

In 1984, Drake went to Stonebridge Golf and Country Club in Boca Raton, where he

helped build and grow in that course.

For a short time, he worked for Aquaturf but, as he says, "I discovered I couldn't function without a farm to take care of."

His "farm" is now Weston Hills Country Club, where he and his staff of 20 take care of the golf course area and the common grounds of the community.

Despite some severe slopes at the course, Drake says Weston Hills is not an overly difficult course to maintain.

"We have 419 bermudagrass on the tees, fairways and roughs and Tifdwarf bermuda on the greens, with bentgrass overseeding in the winter," Drake says. "For the most part, the course is pretty straightforward. On the severe slopes, the crew uses 21-inch, self-propelled rotary mowers. With a two-cycle engine, they can run on an angle without damaging the motor.

"One of the things that makes the course easy to maintain is the way it was designed to allow for homes, but without the tunnel effect you get on a lot of courses that have

homes on both sides, or water on one side and homes on the other. The homesites were planned so that they are inside the course, and almost all the houses have a golf or lake view or both. But they look across two or three holes. They have the view, but they aren't right against the course," Drake says.

"This means that the golfers don't have to alter a shot because the homes are along one side. At some courses, you are afraid if you slice the ball, you'll wind up in someone's swimming pool."

Drake says the location of homesites allowed Jones to create parallel holes. "It not only makes it easier to pull a gang mower through these holes, but it gives the course a nice feel — like you get when you play some of the older courses up north," Drake says.

To keep the course irrigated, Drake has 1800 irrigation heads and 104 satellite clocks, about double the number of heads he has operated on other courses. The irri-

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Robert Drake

Age: 35

Education: Attended Purdue University
Graduated from Lake City Community College

Current Position: Golf Course
Superintendent Weston Hills Country Club, Fort Lauderdale

“...when you’re trying to get a course playable in the short time they want it, then your involvement in organizations begins to deteriorate. I think the guys in the association understand this.”

Previous employment: Assistant superintendent Deer Creek Country Club, Deerfield Beach; superintendent Boca Del Ray, Delray Beach; superintendent Stonebridge Golf and Country Club, Boca Raton; director of golf course construction for South Florida Aquaturf

Personal: Married 14 years to Kristy, real estate salesperson for Stonebridge; Two sons — Matthew, 9 and Thomas, 6

gation system not only waters the 18 holes that make up the Jones course, but three additional holes at Weston Hills.

These three holes — a three-, four- and five-par — were put in ahead of schedule to add to the aesthetics of the entryway, but Drake sees them as an ideal spot for junior golfers.

Drake also had a few more immediate and long-term goals.

For one thing, he would like to become more active with the FGCSA. “I was involved before I came to Weston Hills, but when you’re trying to get a course playable in the short time they want it, then your involvement in organizations begins to deteriorate. I think the guys in the association understand this. But now that the tough stuff is out of the way, I can participate more.”

He’d also like to upgrade his facilities at

Tunnel between 9th and 10th holes provides visual interest.





Fountaingrass juts into both the 10th (above) and 11th (cover) fairways, lending strategic as well as visual drama.

Huge waste bunker bordered by rocks protects the 17th fairway from the moat which meanders throughout the course. Note tower reflected in water.





A few mature trees tie the property to its botanical past.

Weston Hills, and have a more permanent home for the maintenance equipment.

“Right now, we’re working at a severe disadvantage because we’re in temporary facilities about a mile from the course. I’ve rented a trailer to keep the pesticides in, but I have no place to store fertilizer and no cover for most of the machinery. The sun is really taking a toll on the equipment, and we have to wax it every rainy day we get to protect it from the elements.”

And finally, Drake wants to be involved in yet another course. “Those three holes are the beginning of the next course, and I want to be around when they build that course,” Drake says.

“I think I have the best of all worlds. My uncles were farmers, and even though my dad didn’t farm, I think farming is in my blood. I get to farm and I get to play the best golf courses, strictly for inspection purposes, of course. I’ll never be rich, but as long as I can keep working on golf courses, I’ll always be a happy camper.”

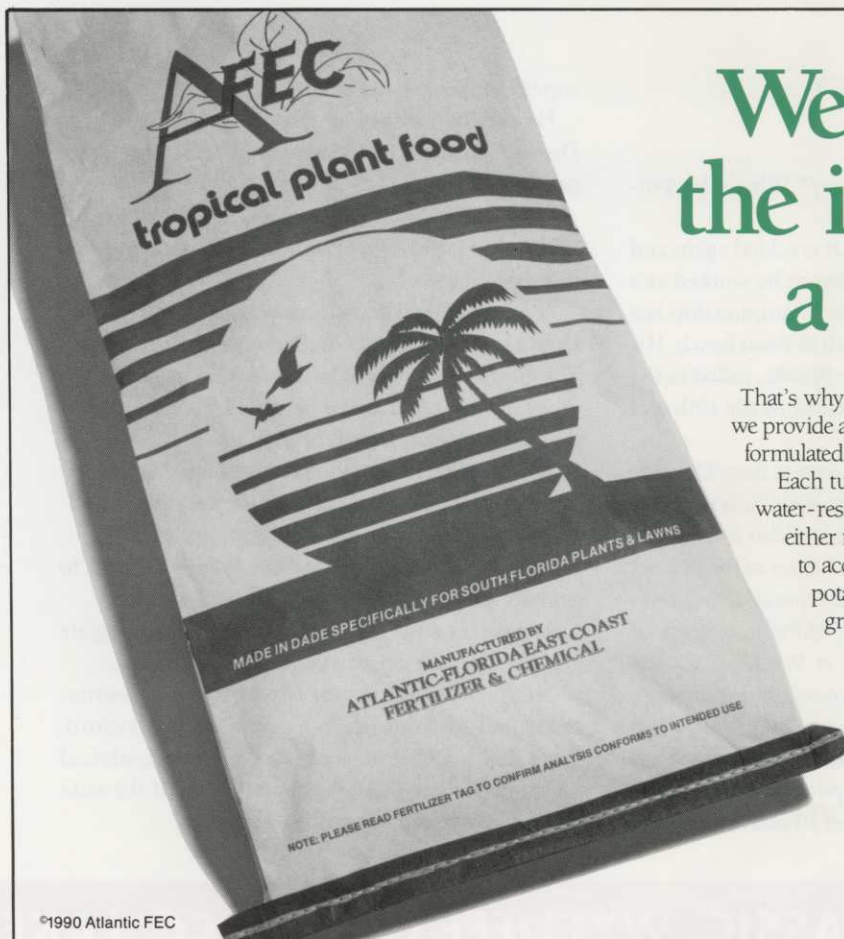
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