



Number 18 Pines
Par 4, 381 yards
Royal Poinciana C.C.
Photo by Daniel Zelazek



ROYAL POINCIANA GOLF CLUB

Difference Between Interest and Commitment

By Joel Jackson, CGCS

Located east of Goodlette-Frank Road in Naples, the Royal Poinciana Golf Club has spent nearly four decades perfecting an operating system that relies on having the right people doing the right jobs. As superintendent Matt Taylor, CGCS put it, “When you are interested in something, you may only do it when it is convenient. When you are com-

mitted to something, you don’t make excuses; you only strive for results.”

I found out quickly while visiting Royal Poinciana this past spring, that Taylor has a clear vision of what he wants to accomplish and how to go about it. I was very interested in his perspectives on balancing work, family and volunteer association

work since I thought he must be nuts to be the vice president of the Florida GCSA and the President of the Florida Turfgrass Association at the same time. Taylor’s answer was simple, but not without substance.

When I asked him how he was managing to oversee a golf club the same time juggle family and volunteer service he simply said,

(Text continues on Page 24)

Course Facts



Royal Poinciana Golf Maintenance Staff

Royal Poinciana Golf Club

Location: Naples

Ownership: Member owned.

Playing Policy: Private

Number of Holes: 36 – *Cypress:* 6,536 yards, Par 72, Rating/Slope: 71.9/126; *Pines:* 6,465 yards, Par 72, Rating/Slope: 72/129

Designed & Constructed by: Dave Wallace.

Opened: 1969

Redesigns and Major Renovations: Arthur Hills (1994 – present)

Management Team: *Club Manager:* Rod Kolesnik; *Club President:* Robert Nichols; *Green Chairman:* John Campbell; *Director of Golf Operations:* Jim Tureskis; *Head Golf Professional:* Bil Bergsma; *Director of Golf Course Operations:* Matt Taylor, CGCS

Property: Total acres - 360. Under maintenance - 231. 110 per 18 holes, 5 each of bahiagrass and St. Augustinegrass, 1

acre Tifway 419 clubhouse grounds. No overseeding.

Greens: Champion; Avg. 5,000 sq. ft. HOC .100 - .125 in.;

Green speeds: Winter 10.5+, Summer 9.0 – 10.0.

Tees: Cypress – TifEagle; HOC .180 - .225 in. Pines

– Mixed bermuda varieties; HOC .375 - .425 in.

Fairways: Cypress – Certified Tifway 419; HOC .500 in; 32 acres. Pines – GN-1 Bermuda; HOC .500 in. 33 acres.

Roughs: Cypress – Certified Tifway 419 (53 acres); Pines – Ormond variety (60 acres). HOC both courses .75 in. summer – 1.5 in. winter.

Bunkers: Cypress (49) & Pines (57). Sand type - 37M. Hand-rake Cypress greenside bunkers. All other bunkers machine-raked.

Waste or Native Areas: 52 acres. Pine straw, 20 acres cord-grass and other native grass beds, 4 acres of marshes.

Irrigation Source: City of Naples reclaimed water. PSI pump stations. 3,500 sprinklers. Toro Osmac and Network 8000 control systems.



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57 Varieties

A few of the 57 bunkers on the Pines Course. With underlying rock formations bunker drainage and consistency can be a challenge. Hole No. 2, 400 yard, par 4. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

“You have to surround yourself with good people.” I know that’s a timeworn management cliché, but Taylor has followed it to a tee and is reaping the rewards. Taylor’s words reminded me of one of Walt Disney’s motivational slogans, “You can design and build the finest theme park in the world, but it takes people to run it.”

We hadn’t gone far into the interview before he began extolling the virtues of his people. Many of them apparently think Taylor must be the real deal, because they have changed jobs to remain part of his team and have worked for him for six to ten-plus years. Taylor confessed, “Those who know me can attest that our administrative assistant, Jean Mears, is the glue that holds our operation together.” Mears

had worked with Taylor at Bonita Bay East in the 1990s. She re-enlisted with her old boss for another tour of duty in 2001.

The story was similar for the other key staff members: Scott Hornish, superintendent, Pines Course; Charles Montgomery, assistant superintendent, Cypress Course; second assistants Richard Lash (Pines) and Kirsten Conover (Cypress). While Conover is a relative newbie at one and a half years, she has an M.S. in biology and heads the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

Finding the right people for the right jobs, it never fails to be the best formula for success.

Then there’s Kenneth McCalister, the IPM/landscape supervisor, and Noel

Chandler, the equipment manager, and Rex Laffin who concentrates on the green- and tee-mower maintenance. Laffin has been with Taylor since 1994. Another veteran is Hector Hernandez who worked with Taylor at Collier Reserve installing irrigation during construction back in 1995. He also rejoined Taylor in 2001.

Taylor turned down three job offers when he was ready to graduate from assistant at Collier’s Reserve to his first head superintendent position, because they just weren’t the right fit for his goals and vision.

Taylor’s vision was not the result of an overnight revelation or moment of clarity. He regrets not pounding the books more in high school, so his grades prevented him from waltzing

Super Facts



Matt Taylor, CGCS

From: Alexandria, Va. Moved to Naples in 1972

Family: Wife Tracy; Daughter Allison (17); Sons Jordan (13) and Ashton (6)

Education: AS Golf Course Operations & AA Business, Lake City Community College.

Employment: 1993-1996 assist. supt. Colliers Reserve, Naples; 1996-2000 director golf course operations/East courses, Bonita Bay Club, Naples; 2000-present director of golf operations Royal Poinciana Golf Club, Naples.

Professional Affiliations: Member of EGCSA, FGCSA, GCSAA, FTGA, USGA. Currently vice president FGCSA and president of FTGA. Past president EGCSA 2001-02; EGCSA board of directors since 1997.

Awards: 1999 GCSAA Environmental Steward Award Private Courses - Bonita Bay East.

Hobbies: Coaching my daughter's softball teams and my sons' baseball teams. Hunting, fishing, riding four-wheelers. Spending time with the family.

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Harmony with Location

With native trees like cypress, pines and palms in the background on and native rock used for lake bank stabilization Royal Poinciana reflects its harmony with its location. Cypress Hole No. 7, 500 yard, par 5. Note owl stand at far right. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

First, show up early. Work hard and get the job done right the first time. No complaining or whining. Second, do not tell people how good you are. They will figure it out on their own.

into the University of Florida. Funny how his parents were right after all, he says.

But he did dabble part time in landscape work and after a brief flirtation with the Culinary Institute in Hyde Park, NY, Taylor did have a revelation when he started figuring out those nighttime and weekend work schedules. That didn't seem like a good fit with raising a family, so he went to work instead for Wayne Griffith at Green Way Landscaping in Naples.

As Taylor recalls, "I owe a lot to Wayne for showing me how to work hard and get the job done no matter what obstacles get in the way. He has remained a good friend to this day.

"While working on landscape at Im-

perial Lakes I met the superintendent, Jerry Redden, and my interest in golf course work was born. After working for Jerry for a couple of years I enrolled in the Lake City program. Upon graduation I started working for Tim Hiers, CGCS at Collier's Reserve. Tim's reputation as a consummate professional is well known. His attention to detail, organization and pursuit of education and always doing the right thing were not lost on me. I learned a lot about dealing with people and the environmental side of our business from him.

"I learned as much from J. Mark Black, CGCS about turf management, course detailing and overall operations management from him. It's not easy working for someone who strives for

Fun Facts



Raking bunkers might not necessarily be “fun,” but taking care of business helps Matt Taylor find the time to have fun with his family and friends. Photo by Joel Jackson.

1. Vehicle: Ford F250

2. Last good movie I saw: Failure to Launch

3. I stay home to watch: House

4. The book I’ve been reading: Books? I have a hard time keeping up with trade magazines

5. Favorite meal: Soft shell crab

6. Favorite performers: Lynyrd Skynyrd, John Anderson

7. Prized possessions: 1981 Jeep CJ-5

8. Personal Heroes: Dr. Ahmad Salmon (See #15) and Jeff Hood, my first assistant at Bonita Bay East. How he survived me, I do not know. Thanks for still talking to me.

9. Nobody knows that I: Am very self conscious

10. I’m better than anyone else when it comes to: Seeing the big picture

11. I’d give anything to meet: Steve Spurrier

12. My fantasy is: Retire early to the islands

13. The one thing I can’t stand: Narrow-minded people who are not willing to change

14. If I could change one thing about myself: Be a better communicator

15. Most humbling experience: When we found out my second son had cancer at age three months.

16. The words that best describe me: Honest, committed, dedicated and funny.

17. My dream foursome would be: Steve Spurrier, Ted Nugent, John Anderson and me

18. If I could do it over: I would have attended UF for Civil Engineering

perfection sometimes, but I would not change that time for anything. What both of these gentlemen have meant to my career, words here cannot adequately describe.

“We are the sum total of our experiences and I would be remiss if I did not salute the following people who also contributed to my growth and development: Tom Burrows, Roy Bates, Steve Durand, Jan Beljan, Robert Bittner, Charlie Campbell, John Teller, Bill Gamble, David Graham and Charlie McMullen.”

Taylor said his work philosophy evolved from lessons learned from those mentors and others. He said, “First, show up early. Work hard and get the job done right the first time. No complaining or whining. Second, do not tell people how good you are. They will figure it out on their own. When managing people in our business you must be firm but fair and always stick to what you know is right.

“My advice to those seeking a profession in greenkeeping is that you must always remember that at the end of the day, no matter what happens at your operation good or bad, you will be held accountable and responsible. Personally, I recommend that you find a balance among work, family and your life needs. Enjoy your children while they are young. They grow up way too fast and the next thing you know they are applying for college.”

Beyond the teamwork of his key staffers Taylor also works on getting recognition and rewards for the entire crew. Whenever Taylor gets an “Atta Boy” note or comment on course conditions or project work, he posts them on the crew bulletin board. He also uses product purchase points to acquire prizes for giveaways at crew parties which include a big Christmas party and an annual bowling party. Then there’s the Pepsi Party from the drink machine proceeds. The Royal Poinciana membership also shows their appreciation by approving bonuses at Christmas and Easter.

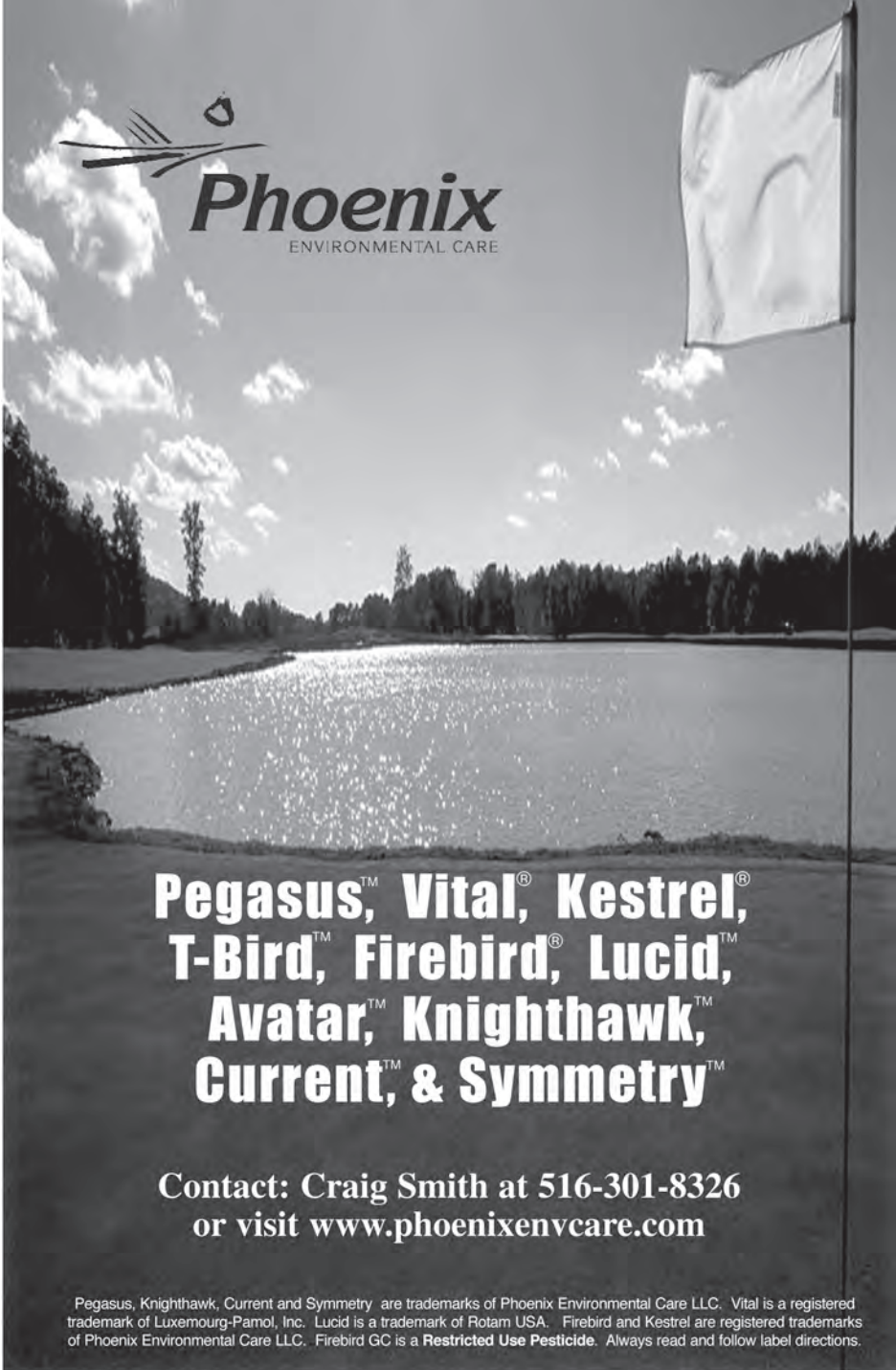
Taylor knows that communication to his staff is important to get the necessary tasks done, but he also knows that

You see so much more at 2-3 miles per hour. Plus the exercise is good for my health and reducing stress. Most any course can look good at 15-20 mph from a golf cart.

he must communicate up the chain of command and to the membership. So besides the five-minute maintenance-management mini-meeting each morning before daily job assignments, Taylor attends weekly manager meetings where pertinent information is compiled into a report for the club officials.

Taylor meets weekly on Mondays during the golf season with his green chairman in what they call "Quality Time with Your Greenkeeper." They review course conditions, maintenance schedules, financials, project progress and planning. Taylor says he generally has some oral or e-mail contact daily. It may be only a few minutes, but it ensures a comfort level on what's happening on the course.

Taylor added, "I have had the good fortune of having two excellent chair-



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TAS Visit

USGA Agronomist John Foy (kneeling) checks green root zone during his annual Turf Advisory Service visit to Royal Poinciana. Green Chairman John Campbell (standing far right) and Matt Taylor (far left) and the rest of the senior maintenance staff listen to Foy's comments. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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Another wildlife success story in Collier County is the fox squirrel. A study done by the University of Florida credits golf course habitats for preventing the loss of fox squirrels in the area. I saw at least a half dozen of them on while riding the course. Photo by Joel Jackson.

men in the past six years. John Teller was the green chairman who hired me in 2000. We worked together for five years. John Campbell was on the selection committee and has also been on the green committee since 2000. This has made for excellent consistency in planning of projects and accomplishing the overall goals of the club.”

Taylor also feels that any successful superintendent should be available for member interactions and be seen on the job. Taylor dedicates time Saturday mornings to be in the pro shop, the putting green and range tee area. He said this is prime time to engage avid golfers and board members and answer any questions they might have. From October to May Taylor writes a monthly article for the club newsletter to reach out to all members.

During the week Taylor walks and/or rides the entire course daily,

logging six miles. It might be walking 18 and riding 18 or walking 9 holes on each course and riding the other nines. Taylor keeps two pairs of shoes and socks for just such course inspection, a tip he picked up from Joe Boe in a *Florida Green* article many years ago. Taylor says, “You see so much more at 2-3 miles per hour. Plus the exercise is good for my health and reducing stress. Most any course can look good at 15-20 mph from a golf cart.”

Since every course has site-specific needs, there are no magic-bullet solutions that you can copy from one course’s recipe for healthy turf, but there are things that might help similar situations. Royal Poinciana — like many Collier County courses — sits on a shallow soil profile with lots of limestone just below the surface. Finding good usable soil can be a challenge and Taylor says that with the recent

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renovation projects just about all the good soil has been excavated.

With rock so near the surface, irrigation management is critical and Taylor and his staff have been trying to find that perfect balance between too much and too little water to apply to keep playing conditions top notch. The effluent is high in sodium and bicarbonates so they manage pH with pHairway acid-injection pumps into the irrigation lines, and more than half the fertilizer applications are liquid spray rather than dry granular. When granulars are used, they are complete blends with slow-release nitrogen sources. They have been using progressively less nitrogen over the years, looking for a happy medium and boosting potassium and micro-nutrient rates to keep the turf healthy and hardy.

Taylor said, "Pest control and IPM programs are mostly curative with only a couple of exceptions; one being nematode and mole cricket control on the Pines course with Ormond bermuda. The nematodes and mole crickets have a field day on that older turf and so Curfew applications have been made to control those populations. We skipped Curfew this year and used Chipco Choice for cricket control with good results. In the past we would clean up recurring hot spots with Nema-cur. Of course that product will not be available after next year.

"The Pines Course is scheduled for renovation soon and the upgrade in turf will help reduce chemical applications. Weeds like tropical signalgrass are tough. They are hard to pull manually

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Colorful Tee Markers

During the golf season, colorful pots of flowers served as tee markers on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for the Ladies' 18 and 9 hole events. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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Dazzling Color

While native plants dominate both course landscapes, dazzling color highlights can also be found in formal beds and wildflower fields. Pines Hole #9, 490 yard, par 5. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



Eastern Bluebirds have become so prolific on Naples area golf courses that biologists are transplanting some of the birds to help bolster the Everglades bluebird population. Photo by Joel Jackson.

and now it looks like we are losing MSMA. Again the weed problems are more evident in the older turf grasses. The new course is much less of a problem and we are on a strict program of having each employee pull 50 weeds a day. It is hard to accomplish sometimes, but it works.”

Taylor’s cultural practices to keep the greens in top shape are typical of most other premier courses in the area. Frequent light verticutting and topdressing to control thatch/biomass build-up, and three aerifications in summer with 5/8-inch tines when play is slow and he can rotate closing the courses.

Every three or four weeks during the winter he closes one course on Mondays after 1p.m. to hydroject the greens. Judicious use of Primo year around has turned out to be a blessing as heights of cut have been raised to help the plant but still maintain great greens.

Royal Poinciana has been a fully certified member of the Audubon Coop-



Wetlands Projects

Several wetlands restoration projects were part of the complete Cypress Course renovations in 2004 and 2005. Hole No. 14, 176 yard, Par 3. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

erative Sanctuary program since 1996. In fact at last count 70 percent of the courses in the Everglades GCSA were members of the Audubon International program.

That is a great statistic in the face of continuing mounting pressures from activists for the ban of fertilizers and chemicals. The Everglades Chapter can speak with credibility when it comes to the table to debate the issues.

Meanwhile Royal Poinciana walks the environmental talk by hosting annual bird and wildlife tours led by local ornithologist George McBath during the winter. The club also hosts wildlife tours for members; grandchildren at Christmas and Easter. Jean Mears organizes these tours, putting together goody bags for the kids with wildflower seeds, recycled pencils and erasers. The

kids also receive a brochure on birds and mammals of southwest Florida.

As Taylor says, “Give any kid a disposable camera, ride them around the golf course and it is an hour of fun, education and entertainment. McBath makes the tours interactive by opening bird boxes to show nests and how to build habitat for animals with simple brush piles in out-of-play areas. It’s important to educate future generations about the positive impacts golf courses can have.”

I started this article wondering how Taylor managed to take on so much responsibility at the same time. There is no easy answer. It takes hard work to be successful and try to lead a balanced life. Taylor comes in early and works late. He gets his work responsibilities done so he can be a coach for his kids

and a volunteer for his associations. And of course he has worked hard to provide a positive work environment for his employees. He believes in being firm and fair, but the bottom line is the work has to be done right with no excuses.

It is often said growing grass is only 10 percent of the job, so we have been looking at the other 90 percent for a change. We’ve spent a lot of time talking about finding the right people, fostering good working relationships up and down the chain of command and getting the job done responsibly.

Taylor said it best, “There are people who make things happen. People who watch things happen. And people who wonder what just happened.”

Are you *interested* in your profession or are you *committed* to it? ■