

USGA UPDATE

BUT...We Cannot Let Our Guard Down

By John Foy

The holiday season is upon us and the winter golf season in Florida is cranking up. As November winds down, everyone is able to breathe a sigh of relief because this also means that the 2006 Atlantic Hurricane Season is coming to an end and the state was not hit by a major storm. After the last two years of multiple hurricanes hitting Florida, everyone desperately needed a break!



Naturally, with not having to conduct storm recovery, it has been much easier to prepare for the winter play season. During TAS visits over the past few weeks, it has been found that in general, good quality course conditioning is being provided. Interestingly, in some areas of the state, rainfall is running 10-20 inches below year-to-date averages. While this creates some course-management challenges, I am sure that everyone will take this situation over the hurricanes.

On Nov. 16, the NOAA Climate Prediction Center issued its final forecast for the 2006-2007 U.S. winter season (December, January, February). For Florida and the Southeast, near-average temperatures are predicted. The outlook is for wetter-than-average precipitation conditions across the entire southern tier of the country.

At first glance this forecast does not sound that bad. However, we should not forget the problems experienced at many courses throughout the state during the El Nino winters of the mid-90s. Record-setting cold temperatures did not occur, but the prolonged periods of cool and wet weather took its toll on course conditioning and quality. Even with only moderate traffic and wear, a pronounced decline in coverage and density occurred; and with this, rapid algae invasion quickly followed. Regardless of inputs, producing any

degree of recovery was a very slow process and sometimes not completed until the late spring to early summer.

Based on previous experience, it is strongly urged that course managers err on the side of caution and maintain as much grass as possible going into the winter. For some, the greens are never fast enough; but remember slow greens are better than no greens. Also, cart traffic management and directional-control devices are generally not popular, but are a necessary part of course management to minimize deterioration and help survive until the weather is favorable to sustained turf growth, hopefully by mid-February to early March in South Florida.

GCSAA NEWS

Chapter Delegates Look to the Future

Noting the association and its members have made significant gains on several fronts, the Oct.13-15 GCSAA Chapter Delegates meeting took a strategic approach in discussing how GCSAA could sustain that momentum in achieving its mission, vision and goals.

“I commend and appreciate the delegates for the energy they displayed during the meeting,” said Ricky Heine, CGCS meeting chairman and GCSAA vice-president. “They were focused and well-prepared in giving the board of directors and staff their perspectives on how we achieve our long-term vision. They took ownership of their association and in their responsibility as delegates. It is obvious they engaged their members in talks before the meeting.”

The exchange of ideas and comments focused primarily on three items:

- **the development of long-term revenue streams to fund programs and services;**
- **growing the GCSAA membership;**
- **positioning GCSAA and its membership classes in the marketplace (primarily to employers and influential golfers).**

The financial conversations centered on the establishment of a long-term dues pricing strategy. At the request of the delegates, the board and staff presented a proposal that would tie the establishment of membership dues to an index (such as the Consumer Price Index). Historically, the association has enacted a dues increase in larger increments on average every five to seven years. The result has been a loss of members.

There was widespread agreement at the meeting that smaller dues increases would be more easily absorbed at the facility level and less likely to result in membership declines. Directors further discussed the issue at their fall meeting, October 20-21 in New Orleans.

Tied to the discussion of revenues was an examination of GCSAA membership numbers. From a high of more than 22,000 in 2001, the association’s membership has declined approximately 10 percent to just over 20,000 today. There was agreement that the situation has been created in large part by a struggling golf economy and the implementation of member standards.

Staff presented a seven-phase membership growth and recruitment campaign enacted late last year. Delegates supported the efforts, realizing such an initiative will take time to yield results and must be long-term in nature. They were especially supportive of the GCSAA field staff pilot program and encouraged strong consideration for expanding it in the near future.

The liveliest debate was on GCSAA’s philosophy regarding the positioning of the association and its membership classes. Delegates shared a variety of opinions, but ultimately agreed that for membership standards to have value in the marketplace, they must be promoted externally. There was unanimous support that greater resources be dedicated to marketing the association. While there will be a focus on Class A because of the PDI process to attain and maintain Class A, it was noted, however, that promoting Class A does not mean that marketing other membership classes should not be part of the program.

Noting that chapters will be integral to the success of revenue generation, membership growth and retention, and marketing efforts, discussion also included an examination of chapter effectiveness. Specifically, the delegates were charged with providing the board and staff direction as to how the association could best invest resources to enhance chapter operations.

The top three items were:

- **membership recruitment and retention;**
- **chapter executive development and support;**
- **chapter meeting effectiveness (attendance, timing, satisfaction, value, etc.).**

It was the consensus that many of the issues were interrelated and thus could be addressed if programs and services are developed and coordinated appropriately. Once again, support for expanding the field staff pilot program was communicated, and suggested as a means to implement effectiveness programs.

Delegates also expressed interest in providing support to GCSAA's advocacy efforts. They were briefed on the process the association follows for commenting to the EPA on product re-registration. The process includes an element for member input to GCSAA actions, plus the opportunity for chapters and members to become directly engaged as well.

To view the complete report log on to www.gcsaa.org and select Delegates Meeting Results.

Key West GC reopens after hurricane

On Oct. 24, 2005 Hurricane Wilma – the most devastating hurricane to strike Key West and the Lower Florida Keys in almost 100 years – hit with an 8-foot storm surge, leaving the southernmost golf course in the U.S. under 4 feet of sea water.

For Key West Golf Club owner Gwenn Smith, Wilma may have taken the fairways but not her sense of humor. “For a short while, our golf course could accommodate Keys divers with drivers!” said Smith. Smith faced the economic adversity with her husband Bill and a perpetual optimism.

“We knew the 20-year old Bermuda greens could not survive being under salt water and this meant a major course rebuild; so our club staff quickly responded and got right to work.” added Smith.

Club general manager and golf pro Doug Carter said the 150-acre golf course was not only inundated with the ocean storm surge but the irrigation lakes were also infiltrated with sea water leaving no source of fresh water to flush the salt off the greens.

Before the waters had receded, Smith, Carter, head golf professional Eric Favier and superintendent Koby Minshall had a course-recovery plan under way.

Renovation on the front nine began in June. A salt-tolerant grass, SeaDwarf seashore paspalum turfgrass would replace less tolerant bermudagrass.

Carter said playability also figured

into the decision to regrass with SeaDwarf. “The grass is very dense and grows quickly. It seems to have a more vibrant color than the bermudagrasses and, with the proper maintenance practices, it will have less grain,” said Carter.

Seashore paspalum turfgrass is environmentally friendly, a constant concern in the Lower Florida Keys; it requires less water.

“The biggest environmental benefit is that it will handle effluent water for irrigation much better than other turfgrasses. This will help conserve the freshwater supplies,” said Favier.

Minshall said the new SeaDwarf grass will act almost like an insurance policy against future tropical storms and hurricanes. “Seadwarf will help us survive future hurricanes because it is more salt tolerant than bermudagrass,” he said. “Even if there is no storm surge associated with a hurricane, the rain water in tropical systems is high in salt content.”

Along with re-grassing the greens, fairly extensive work was completed to a number of fairways including new drainage or raising the greens on holes 1, 2, 5, 6 and 9.

The back nine greens are in shape for play this season but will be re-grassed with SeaDwarf in June.

Key West Golf Club originally opened in the early 1920s as a nine-hole facility. In the 1950s another nine holes were added. In 1983, Rees Jones was hired to design the current 18. Key West Golf Club was Rees Jones's first design with his own company. ■

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