

Frye has worked with the best, accepts Kiawah's test

By Peter Blais

He has helped Robert Trent Jones, Tom Fazio, Jay Morrish and Pete Dye build courses.

He is head superintendent at the course that just hosted perhaps the most-talked-about golf tournament in history — the 1991 Ryder Cup at Kiawah Island, S.C.

So, when George Frye, 35, answers, "I just want to keep learning and advancing in the golf business," it's hard to imagine there is much left for him to learn.

Frye's education began in the golf-rich area of Pinehurst, N.C. He picked up his first club at age 10 and was on the ground crew at Donald Ross' personal shrine by 16.

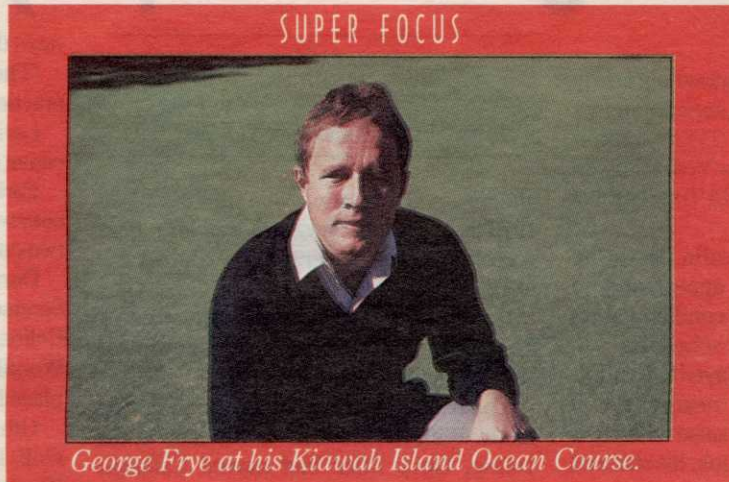
"I knew back then that all I ever wanted was to work in the golf business," said Frye, who received an associate's degree in turfgrass management from North Carolina State University in 1978.

Frye's first professional stop was a 4-1/2-year stint as assistant and later head superintendent at Seabrook Island, S.C., where he worked with Jones on the Crooked Oaks Course.

Asked for a brief description of the best-known of contemporary architects, Frye said: "Trent Jones is very traditional in his designs. He always said he tried to build courses with hard pars and easy bogeys. He has certain design philosophies and sticks to them. He's very consistent."

In 1984, Frye headed west to Oak Hills Country Club in San Antonio, Texas, to help Morrish renovate the A.W. Tillinghast layout.

"It was a huge job," Frye recalled. "The course was tinkered with a lot



over the years. Jay was selected because he knew a lot of the history behind Tillinghast courses. It ended up being more of a total facelift than a renovation.

"Jay has a huge reservoir of golf design experience. He's worked with many architects (including Jones, George Fazio, Desmond Muirhead, Jack Nicklaus and Bob Cupp). He can adapt to many different design conditions. No two of his courses are the same."

But Frye and his wife Louise, a native of Athens, Ga., missed the Southeast. So when the chance to return to Kiawah as director of maintenance in 1985 appeared, Frye jumped at it.

The island, located 17 miles south of Charleston, had two courses — Gary Player's Marsh Point and Nicklaus' Turtle Point. Fazio had started a third course, Osprey Point, when Frye arrived.

Construction was delayed somewhat because of the resort's sale by a Kuwaiti investment company to a group of local businessmen. Landmark Land Co., in turn, bought the golf courses and other amenities from the local investors.

Frye assisted Fazio at Osprey, a course developers asked Fazio to make friendly on the budget and maintenance crew.

"Fazio was very accommodating," Frye said. "We ended up with a course that was a lot of fun to play, with wide fairways and a lot of character. It's a layout that can be very rewarding for the average golfer."

"Tom is very flexible. His designs really take advantage of the land. He creates features that complement the piece of property he has to work with."

While Frye oversaw construction at Seabrook Island, Oak Hills and Osprey Point, his role was more limited at Dye's Ocean Course.

"Pete did most of it," Frye recalled. "Pete prefers to say he builds rather than designs golf courses. He really does design as he builds, moving things around until he gets it just right."

"He lived on the course for about a year (1989 and early 1990). He was gone for only about three weeks. Pete directed everything. That's what he needs to do to get the product he wants."

The course was beginning to grow in by the spring of 1990. That's when Frye took over. Unlike most tournament courses, Kiawah was a brand new facility that would be open for just a few months prior to the late September Ryder Cup.

While older courses can simply cure existing ills in preparation for a major tournament, the superintendent at a new course must anticipate any problems that might crop up.

"We were shooting for perfect conditions. We didn't want anyone saying, 'Not bad, for a new course.' We wanted it to look like a mature course in great condition," Frye said.

Frye's first priority was the greens. A tournament mowing height of 6/64ths-of-an-inch was the target. His crew began grooming the grass with that goal in mind beginning in April 1990, 18 months before the tournament.

Frye verticut the greens every two weeks throughout the summer, smoothing out the grass, leveling off excess contours and taking out any unevenness in the putting surface, thus avoiding scalping come the tournament.

Laying a solid foundation by selecting grasses that could sustain such low cutting heights was extremely important, Frye said. He and Dye settled on Tifdwarf on greens, aprons and along the slopes (for contrast) bordering the fairway. Tifway 419 was selected for tees and fairways.

The fairways were next. Fairways were aerified and rolled between five and eight times during April and early May 1991 to get as smooth a playing surface as possible. Plugs were cut up, then dragged back over the aerification holes. A vibratory roller made two or three passes

over each fairway. Par-3 fairways were excluded to maintain a natural look.

After the fairways recovered, they were verticut twice that summer, further smoothing any rough spots. Frye also applied a top dressing of sugar sand, a native variety.

The grounds crew top dressed tees throughout the summer of 1991. Dye also added several new tees.

The last, but not least, important job was stabilizing the sand dunes bordering the course. The Ocean Course is fully exposed to wind and other elements from the sea. Blowing sand would be a major problem in the frequent 20- to 30-mile-per-hour gusts that buffet that stretch of coastline.

Seedless hydro-mulch was applied to the dunes beginning in 1990. Desirable vegetation — mostly sea oats, American beachgrass and sweetgrass — were then planted by hand. Once the desirable vegetation was established, Frye selectively applied herbicides to rid the dunes of undesirable plant materials, primarily purple nutgrass. The chemicals were applied from June through early September 1991.

The course closed two weeks prior to the tournament for fine tuning. Mowing patterns were established and greens verticut every other day the first week-and-a-half. Frye hoped to have the facility tournament-ready at least seven days before matches began, giving early-arriving players the chance to see and play the course under Ryder Cup conditions.

It was in such great shape the week before the tournament that Mark Calcavecchia shot a 64 in a practice round. But even the best-laid plans go awry. The wind gusted near 20 mph tournament weekend and "gave the players fits," Frye said.

"Once a tournament starts, the No. 1 thing you should have to worry about is consistency. Maintaining green speeds and mowing frequency are important (Frye double-cut the greens before play started and after it ended). But no one controls Mother Nature," he said.

Frye's crew tried to counteract the drying effects of the wind by adding extra water to the greens to keep speeds reasonable. The dunes were watered to keep blowing sand to a minimum. But some greens still received windblown sand and had to be swept off from time to time.

Still, PGA Tour officials were very happy with the conditions, Frye said. The players thought the course played extremely hard, but mainly because of the wind. And Frye's fellow superintendents were very complimentary.

"I even got a letter from a Florida superintendent who thought we had the best mowing patterns he'd ever seen," Frye said.

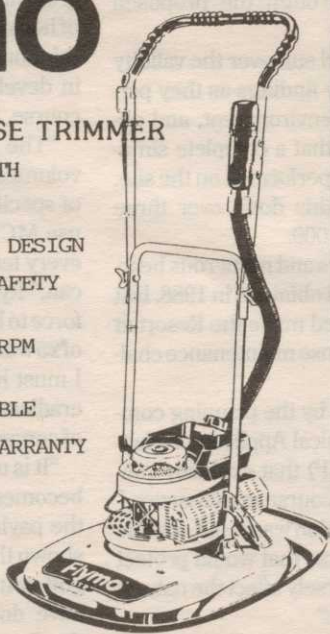
What was Frye's evaluation of his own contribution?

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Metam-sodium applicators now must be certified, EPA reports

All individuals associated with use of the pesticide metam-sodium must now wear protective clothing.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the principal registrants of metam-sodium reached an agreement on the requirement. Use around the home will be prohibited unless applied by a certified applicator.

The announcement is based on EPA's review of animal studies, which show that exposure of individuals (particularly pregnant women) under current use practices may pose a risk of birth de-

fects in the offspring.

Metam-sodium, registered since 1954, is a fumigant used before planting as a pesticide to control weeds, nematodes, fungi, bacteria and insects in the soil. The primary uses include agriculture and lawn grasses, flowers, fruit trees, grapevines and nursery stock. Approximately seven million to 12 million pounds are used annually, nearly half in agriculture.

EPA's review of the studies was prompted by the July 14 spill of thousands of gallons of metam-so-

dium into the Sacramento River near Dunsmuir, Calif.

"The actions we are announcing are primarily precautionary," said William K. Reilly, EPA administrator.

The two developmental toxicity studies on animals, which resulted in the protective measures being taken, are not considered to be fully adequate to fulfill EPA's requirements for reregistration. However, the agency does consider the studies useful to provide estimates of possible risk from exposure to this chemical.

Under terms of the agreement:

- Mixers, loaders, applicators or any other persons who may come into direct contact with this pesticide will be required to wear properly fitting respirators; body covering, which includes long sleeves and long pants; and chemical resistant gloves and boots.

- Workers entering treated fields within 48 hours following application will be required to wear chemical resistant footwear and body covering including long sleeves and long pants. Respirators and chemical resistant

gloves are to be immediately available and used by these workers if they are likely to come into direct contact with the pesticide.

Registrants of metam-sodium products included in the agreement are ICI Americas Inc. of Wilmington, Del.; Amvac Chemical Co. of Los Angeles; Buckman Labs Inc. of Memphis, Tenn.; Oregon-California Chemicals Inc. of Junction City, Ore.; and UCB Chemicals Corp. of Norfolk, Va. These registrants account for well over 90 percent of metam-sodium production.

Frye

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"I'm an extremely quality-conscious individual," he said. "We used every resource available to get the most out of this golf course. A desire for quality is an important trait. To maintain a golf course properly you want to complement the design with sound management practices that bring out the true character of that design."

And what kind of course was Frye left with once the Ryder Cup hoopla died down?

"Pete didn't want to leave us with a maintenance nightmare and he didn't," Frye said. "The turf areas are relatively easy to maintain. It's the natural areas, particularly the dunes, that are the most difficult."

"This is a very sensitive piece of property. We have to spend the time and money to protect the natural areas, fowl and wildlife that make it special."

The total annual maintenance budget for the four courses runs between \$2.3 million and \$2.4 million. The Ocean Course and Turtle Point are the most expensive to maintain. Osprey Point and Marsh Point cost a little less.

Among Frye's 60 employees are head superintendents at each course—Jeff Stone at Marsh Point, Rich Abbott at Turtle Point, Wayne Sellers at Osprey Point and Steve Miller at the Ocean Course.

A new course has sprung up every four to five years at Kiawah since Marsh Point became the island's first 18 in 1976. Enough acreage is available at Turtle Point for another nine or possibly 18 holes, Frye said.

"I enjoy taking a course from beginning to end, producing something that is compatible with good maintenance practices," Frye said. "It's fun visualizing how things could be, putting a green here, figuring how you'd mow around a bunker there."

Whether it will be financially troubled Landmark or someone else who develops that land remains to be seen.

"Not knowing what the destiny of current management will be is somewhat troubling," Frye said. "But Kiawah is such a well-planned and developed facility that it will remain one of the top resorts on the East Coast, regardless of who owns it."

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