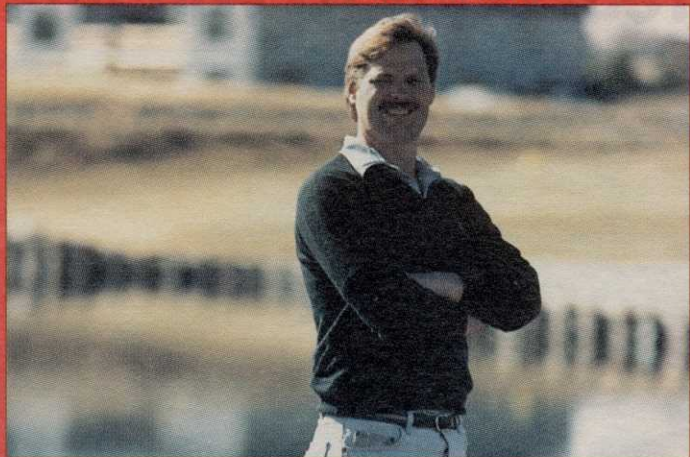


SUPER FOCUS



Dennis Vogt on site in Asia for Dye Designs International.

Asian work a different

By Peter Blais

The slopes along the roughs were steep, too steep for riding mowers thought members of the grounds crew at Mariya Country Club.

Instead, 12 workers were assigned the month-long task of grooming the 100 acres bordering the fairways of the suburban Tokyo course with walk-behind mowers.

Try though he might, Dennis Vogt couldn't convince his Japanese workers that a riding mower could navigate the course quicker

and without tipping over. Finally he jumped behind the wheel and began cutting himself.

"It took me four or five days to do the whole course. They were just afraid to do it. Once they saw it was safe, they were happy to use riding mowers. Now two guys do the course in a couple of days," said Vogt, an American and Dye Designs International's director of turf maintenance.

Getting crew members to change the way they did things was the biggest challenge Vogt said he faced during his two-year stay (1989-90) at Mariya and nearby Glenmoor Country Club.

Vogt, currently the grow-in superintendent at Royal Hawaiian Country Club on Oahu, was brought in to prepare Mariya for a Jack Nicklaus-Jumbo Osaki Skins Match. He doubled as grow-in superintendent at nearby Glenmoor, which hosted that year's inaugural Japanese Professional Golfers Association tournament.

Vogt trained both staffs in equipment operation and maintenance, irrigation system operation and repair, safe chemical and fertilizer application, irrigation principles and pest management. Though they were apt pupils, Vogt's Japanese crew provided some frustrations.

"I'd leave the site after teaching something and they'd go right back to doing it their own way," he recalled. "Eventually I found that suggesting a new way of doing things worked better than forcing them to do it.

"That first month, I couldn't get them to listen much. I did a lot of mowing and chemical applications myself. But once they saw the results, they trusted me and began doing it my way."

The chance to experience a different culture first attracted Vogt to Japan. The 32-year-old had already carved out a fairly successful career in the United States, having worked at Castle Pines Golf Club in Castle Rock, Colo. (site of "The International" PGA Tour stop), Riverdale Dunes in Denver as grow-in superintendent and Glenmoor

Continued on page 15

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CIRCLE #112

breed of challenge for American Dennis Vogt

Continued from page 14

Country Club of Cherry Hills in Englewood, Colo., as head superintendent.

But those experiences didn't prepare the American for the cultural difference he encountered in Japan.

In the United States, an unproductive worker can simply be fired. "But that's not the Japanese way. If a guy won't listen to you, you can't just get rid of him. Many workers stay at the same course for life," Vogt said.

Then there is the matter of job responsibilities. In America, a crew member is often assigned a specific task, such as mowing greens, and that is all he does. In Japan, workers rotate jobs, sometimes the same day.

"I'd spend a week with someone, teaching him how to spray chemicals or apply fertilizers," Vogt said. "I'd put him on his own one morning, come back that afternoon, and someone else would be doing his job. It created a lot of problems with consistency. But that's the way they do things. I finally convinced them it would be better to rotate jobs on a weekly rather than a half-daily basis. It was a compromise and worked pretty well."

Getting 2-year-old Mariya in tournament shape was a difficult assignment considering that, despite their love of golf, the Japanese rarely maintain their courses up to U.S. standards, he said.

For example, most American courses mow greens six times and fairways three times a week, Vogt explained. In Japan, it's not unusual for fairways to get four inches high and roughs a foot or more before mowing, he added.

Vogt introduced more frequent mowings and new equipment, and corrected old ways of applying chemicals and fertilizers.

"They were spraying on chemicals an hour before it rained at Mariya," Vogt said. "They weren't environmentally conscious. And yet, the government is trying to ban pesticides and chemicals. It would be better to educate people in their proper use."

Glenmoor, which opened in July 1990, departed from the common Japanese practice of having two greens per hole, one for summer and the other for winter use. Vogt taught the crew how to maintain a single, year-round green. He also made Glenmoor one of the few Japanese courses to overseed tees and fairways with perennial ryegrass during the winter.

"Some courses may overseed the 9th and 18th holes for appearance sake," Vogt said. "But we were one of the first to overseed everywhere."

Outdated equipment, lack of irrigation systems and extensive use of hand labor also make it difficult to bring courses up to U.S. standards, Vogt said.

Additionally, few educational opportunities exist other than occasional seminars by visiting U.S. professors and the extensive reading materials made available to course employees. Golf course superintendent is not viewed as a high-profile job and, in many instances, probably pays less than the average waitress' salary, Vogt said.

"Japan is a good 10 to 15 years behind the United States in course maintenance," he said.

The low pay has generally discouraged Americans from accepting daily superintendent posts at golf courses, although many have worked in the more lucrative construction area.

"I don't see that changing," Vogt said. "But I do see Japanese superintendents becoming more professional as they make trips to the

They were spraying on chemicals an hour before it rained at Mariya. They weren't environmentally conscious. And yet, the government is trying to ban pesticides and chemicals. It would be better to educate people in their proper use.'

— Dennis Vogt

United States and get involved in other educational opportunities."

Vogt's current post, Royal Hawaiian, is the first Dye Designs' course in the island state. The 36-hole facility is located in an environ-

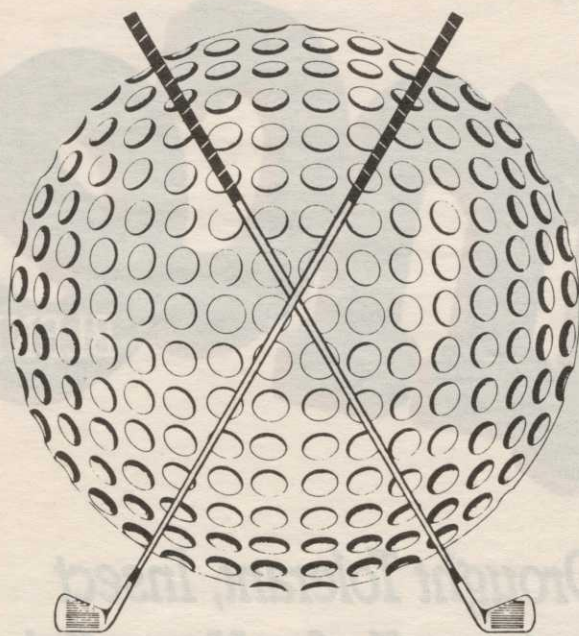
mentally sensitive valley on Oahu's windward side. Ancient artifacts, wetlands and natural streams must be preserved.

It is the state's first golf course to use Zoysia Japonica in the rough areas, Vogt said.

Once established, the zoysiagrass will not need watering during the dry season and will provide a contrast to the Bermudagrass fairways. Although parts of the course receive as much as 80 inches of rain annually, most of it falls from December through February.

"I'll spend most of my time here the next nine months," Vogt said in early February. "I'll also make sure construction specifications are being followed at other Dye courses throughout the Pacific. After that, I'd like to find a course that will be my base and travel just five or six days a month."

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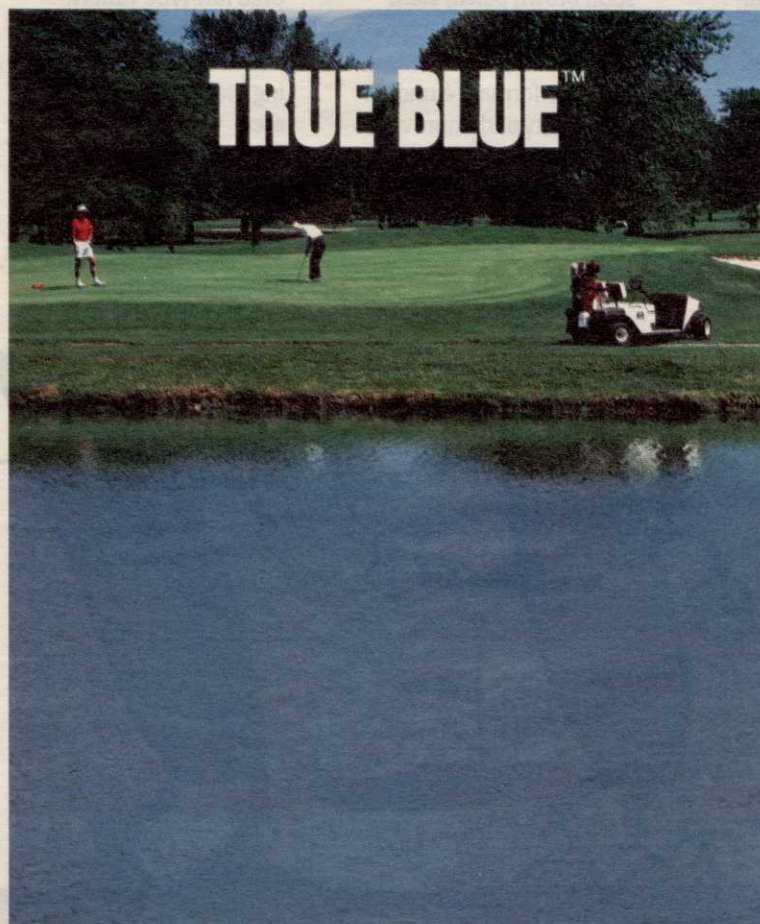
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