

Building a Master's Touch



Tony Brown takes over the reins at Wild Dunes

By J. BARRY MOTHES

CHARLESTON, S.C. — The trajectory of Tony Brown's career as a golf course superintendent resembles the sweet steady rise of a well-struck 3-iron.

After 3 1/2 years at highly-acclaimed Kiawah Island and then 7 1/2 years at the Seth Raynor-designed Country Club of Charleston, the 36-year-old Brown recently moved into the head superintendent's job at Wild Dunes, a 1,600-acre golf and residential retreat 15 miles north of Charleston in the midst of a very competitive market.

Brown, who started at Wild Dunes on Halloween, has inherited two 18-hole championship-caliber courses designed by Tom Fazio. The oldest, The Links Course, was an instant hit with critics when it opened in 1980. Reputedly one

of Fazio's personal favorites, it has been called "a combination of Scotland and the Caribbean" and "the ultimate in seaside golf in America."

The second, the Harbor Course, has struggled to gain the same popularity since opening in 1986. Both courses needed substantial renovation after the devastation wrought by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Fazio was so upset by the damage reports that he refused to go to the site personally until things had been cleaned up substantially. Fazio eventually supervised the construction of four new holes at the Harbor Course and the entire course was rerouted.

Brown grew up in rural North Augusta, S.C., and says he sort of wandered into superintendents work while attending Clemson University in South Carolina.

"I was enrolled in a Calculus class that was a pre-requisite for civil engineering and I was having some problems," he says. "I was at such a loss as to what to do. I picked up a course catalog and started considering other options and the course catalog

had a course on turf environment and golf course superintendent's work.

"I had grown up in a rural area and knew how to drive a tractor before I could swing a golf club. So I ended up enrolling in turf management and got a summer job at a small rural country club near Clemson. I've been at it ever since."

Brown pinpoints his first big break to 1984 when, just two years after graduation, he got an assistant superintendent's job at Kiawah. Before Kiawah he worked briefly at the Country Club of Spartanburg and Myrtle Beach National Golf Club.

"That (Kiawah) represented to me the type of facility that I wanted to be involved with," says Brown. "It was a dynamic work environment that demanded of me the efficient application of all the skills I had. It was a true challenge."

At Kiawah, Brown was first an assistant at the Marsh Point course then later moved to Turtle Point. He had moved on to the C.C. of Charleston by the time the Ryder Cup came to Kiawah's Ocean Course in 1991 — the year of Bernhard Langer's infamous missed putt which allowed the U.S. to retain the trophy. But Brown has plenty of firsthand experience with the intensified world of preparing and maintaining a course for championship play carried out under the magnified scrutiny of international television.

Every April for the past several years Brown has joined the support grounds staff at Augusta National for Masters week. In tight-lipped Masters tradition, Brown was reluctant to talk much about his experiences at the legendary Grand Slam event, other than mention he's pushed and driven a mower or two around.

"To visit that golf course for seven days in April during the Masters ... you tend to learn a lot about what you can accomplish given the resources and the

dedication that's required," he says. "It's a unique opportunity to view from the inside what has to be considered the premier operation in the industry."

What does Brown consider the secret of the Masters' success?

"It's an overall feeling, just witnessing the level of dedication of the entire full-time regular staff. A lot of the success of that tournament is that the committees have been working together on the same thing for so many years. They know exactly what they're doing."

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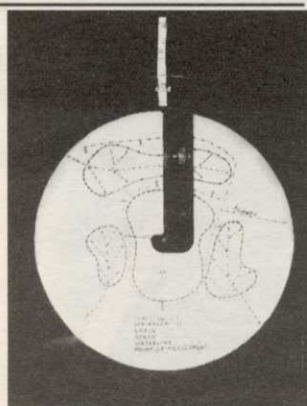
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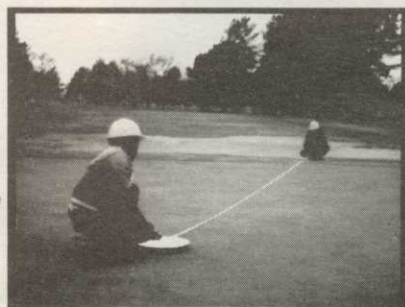
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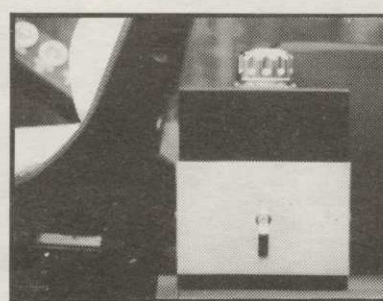


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By TERRY BUCHEN

GALENA, Ohio — John H. McConnell, when he conceived the Double Eagle Club here, always felt that everyone should have lots of fun, all the time. With this concept in mind, the club does not have portable tee markers on each teeing ground as players are allowed to tee off wherever they please.

To conform with the U.S. Golf Association Rules of Golf, there are two permanent tee marker/bronze yardage plaques on each teeing ground with a total of four different lengths on each hole, stretching to 5,300, 5760, 6,450

Having fun while conforming to marker rules

and 7,100 yards, respectively.

McConnell, on his many trips to Scotland, noticed that many of the golf courses would allow play from anywhere on the teeing ground, with the exception of "Medal Day," when one set of portable tee markers would be put out, on a typical course, one or two days a week.

Then scorecards would be turned in, just on those days, for handicap purposes!

Double Eagle does not put out portable tee markers routinely.

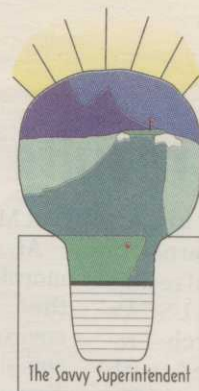
If a member or guest wants to turn in a score, they may tee off up to two club lengths behind the permanent yardage markers that are slightly below the turf so a tee mower can easily mow over them.

This concept has proven extremely popular, with the only downfall being that most humans are creatures of habit. As an example, some players will decide before the round begins that they will tee off five paces in front of each permanent yardage

plaque. But by the 3rd or 4th hole they start teeing off at the yardage plates or slightly behind.

To help scatter the traffic, a large boulder — near the 1st and 10th tees — has been fitted with a bronze plaque bearing this inscription:

"For your golfing enjoyment you may tee off wherever you like. Please avoid play from between the yardage plates. Have a good round."



This has helped scatter the divot traffic more and more. Some groups elect to have the team who won the previous hole select where the entire foursome will tee off on the next hole; or they all will

tee off far forward while playing into the wind and towards the rear with the wind at their back.

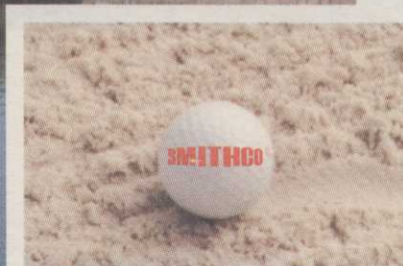
Golf course architects Tom Weiskopf and Jay Morrish were excited about this concept from the get-go, as it works quite well on this course, that opened in 1992. Only 4,000 rounds were played in 1994.

This idea is definitely a conversation piece as it always provides a friendly spirited debate about where to tee off from next!

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Brown at Dunes

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Back at Wild Dunes, Brown is fighting black layer problems on greens at both golf courses.

"It's related to poor quality irrigation water and heavy traffic," he said, "particularly on the greens of the Links course. We'll be working to alleviate that to whatever degree we can primarily through strategic aerifications and heavy top dressing and water quality issues."

Brown supervises a full-time staff of 21 spread over the two courses at two separate maintenance facilities. He has an assistant superintendent on each golf course, who each have a foreman and a crew of equipment operators. A senior technician and mechanic works at both courses. Brown adds about six people during the primary part of the growing season, which for Bermuda grass is May to September.

Another new natural maintenance task for Brown at Wild Dunes are the resort's namesake — acres of natural and manmade dunes.

"I'm hoping to provide a higher level of management in weed control and cultivation of the key desirable plants," said Brown. "They have such a tremendous visual impact. We feel that's one we can really enhance."

With his annual taste of the real big time each spring at Augusta National, Brown said he'd love the opportunity to prepare for a major event at Wild Dunes sometime soon. The last major event was the USGA Senior Amateur on the Links course in 1985, although the courses have been host to several state and regional amateur championships.

"I enjoy tournament preparation," he said. "It's another opportunity to be in a position where you're challenged and can feel a very focused accomplishment."