

Champions of years past vie for GCSAA honors

By J. BARRY MOTHES

ORLANDO — When superintendent Todd Barker of Fore Lakes Golf Course in Taylorsville, Utah, competes in the 1996 Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) Golf Championship next month, he'll try to do what only five of his peers have done before him: win back-to-back titles.

Barker, 42, won the 1995 GCSAA golf championship in Monterey, Calif., posting an im-

pressive 70-74=144 over the Bayonet and Poppy Hills courses. He was one of more than 100 superintendent/golfers with handicaps between 0 and 2.9 competing in the Championship Flight Division A.

"I'll give it a whirl and see what happens," said Barker, who had played in the 1989 Palm Springs and 1993 San Diego tournaments before winning the 1995 Monterey event. Interestingly, Barker's father, Vaughn, won the 1977 GCSAA tourney — the last time it

had been played in Monterey.

Barker entered last year's tournament apparently playing "the worst golf of my life." He can't say the same this time around. He was a medalist in the 1995 Utah state amateur tournament and advanced to the quarterfinal round of match play before losing.

Other back-to-back GCSAA golf winners over the past 45 tourneys, going back to 1938, include six-time champion Emil Masciocchi, Marcus List, Bob Martino, Dave

Powell and Roger Null.

The 52-year-old Null, a scratch player from Boone Valley Golf Club in Augusta, Mo., outside St. Louis, claimed the championship the last time the convention was held in Orlando, in 1990. Null, a 5-time qualifier for the U.S. Amateur, will not play in this year's tournament. He has recently moved from full-time superintendent at Boone Valley into the general manager's position.

"It's more for the superinten-

dents," said Null of the tourney, "even though I look after all our grounds. I've had my day in the sun. But it's a great tournament. It was a hard decision after playing every year since 1967."

This year's 46th GCSAA golf tournament will be held Feb. 5 and 6, at five different 18-hole courses in and around Walt Disney World's Contemporary Resort. Three of the five tournament courses — Eagle Pines (a Pete Dye design), Lake Buena Vista (designed by Joe Lee) and The Magnolia (also by Lee) — are located at the resort. The other two, Falcon's Fire (by Rees Jones) and MetroWest Country Club (a Robert Trent Jones Sr. design), are nearby.

Each of the flights will play the same two courses, although GCSAA tourney officials hadn't decided which flights would play which courses when Golf Course News went to press. Practice rounds are scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 3, and Sunday, Feb. 4, with a pre-tournament reception Sunday night. The Four-Ball Championship will be played on Sunday.

The official purpose of attending the annual GCSAA convention each February is to keep up with the fast-changing trends and technologies in golf course maintenance. But the GCSAA's annual two-day 36-hole golf tournament has a 46-year tradition and competitive spirit to match at least a top-flight amateur tourney. The tourney draws everyone from top-flight players with handicaps of 2.9 or less to players with handicaps in the mid- to high 20s.

Last year's tournament field included more than 450 GCSAA members and affiliates who were spread across 11 flights according to handicaps, including two seniors flights and a super seniors flight. As of early December, GCSAA officials had received more than 600 entries.

"The numbers are always high in Florida," said Lisa Wick, a press relations official with the GCSAA. "We'll probably get at least 650 golfers. We had a very big field the last time we were in Florida (1992 at Ponte Vedra Beach, won by Gary D. Bennett)."

Last year was also the first year the GCSAA's annual golf championship had an outside, commercial sponsor. Toro subsidized door prizes and trophies and is back again this year as a sponsor. Heading into last year's tournament, several superintendents had expressed concerns over the sponsorship, and whether it was appropriate for the tournament. But several players interviewed said that Toro's presence was welcome.

"They certainly made the tournament seem very professional," said Barker. "It took on a little more prestige."

Null, a three-time GCSAA golf champion, agreed, "We need the exposure and the corporate backing helps. Our business is growing."

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