

*Take it easy, take it easy,
Don't let the sound of your own wheels
drive you crazy.*

You could say that *Take It Easy*, the Eagles' hit song from the mid-1970s, was superintendent Don Sutton's theme song when he grew in Kinsale Golf Club last year and the year before.

Yes, we did say last year *and* the year before. Sutton had that long to grow in Kinsale, located in the booming suburbia on the northern edge of Columbus, Ohio. Hence, there wasn't the sound of Sutton's own bustling wheels screeching in his head reminding him to hurry up and get the course grown in so it could open, and the new cash register could be broken in.

That's not to say the grow-in didn't come with pressure. But it was sure nice to have a lot of time to grow in the Arthur Hills design, Sutton says.

Now Sutton realizes that the golf business, like many facets of American commerce, is driven by the almighty dollar. It's expensive to build a golf course, so it's vital to open it quickly to start making money.

The Kinsale project, however, goes against the "time is money" motto. Sutton's philosophy — with which it is difficult to contend — states that taking one's time on a massive project, such as building a golf course, also equates directly to the issue of accruing legal tender.

Sutton seeded Kinsale in October 2002. A lot of courses seeded around that time of year are expected to open the following spring. Kinsale targeted late May of this year to open. The course's key decision makers, including Sutton, thought it best to let the course ripen like a full-grown tomato before opening.

In May, Sutton opened the course to area superintendents to play in a qualifying round for the BASF Professional Turf-sponsored People vs. The Pros event. One could tell Sutton was proud to have his peers over to his house. He was confident that they would be impressed, too. Sutton said that day he was 99 percent satisfied with the course's appearance.

The 35-year-old Sutton says the decision makers didn't want to open Kinsale in a rush and have players playing on thin turf and hitting second shots from bad lies. They knew that

Taking the Time for a Grow-In

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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would be akin to someone buying a new car, taking it out for a spin and discovering that the air conditioning didn't work. (So much for going back to that dealership.)

"Our goal was to open in perfect condition and have people in awe of what we were offering," says Sutton, who has political science and turf degrees from The Ohio State University.

Who can argue with that shoot-for-the-stars thinking? In mid-May, the course's turf looked healthy and mature. Yes, Kinsale looked like a new golf course, what with newly planted trees and shimmering new cart paths, but the turf looked like it had been there awhile.

Competition is tough in Kinsale's market, and many of the rivals are fantastic golf courses. The area has the reputation for having some of the best maintained courses in the country, Sutton points out. So it made sense that Kinsale's goal was for its turf to *look* like the other golf courses' turf when it opened.

Kinsale's course and clubhouse cost \$25 million. Not many owners can sit on the opening of a golf course with that kind of jack invested. But Sutton says it was more important for the course's business to make a solid first impression than to open early, earn some money and take the chance on not making a good first impression because the turf was still in its infancy.

It was long-sighted thinking, and it sure made sense. It took the pressure off Sutton, who had the time to think twice about making decisions related to the grow-in.

But it wasn't like Sutton didn't feel *any* pressure. Remember, this is the golf course maintenance business in 2004. "If you're given a year and a half to do a grow-in, the course had better be perfect when it opens," Sutton declares.

OK. So it wasn't *that* easy.

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