

Movie Site Turns California Golf Course 'Sideways'

By Thomas Skernivitz, Managing Editor

Asked to pick his favorite flick of 2004, David Rosenstrauch gives two thumbs up to the only movie that really "hit home."

Certainly, then, the certified superintendent at River Course at the Alisal has to be heralding "Sideways." After all, the movie literally hit home — in this case Solvang, Calif., in the heart of Santa Barbara wine country. Two scenes were filmed at River Course, including one gut-buster that occurs on one of Rosenstrauch's fairways. The lead characters, played by Paul Giamatti and Thomas Hayden Church, having just had a group chip into them, return the favor and fire a few balls (and expletives) right back at 'em.

"The scene on the golf course was

pretty cool," Rosenstrauch says. "Those were some of the members from our private course that they used (as extras)."

Nevertheless, it's "Finding Neverland" over "Sideways" when Rosenstrauch is pressed to name his No. 1 movie. So much for any home-course advantage, which, in this case, included some terrific on-location food spreads and a set of free tickets to the premier.

"Personally, I thought 'Finding Neverland' was one of the best movies I've seen in the last 15 or 20 years," he says of the Johnny Depp film that details the origination of the fairy tale character Peter Pan. "I loved 'Neverland.' It hit home. The end got me right between my heart. When that little kid is looking at (Depp's character) with tears in his eyes, it struck me. Loved that movie. It was fantastic."

Not that "Sideways" was bad.

"I'd give it a B," Rosenstrauch, 52, says. "I thought it was pretty funny."

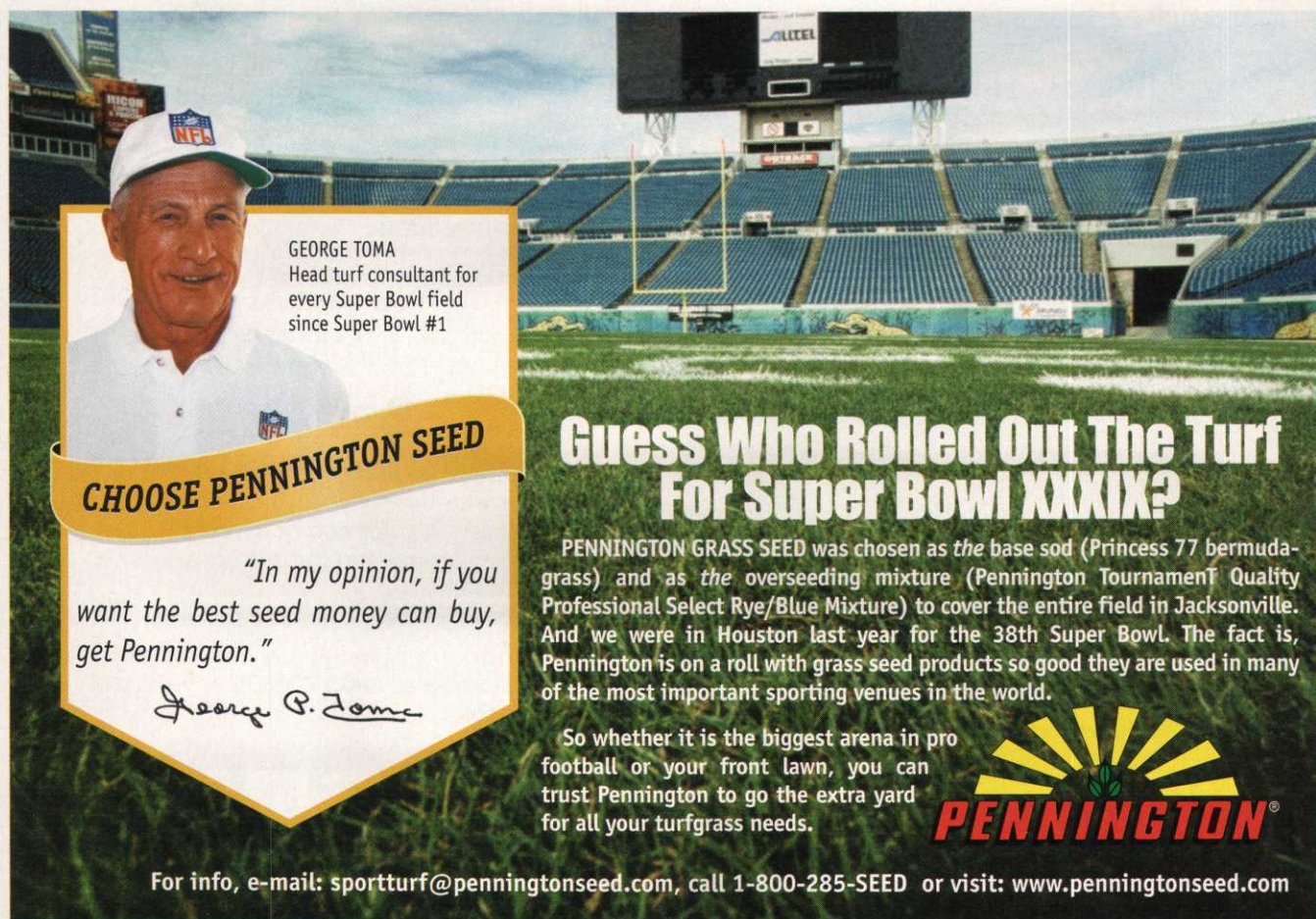
Things weren't so amusing at the time of the filming last May. The two golf scenes, which lasted less than five minutes combined on film, closed the course for the four days it took to shoot.

"Man, I could never be an actor. I'd be going out of my brain," Rosenstrauch says.

The good news is that tourism in the valley is booming. Not bad for a movie that Rosenstrauch says was considered "B-grade from the get-go."

"The River Course is just packed. A 5-hour round, 6-hour round is not uncommon now," Rosenstrauch says. "It's going to be a good year."

Spoken like a true wine-country superintendent.



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