



Britannia—The Short Course Long on Appeal

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

Why is the golf world focusing its attention on a golf course on a small Caribbean island? Like a phoenix, this course has risen from a rocky, tree-infested, sun-baked piece of island to become the world's first "short" course.

It is turning heads as well as stirring up debate on its future in the golf industry.



Mounds dominate the terrain at Britannia, reminiscent of Scottish courses, (top). \$20,000 in brick support work, (bottom) stabilizes water hazards on the course.

Looking out across the sun-drenched golf course, Gene Bates squints against the brightness, deepening the crow's feet in his already sun-tanned face.

In front of him sprawls Britannia—the current media darling among golf courses.

Britannia's fame is two-pronged—from its designer, Jack Nicklaus, and its design—a "short" golf course, laid out to take one quarter of the land of a traditional golf course and half the time to play with a specially-designed ball. The concept has stirred up con-

trovery and curiosity in the traditionally conservative golf industry.

Britannia, which opened last Christmas, is actually three courses superimposed on one 38-acre parcel of land; a 9 hole, 3,180-yard par 35 championship course; an 18-hole, 3,129 yard par 60 course and the 18-hole, 3,338 yard par 72 Cayman course. Three days a week the course is devoted to Cayman golf, three days a week to the championship layout and one day a week to executive golf.

The overall 88-acre, \$110 million resort, when completed, will boast a

240-room hotel, condos and golf course clubhouse.

Grand Cayman Island is a British Crown Colony, the largest of three Cayman Islands with a population of 18,000. This mecca for scuba divers and turtle lovers is located 480 miles south of Miami and 180 miles northwest of Jamaica. What was once Blackbeard's old haunt has evolved from the hub of pirateering in the 1800s to, what some conclude, is its 20th century counterpart—a tax shelter for numerous American and foreign corporations. Now, it adds



another tourist lure—the first “short” golf course.”

Bates, vice president of Golforce, Nicklaus' design operation, built Britannia and knew her long before she became a “star”. What stands before the builder's critical eye now is a far cry from the flat, scraggly Australian-pine-and-rock-infested hunk of land, baking under the British West Indies sun that confronted him a little more than a year ago.

“I remember thinking, ‘Good God, how do we build a golf course here?’” Bates recalls of his first look at the site.

But build a golf course he did—the first on Grand Cayman Island and the first of a new breed, the “short” golf course.

Bates had only a year to transform a forgotten piece of island into the embodiment of Nicklaus' and senior designer Bob Cupp's brainchild.

Cream of wheat

In November, 1983, crews began clearing the shrubs and pines that filled the area. Excavation was begun Dec. 1 with one large and one medium excavator and five dump trucks. (All equipment had to be shipped over from the States.) After down time around the Christmas season, it took until Feb. 15 to complete the excavation. Then, the arduous task of moving 110,000 cubic yards of dirt on only 40 acres to shape the course's features began.

“Actually, we ended up moving about 220,000 yards because of the type of material we were dealing with,” explains Bates. “We moved it once to dry it and then again to shape it.”

That material was a soupy “cream of wheat” consistency combination of coral, rocks, roots, limbs from an old mangrove swamp and lots of peat moss (so much peat, it still leaches tannic acid into the water hazards turning them a cinnamon color.)

“The terrain was actually one of our biggest challenges,” Bates says. The land was very unstable and at an elevation of about plus 4 above sea level. We had to give the property definition. When you walked across it, it was like Jello.”

The excavated swamp material was hauled up to dry, went through a cleaning and mixing process then hauled to shape the desired features, amounting to what resembles the mounding on Scottish courses. Bates, John Copeland and Jerry Cooper supervised the mounding which was planted with common bermuda, Argentine and Pensacola bermudagrass



Jimmie Griffin and Gene Bates—superintendent and builder confer.

and bahia and weeping lovegrass, chosen for their drought hardiness.

From the start, Bates had his work cut out for him. The original land survey done by the Caymanians was inaccurate. Stakes marking reference points for greens, tees and turning points were constantly knocked over by the local contractors.

“Understanding the local mentality was, at times, difficult,” concedes Bates. “You also have to be more precise building a short course because of the reduced parameters which added to the difficulty.”

Twelve Caymanians were used in the initial phases of the project. Americans were brought in to do the finishing work.

A chartered DC-6 flew in Tifgreen sprigs for the greens and Tifton 419 for the tees from Tifton, GA. The banks along the lakes are covered with 159,000 square feet of Tifton 419 sod.

After five days of planting the sprigs, another setback occurred. The course's \$400,000 reverse osmosis pumps used to purify the irrigation water broke.

“We lost half the tees we planted due to lack of water,” says Bates.

Water is a ghost that Britannia will probably never totally shake. Annual rainfall on Grand Cayman is about 65 inches a year. All the Caribbean islands are faced with water shortages. Britannia can use a minimum of 100,000 gallons a day. Five gallons of feed water going through the reverse osmosis system will yield one gallon of useable water which is then stored in a 500,000 gallon reservoir.

The reverse osmosis pumps will hopefully stave off any severe water problems. Cayman water, at \$17.58 a gallon, is cost prohibitive to use. When it does rain, the showers can be so intense for a short amount of time they cause flooding and puddling. Britannia's designers foresaw

this trouble spot as well as the fact the course is close to sea level, and designed a sophisticated drainage system to get the water off the course fast. There are even drains in the grassy swales. The course is currently irrigated with a Toro Vari-Time 4000 automatic, double-row, hydraulic valve and head system.

The common bermuda fairways were ready to be mowed within three weeks of planting. Sulfur and gypsum were used to combat salt and Ph problems.

Green size, on the average, is 3,500 square feet with the smallest of 1,900 feet. The Nicklaus' design characteristic of “movement” on the greens and deep bunkers is particularly evident at Britannia.

Starting from 4 feet, Bates created 12-foot banks along one of the main water hazards. More than \$20,000 in rock work stabilizes the banks of many of the waterways on the course.

Maintenance

Course superintendent Jimmie Griffin is a human cyclone. This hulk of a man seems to be everywhere at once, buzzing the course in his golf cart, inspecting work, having meetings, keeping Britannia's maintenance routine with the careful eye of a Swiss rail conductor.

“This course is a challenging, intriguing project. It's always the hardest being the ‘first’ of anything,” he says referring to Britannia's distinction as the first course on Grand Cayman. “Most of the locals here have never even seen a golf course let alone worked on one.”

He has a crew of nine Caymanians.

Greens and tees are his priority maintenance areas. The mounds on the course are not irrigated to save precious water. Where the water situation and labor present his two biggest headaches, turf disease problems give him few grey hairs.

“There's not much problem with diseases here. We take care of armyworms with Dursban and diazinon.”

Rotating the course among the three playing options creates more work in setting up the markers and flags every day. Monday, Wednesday and Friday are championship layout days, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday are Cayman golf days and Sunday is executive golf.

Shipping costs of an additional 27.5 percent inflates Griffin's \$600,000-a-year maintenance budget. All his Jacobsen equipment (walking greens mower, riding triplex and hydraulic



A Golf Ball With the Midas Touch?

It looks like a regular golf ball, more or less, and that's where the resemblance ends.

The Cayman ball, the result of two years and \$100,000 in research and development by Jack Nicklaus' MacGregor Golf Company, has made its debut to mixed reviews.

When everyone is trying to make the ball travel just a little bit farther, why would a ball that is designed to go only 125 yards when hit with a driver and weighs half of what a traditional ball weighs, merit the kind of attention the Cayman ball is getting?

First, a profile of the ball itself.

The Cayman ball is named after Grand Cayman Island in the British West Indies. It is on this Caribbean island that Jack Nicklaus built Britannia, the first "short" golf course designed to be played with the Cayman ball.

The Cayman ball has a bramble pattern covering made of thermoplastic material; the dimples being convex instead of concave. Both the traditional ball and Cayman are 1.68 inches in diameter, but the Cayman ball only weighs $\frac{2}{3}$ -ounce, with the traditional ball weighing in at 1.62 ounces. It's so light, it floats. (Britannia's pro Cary McGaughey's driving range is situated so the balls are driven into the North Sound. The balls float back to the shore and they're scooped up with a net.)

The ball is made by mixing a thermoplastic polymer with microscopic glass bubbles and a chemical blowing agent that is injected into the ball mold cavity.

The Cayman ball permits the

"short" game to be played in $\frac{1}{2}$ the time with $\frac{1}{4}$ the clubs on $\frac{1}{2}$ of the land of a traditional course.

McGaughey says a golfer can still enjoy the competitive factor and challenge of golf playing with the lighter ball.

"You find yourself starting to think more about the game. You have to look at it as enjoyment," McGaughey says.

Maurice Cullen, general manager of Britannia, which is owned by the Canadian Ellesmere Ltd.,

says those who have played the course "have been fascinated by the game."

"One should come and play the course and then pass judgement," he continues. "It is a marvelous teaching aid as well as a means to improve one's traditional game."

As general manager, Cullen sees the lost income from cart rentals (few people would need a cart to play the short course) being compensated for by more people being able to play the course on a

New Modified Golf Association Brings Short Game to the Fore

It was 30 years in the making, but worth the wait.

At least that's the way Florida golf course architect Bill Amick looks at it.

Amick is founder and president of the newly-formed American Modified Golf Association. Chartered in March, the non-profit association and its seven-member board of directors are dedicated to promoting and governing the short course golf concept, brought to the center of attention recently by Jack Nicklaus' new "short course," Britannia, on Grand Cayman Island and with the Cayman ball, designed to travel only half the distance of a traditional golf ball. The association is currently in a membership drive.

"We believe in what Jack is doing," says Amick.

But Amick's interest in the short

game started long before the Golden Bear's Britannia was even a glimmer in its architect's eye.

"Back in the '50s I had the privilege of working with Bill Diddel on a reduced yardage, less lively ball, but we never got one that was really satisfactory," explains Amick.

They tried again in the late '70s, but came up with nothing they felt could be marketed in mass quantities.

It wasn't until Nicklaus' MacGregor company introduced the MacGregor 50 and christened it the Cayman ball, that Amick decided the time had come to get together everyone interested in the short course concept.

A seminar was held in Daytona Beach in December of last year with about 45 attendees, including representatives from the USGA,

reel) have to be shipped from the States. He employs his own maintenance man.

One of the touted virtues of the Cayman course is that because of its size, the way the Cayman game is played and the ball that's used, it reduces maintenance. Griffin said he's noticed less divots because "with the Cayman ball, you don't hit down on the ball; it's more of a sweeping motion."

Future plans call for more trees and vegetation to fill out the planting scheme once the course stabilizes.

Is there a minimum acreage for Cayman golf courses?

"The minimum acreage depends on whether you want a nine or 18 hole configuration, the shape of the property, and the landscape; whether it has creeks, lakes or swamps. I would say 20 acres would be the minimum for a nine-hole Cayman course and 40 acres for an 18 hole course."

Even with the pitfalls of building a golf course on an island in the Caribbean, Bates is proud of the course and of the friendships and camaraderie that grew out of the experience.

"When we started to build it seemed as if everything that could go wrong did—no rain, equipment breakdowns, labor problems, but no one was willing to accept defeat. I'm very pleased with the way the course turned out, except the water situation," says Bates. "Bob Cupp and Jack Nicklaus are the geniuses that made this thing work. They're on the same wavelength. People have been talking about building a golf course here for years, but no one was willing to try it."

Until now.

given day. Those estimates range as high as 18 percent more players completing play per day because of the shortened playing time. Britannia's membership will be limited to condo owners, hotel guests and a few limited open memberships.

Interest in the short course concept, according to Gene Bates vice president of Golforce, Nicklaus' design operation, has been steady.

"We've had about 50 inquiries from Portland to Chicago (since Britannia opened)," he says. □

MacGregor Golf Company, Golden Bear Enterprises, golf course architects and others interested in the concept. A slate of officers was elected and three short course tournaments planned to introduce the game to the public. The first of these tournaments was held earlier this month at the Oceans golf course in Daytona Beach Shores which was a Par 3 modified to accommodate the Cayman game, with another scheduled for May 18 and the last on June 8. They will all be held in Florida.

"These tournaments, as well as introducing the game to the public, will also help us as an association, learn about the peculiarities of the game," says Amick.

Amick admits there are diehard golf purists who will never play the Cayman game.

"There will be a percentage that plays both and there will be some who will be happy to play the Cayman game exclusively because it's less intimidating."

Amick sees countless applications of the short game to Par 3 courses as well as municipal and school applications. He, personally, has had inquiries about the short course from all over the U.S. and even one from France.

"We're looking at long-term acceptance here," Amick says. "It will take awhile for people to 'find' the short game."

"It's very gratifying to me that Bill Diddel talked of this concept enthusiastically more than 30 years ago, and that it's happening today." □

The Cayman Controversy: The Emperor's New Clothes?

by Dr. Michael Hurdzan, president, American Society of Golf Course Architects

Let's put Cayman golf into perspective.

Is it a great idea, or just a passing novelty? As a golf course architect, I have some strong personal thoughts on the subject.

Before expressing my views, I would like to clearly state that the American Society of Golf Course Architects has no formal opinion on this concept, but it does strongly support any idea that helps this great game grow and flourish. An opinion poll of our members would be expected to vary as widely as one taken of any other golf-related professional organization on whether it is a good or bad idea.

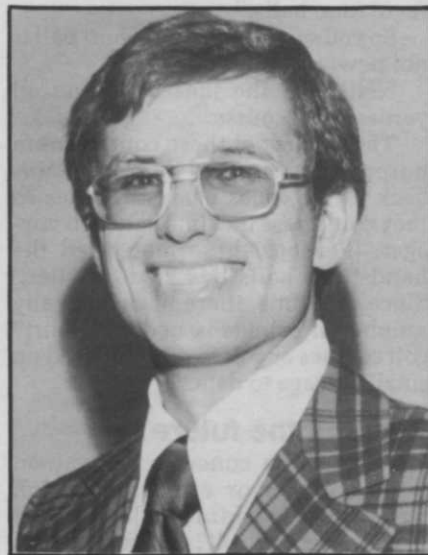
Putting things into perspective means looking at historical facts and present developments, then evaluating the relative value of an idea within the context of current society. The relative worth of an idea can only be arrived at by examining what the idea "is" and "is not" and the proper weighting of its positive and negative aspects.

Let's begin by examining what this "short ball" concept "is" and "is not." The concept of:

- a reduced distance ball is not new.
- a reduced yardage golf course is not new.
- short ball golf is probably not the wave of the future.
- Cayman golf is not golf under USGA rules.
- short ball golf may not be economically viable.

However, the concept:

- is good for golf because of the interest and publicity it has generated.
- is a good teaching tool.
- is an alternative to golf much like a form of miniature golf.
- is, in my opinion, a great publicity gimmick for Grand Cayman Island, home of Britannia, Jack Nicklaus'



Dr. Michael Hurdzan

short course.

Now, I will try to substantiate these facts and observations.

As I said earlier, the idea of a reduced distance golf ball is not new and originated when golf was still played with gutta percha golf balls. A small item in the Nov. 6, 1891 issue of Britain's *Golf* suggested using "hand-fives" balls that "... do not carry so far, while at the same time ... let you know when you made a clean drive. This is important for those whose space is limited, and it also enables the learner to do more driving with less walking."

A quick check of golf ball patents identified many patents for a "short" ball with the oldest being issued to a Francis Atkinson (Patent No. 456,920) of New York City in 1891; almost 100 years ago.

Some of the more notable patents since then have included balls made of sponge rubber (1922), yarn coverings (1929), and cork (1920). Of particular interest to me was Patent No. 2,364,955 issued in 1944 to the golf course architect William Diddel. Diddel, recently deceased, had earned a

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