

LANDSCAPE PROFILE

ONE OF A KIND

Unlike its south Florida neighbors, Jupiter Hills Golf Club features characteristics you might find on a northern course—from the trees to the bentgrass greens.

by Heide Aungst, associate editor

Standing in the middle of Jupiter Hills Golf Course, you'd never guess you were in Florida—unless the balmy breeze off the nearby intercoastal waterway gave it away.

Certainly the softly rolling hills and absence of palm trees would yield no clues.

The course, located just north of West Palm Beach, has been designed to resemble one of its northern cousins, right down to the trees—oaks, mahogany, and pine—scattered throughout the property.

"There's no course like it in the state of Florida," says superintendent Dick Herr.

It's the second-toughest course to get a chance to play on in the state, behind the very exclusive Seminole Country Club in North Palm Beach. But Seminole's superintendent even visited Jupiter Hills recently to get some hints on improving his course.

A Midwesterner himself, Herr likes Jupiter Hills' "northern" look with a tropical climate. That's just what the superintendent from Logansport, Ind., a small farming community north of Indianapolis, was looking for when he packed his bags and headed south.

Herr had visited the club briefly before deciding to move to Florida.

He was hired at Jupiter Hills as an assistant to the superintendent. Two months later, his boss left and Herr took over.

Jupiter Hills was known as a graveyard for superintendents under the reigns of owners Tom and George Fazio; rumors say that some 40 came and went before Herr. But Herr's easy-going manner has allowed him to survive—more than survive—for six years.

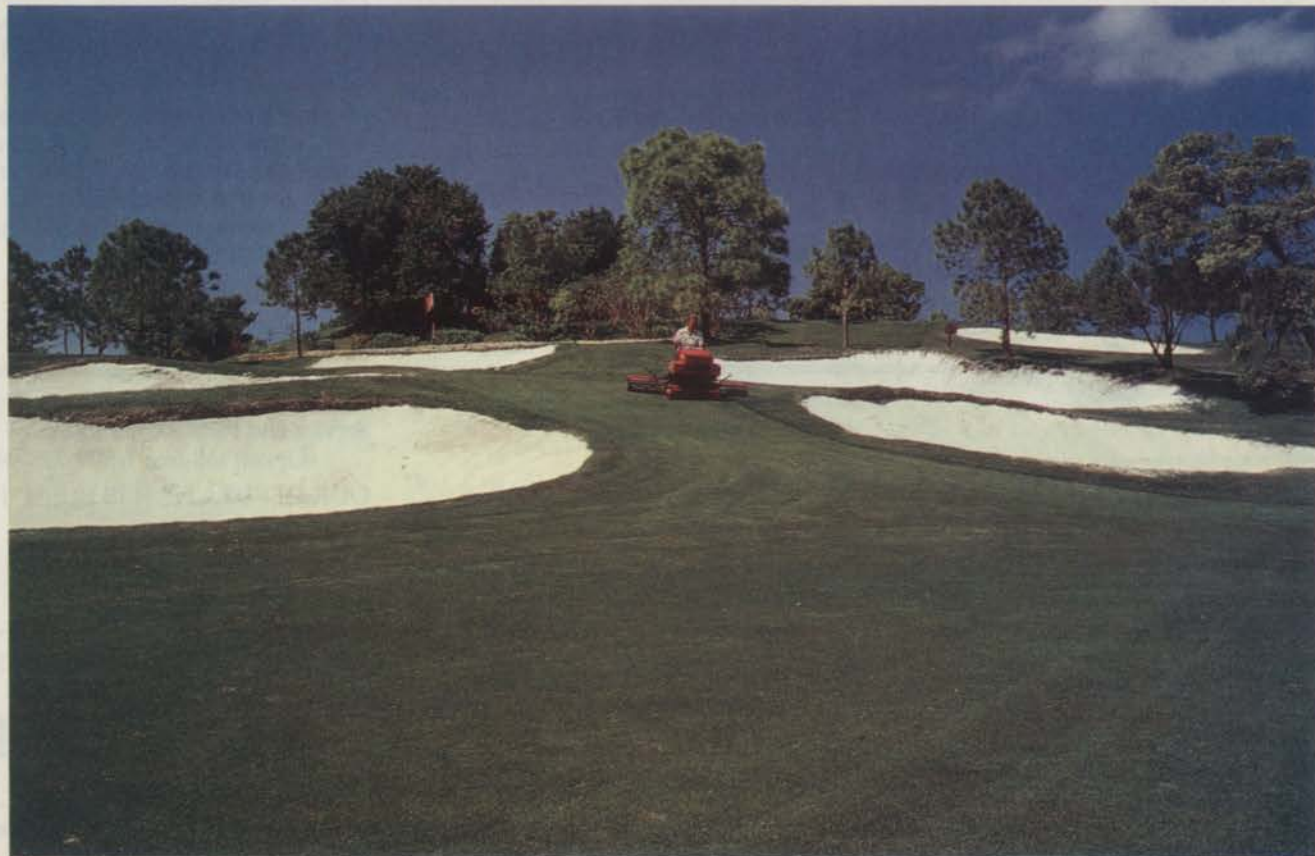
He has shaped the course to where it's one of the best in the country, No. 51, according to GOLF DIGEST. The U.S. Amateur will be played there during Labor Day weekend 1987, a first for the club.

A second course, Village Course, is built around a residential area.

The two courses were built on a sand bar (can you believe 200 sandtraps?) just off the ocean in 1970. Combined, the courses stretch 400 acres, 250 of which is irrigated. Herr is in the process of changing to year-round bentgrass greens.

A bentgrass overseeder

The usual process at area courses is to overseed each October with ryegrass or bentgrass. Herr uses



Jupiter Hills, built on a sandbar in 1970, features some 200 sand traps to test the golfers' mettle.

Penncross bentgrass to oversee the base of Tifdwarf bermudagrass. He says rye bounces and is too slow. "My members wouldn't stand still for it."

Then in April, the bent is removed, and the bermudagrass grows in.

The theory behind the switch is that bermudagrass will turn brown in the winter, so overseeding is needed to keep the green color. The bermudagrass supposedly overtakes the bent in the summer, thus the switch back to bermuda. Courses just a bit further south, in the Miami area, don't need to overseed since bermudagrass grows throughout the year.

But Herr figures if he can keep bentgrass green in a sweltering Indiana August, he can keep it green in Florida during any season. So far, his philosophy has worked.

He first pondered the idea three years ago and decided to watch the greens to see if the bent would grow stronger naturally without overseeding. Last year he started experimenting on the Village Course, and hopes this spring that he won't have to remove the bentgrass from the Hills Course. Not overseeding could save the course more than \$15,000 a year in seed and labor costs.

Jupiter's members are much happier with bent greens; it is softer, with a smooth and accurate putt. Herr's members can be fierce critics. One of his members is on the greens committee at the renowned Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaronek, N.Y.

Herr says the main reason other Florida supers don't use bentgrass is simply because they've been told it can't work. Many fear an invasion of pythium blight. But Herr says he hasn't had any problems with it.

"I don't syringe or use any special watering system," Herr explains. Though others insist that syringing is necessary on bentgrass to prevent pythium blight, Herr says someone would have to do a lot of talking to convince him of that.

No regulated watering system

In fact, he doesn't use a regulated watering system at all. Call it luck, but Herr insists that when he needs rain, it rains. When a green needs to be watered, he gives it just the right amount.

"You've just gotta know how much to use and when to use it," Herr says. "It only comes from experience. They're (greens) all



The green at No. 17 shows finely manicured bentgrass prospering under the hot Florida sun.

different; none are the same. It's like having 18 different babies on a golf course."

And he treats his course as any proud father would.

His crew hand-mows the greens to avoid leaving a pattern from riding mowers. They aerify once a year, around the first of July.

The fertilizer program is as individualized for each green as the watering program. Herr's independent thinking has even led him to break the norm on what type of fertilizer he uses.

When the course was built, a consultant recommended a fertilizer program. But when Herr arrived, he decided the course didn't look good and he'd have to mix his own.

Although he hesitates at revealing too many secrets, he will give out his fertilizer recipe: two bags of sulfate mixed with one bag of Milorganite.

When it rains, regular fertilizers will wash off and the lush green color can fade. But the organic sludge mixed in helps transfer the fertilizer to the roots.

Herr is a rare breed among superintendents. Also a golf pro, his extensive playing and teaching experience gives him a deeper insight into what his members want from a course.

A pro at 17

As a boy in Indiana, Herr bought his first golf club for \$10. He went out on a private course to play. The owner caught him and made a bargain: he could play for free if he caddied and worked on the course. Herr spent about four hours a day mowing greens and fairways, and the rest of his time playing the game. At 17, he turned pro.

But a twist of fate: that superintendent was killed in an automobile accident. Herr was offered the job, putting him face-to-face with the biggest decision of his life. To go on tour as a pro golfer, or

to become a superintendent?

The thought of living out of a suitcase turned Herr off, so he took over as superintendent.

He never went to college, but learned all his tricks through experience and a sixth sense. Whatever Dick Herr thinks will work usually does, despite what so-called experts tell him.

George Fazio was his best teacher, the same man other superintendents ran from. "He's a perfectionist. He'd find fault with every superintendent," Herr says. "I think a lot of him. He's one of the smartest men in golf I've ever known. I learned more off him in two years than I probably will the rest of my life on the golf course."

Herr won't hire college grads, either, unless they have a wealth of experience backing them up. He prefers to train his staff which fluctuates from 20 to 25. The crew works seven days a week.

"I built my crew," Herr says proudly. "We all learn together like a family."

The course has gone through very few design changes. About eight years ago, hole Nos. 7, 8 and 9 were moved to the Village Course, and three new holes were built on the Hills Course. No more major changes are anticipated. "I think now we're set. We'll let it age on its own," Herr says.

Strong turf

The course has matured quite a bit since Herr arrived. It used to be six inches of rain would go right through the "sugar" sand soil. Today, the turf has developed root systems which help to hold the water.

Strong turf throughout the course, along with new bentgrass greens, will keep Jupiter Hills in prime condition for the Amateur and in tip-top shape to meet Herr's own high standards.

"I love my course," he says...just like a gloating dad. **WT&T**