



Fairways at King's Island Golf Course have recently been converted from bluegrass to the more playable bentgrass.

FIT FOR A QUEEN

King's Island Golf Course is the home of the Ladies Professional Golf Association championship. The queens of golf treat the superintendent like a king—and vice versa.

It's a superintendent's dream, right? Just situate a golf course between a popular amusement park, the College Football Hall of Fame, and the center-court home of a Grand Prix tennis tournament. Then, as an added touch, arrange to have the LPGA stage its championship there each year.

Initially, practically everybody associated with the King's Island Amusement Park and the Jack Nicklaus Sports Center near Cincinnati, Ohio, thought it was time to sit back and watch the tee-off line wind down to the Ohio River. Superintendent John Hamilton admits it seemed logical to him, too.

On the contrary, however: the 14-year-old, 36-hole golf center has thrived in spite of the surrounding attractions, not because of them.

"We foresaw the scenario as dad

drops off mom and the kids at the amusement park and heads to the course for 18 holes," says Hamilton, whose 40-person staff maintains the grounds for all of the complex's facilities. "But we've observed the situation, and that's just not the case. We have our clientele and they have theirs."

In 1972, Kings Island owner Taft Broadcasting decided that a golf course would make a nice addition to the complex. Jack Nicklaus was just becoming intrigued by golf course design and management, and he teamed with community planner and golf course architect Desmond Muirhead in the design of two courses: the 18-hole Grizzley, a challenging tournament course; and the 18-hole Bruin, a shorter, recreational course.

Muirhead's influence manifests itself in long, multi-curved fairways

with large trees retained as natural hazards. Nicklaus' now-famous design style—sloping bunkers and rolling terrain—was already evident. Originally, the tees and greens were bentgrass, and the fairways were bluegrass. The fairways have now been converted to a more manageable, better-playing bentgrass.

The women come 'home'

In 1978, the Sports Center became home to the LPGA championship. Winners since then have included Nancy Lopez (1978 and 1985), Patty Sheehan (1983 and 1984), and Pat Bradley (1966). From the very beginning, the relationship between the LPGA and Hamilton has been based on mutual admiration.

"I think they're wonderful people," Hamilton says. "The organization and



The 7,500-seat stadium where the ATP championship has been played every year since 1979.

the golfers have been great to work with. We bend over backwards to accommodate them, but we do it because we want to."

And the LPGA has noticed. "They look forward to coming here," Hamilton says. "They've made comments to me that this is one of the best maintained courses and best organized tournaments on the tour."

A photo in Hamilton's office of an LPGA golfer giving him a peck on the cheek serves to underscore his description of the working relationship. The good feelings help to soothe Hamilton

when he realizes how much money the course loses every year at tournament time. "We close the course for six days before the tournament," he says. "At \$15,000 a day, we really don't recoup our losses through the publicity the tournament generates. It really is a privilege to have the championship here, but it's not a free privilege."

Enter the netters

In 1979, a 7,500-seat tennis stadium was added to the Sports Center for the Association of Tennis Professionals Championship. The winners list since

then includes John McEnroe and Mats Wilander, and attendance has been outstanding. But it's been far from a boon to the golf course.

"You could fire a cannon down the middle of a fairway during the tournament," Hamilton said. "Parking is tough, for one thing, but the biggest problem is the perception that the golf course is closed. We have to buck up our advertising to get some people on the course."

But Hamilton, his staff, and the rest of the management of the Sports Center have managed to get plenty of people on the course throughout its history. He cites two reasons: courses that can be everything to everyone; and the green, green grass that warms a golfers heart.

The flexibility of the golf center begins with the two contrasting courses. The Grizzley challenges even the pros, and the Bruin offers an easier alternative for families, novices or people with little time to spare. In addition, an extraordinary selection of tee and pin placements allows the courses to take on vastly different looks.

Flexibility is a necessity, Hamilton says, because 25 percent of the golf center's business is corporate outings, which bring along golfers of vastly diverse talents. "Grizzley has to be tough for the tournament and a little easier for outings," he explains.

Dumping the water

Hamilton attributes the quality of his turf to an extensive irrigation program and a tank-mix of two fungicides, a systemic and a contact. During the season, Hamilton has 750,000 gallons of water pumped onto the course each night, seven nights a week.

"I see it as preventive medicine," he says. "Keeping the microclimate (the six to 12 inches just above the turf) reasonably cool during the hot season can prevent a lot of grief with disease."

Hamilton's other preventive medicine is a tank mix of Bayleton and Daconil turf fungicides. Bayleton is a systemic fungicide and Daconil is a contact turf fungicide, which, combined, prevent "just about everything," he says. "Particularly dollar spot in this hot, humid environment."

The chemicals are applied every four weeks, but Hamilton suspects they would last longer. "I'm not going to take the chance on the courses, but I'd love to do a test plot on it," he says.

So what Hamilton doesn't see means the golfers are happy with what they do see—green, green grass. Happy enough, in fact, to play more than 40,000 rounds per year.

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