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## Westchase has new greens better-suited for Florida weather

By [Rodney Page](#), Times Staff Writer  
In print: Thursday, September 25, 2008

Westchase Golf Club in Tampa spent the past two summers overhauling its greens and par-3 tee boxes by replacing its Bermuda grass with paspalum, a grass more tolerant of salt and heat.



[RODNEY PAGE | Times]

TAMPA — Westchase Golf Club is back to full strength.

The course, off Linebaugh Avenue, was ambitiously overhauled the past two summers, a process that included converting all 18 greens and the tee boxes on all par 3s. The greens were stripped of their Bermuda grass and replaced with paspalum, a grass that is more tolerant of salt and heat.

Last summer Nos. 1-8, 17 and 18 got the new grass. The greens' original contour was kept, but a layer about 6 inches deep was scraped away, and sprigs of the new grass were put in place. Holes 9-16 were done this summer.

For three months each of the past two summers, golfers could play only nine holes. On Sept. 1, Westchase reopened all 18 holes with the new, greener grass.

"The lifespan of a green in Florida is generally about 15 years," Westchase general manager Clay Thomas said. "This paspalum is a new kind of grass that will withstand a lot of the weather we have in Florida. They did the same

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thing at Fox Hollow (in New Port Richey), and it's worked very well for them."

Fox Hollow's Bermuda greens started fading about four years ago. The course switched to SeaDwarf paspalum, and the decision paid off.

"It was a big gamble for us because nobody else around here had these kind of greens," Fox Hollow head professional Matt Cote said. "We went down to Naples and checked out the courses that had it, and we decided in the long run this was going to be best for us. It's the best thing we ever did. The greens are very green and healthy, and we can mow them down pretty low. They can get ridiculously fast if we want them to."

Paspalum

Bermuda is the main grass used on fairways and greens in Florida. But some courses are changing to paspalum. The official name of the turf used on the Westchase greens is SeaDwarf Seashore Paspalum.

The greens don't get burned by the summer sun as easily, and they don't require overseeding in the winter. Because of its extensive root system, paspalum is much more drought-tolerant than Bermuda. It also requires about half as much water and up to 75 percent less nitrogen, which means less runoff of nitrogen into surrounding lakes.

Paspalum also is highly salt-tolerant. Ordinary table salt can be used as an herbicide without damaging it.

Once the green is stripped of the old grass and graded to the correct elevation, a tractor puts sprigs of paspalum into the sand/peat mix. The sprigs then grow together over six to seven weeks. They are watered constantly.

"You really have to know what you're doing," Thomas said. "But once it comes in, it has this bright green look. It rolls just like the Bermuda; it just looks different."

#### Staying competitive

Thomas has been at Westchase since it opened in 1992. A trailer served as the pro shop, and the housing development that now surrounds the course was being built.

Westchase was one of the area's few daily fee courses, and golfers came from all over to play. But about four years later, a boom in nearby courses took tee times away from Westchase.

"There was a time from about 1996-2000 where there were about 18 new courses built in this area," Thomas said. "It used to be that this area was underserved. We would have our tee times filled every day during the peak season. This area isn't underserved anymore. You have to stay competitive."

The conversion at Westchase is also timely because it finishes a few months before the Super Bowl, which is Feb. 1 at Raymond James Stadium. Tee times will be at a premium at most bay area courses for the days leading up to the game, and getting the course in the best shape possible is a priority.

"We started this before we knew the Super Bowl was going to be in Tampa," Thomas said. "We had to do it anyway. But it does help to have an event like that in town. We're already getting calls from groups that want to play that week. Obviously, you want your course to be in the best shape during that time."

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#### Westchase by the numbers

**16** Lakes spread across the course

**\$48-\$59** Greens fee, Mon.-Thurs. before 3:30 p.m., and Fri. before 3:30 and Sat.-Sun. before 11:30 a.m., respectively, through Nov. 20

**63** Course record

**72/6,710** Par/yardage

**\$140** Greens fee during Super Bowl week

**213** Acres

**1992** Year opened

**\$24,000** Cost per green for the renovation

**\$432,000** Approximate overall renovation cost

**858,000** Approximate rounds played since the course opened

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