

Old Palm chooses Seashore Paspalum

MAGKNIFE FOR A HIGH QUALITY,

There are many aspects of Old Palm Golf Club that make it a unique addition to the south Florida golf market, but one of the most intriguing is the turf. The 18-hole private course in Palm Beach Gardens was grassed wall-to-wall with SeaDwarf Seashore Paspalum.

Course designer and Master's champion Raymond Floyd mentioned in an early planning meeting that some of the best greens he ever putted on were paspalum courses in Hawaii. He especially liked the reduced grain of this grass.

There was another reason the club chose paspalum. As a gold level member of Audubon International's Signature Program, Old Palm selected SeaDwarf because it is extremely environmentally friendly. The grass species requires low amounts of fertilizer and nitrogen and weeds can be treated with table salt. This saves time and money and helps the environment by putting fewer chemicals into the ecosystem. In addition, paspalum requires less water than Bermuda grass, can be irrigated with recycled water and has much less nitrogen runoff than many other turf grasses.



"We maintain tournament conditions every day."

Lee Bladen, superintendent

Water issues

Solving irrigation water issues was huge in construction of the course. Old Palm is located in a utility well field (a place where water is pulled from the ground to be turned into potable water; there are 19 wells on the property). The club can't dig any wells because it is in the utility company's cone of influence, and can only recharge its 15 lakes with reclaimed water.

The development is on 650 acres, and the contract for effluent water is 1 million gallons a day. To make sure all the water purchased is retained, the lakes had to be lined with plastic.

The next step was to develop a drainage system compatible with Audubon's certification requirements. All drainage goes through a filtration system of natural materials before it gets to the lakes. These areas are called phytozones, and are like saucers around the edges of drainage inlets. For example, water runoff from roads enters through an inlet pipe and is held up in the saucer. The rim is planted with aquatic vegetation that acts as the filter. Then the water goes into the lakes. The goal is to slow nutrient loading.



Different maintenance practices

Old Palm was developed by WCI Communities Inc., which has 16 golf/residential developments in Florida. All 18 holes were ready for play a year ago, and the clubhouse opened Dec. 10, 2005. The facility boasts a 33-acre private practice facility with a driving range, putting green and target green with bunkers. It also sports the latest digital swing analysis technology. Three dedicated practice

Old Palm Golf Club at-a-glance

Location: Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Type of course: Private

Number of holes: 18

Number of employees: 45

Type of grass: SeaDwarf
Seashore Paspalum

CONSISTENT CUT



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holes are modeled after actual holes on the course. There is even a legendary Scottish “bye hole,” or 19th hole for golfers to settle friendly wagers.

A landscape crew of 17, attached to the maintenance department, is responsible for residential lawns, boulevards, entranceways, waterfalls and other water features. All the grasses are a different species of paspalum, Sealsle 1, again because it takes less water to maintain.

Superintendent Lee Bladen came to Old

Palm to begin construction in November 2002. He spent most of his career maintaining Bermuda grass, but is very pleased to be working with paspalum.

“We’re among a handful of courses that are wall-to-wall paspalum,” he says. “It’s the greatest grass in the world. There are no issues with delineating areas or intrusion into putting surfaces because we have one grass. Awhile back Mr. Floyd came to me and said he wasn’t happy with the shape of No. 5

green. He wanted to pull one side in and mow out the back another 5 feet. I told him it would be no problem; just give me a couple of weeks to get the grass trained.”

According to Bladen, paspalum becomes just as dense as ultra-dwarf Bermuda grasses. However, it takes longer to train the blades to go upright. This is accomplished with an aggressive topdressing program. The staff topdresses on Mondays and mows with



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standard Jacobsen Tournament Cut-22s™ until Thursday. From Friday through Sunday, the TC-22s are equipped with Jacobsen's patented turf groomers.

"It takes a little more effort to get to our desired green speeds," he says. "You can putt on TifDwarf or TifEagle in eight to 10 weeks, but it takes paspalum longer because the blades want to lay down. We topdress so the blade is always looking for sunlight. As it becomes more upright, it gets denser and denser. It takes about a year to get the grass trained to be more upright and dense enough to eliminate grain and increase ball speed."

MAGKnife to the rescue

Aggressive sanding means bedknives have to be changed more often. Old Palm has been using MAGKnives™ since they were introduced more than two years ago.

"We change bedknives every time a mower goes out," Bladen says. "The MAGKnife really frees up our head technician. He's not spending hours replacing screw-type bedknives. In fact, we change bedknives like NASCAR changes tires. In some cases we've found that after mowing several greens the cut isn't the quality we're looking for. So, we change bedknives on the course, and the only way we could do that efficiently is with the MAGKnife."

Head technician Don Keith's charge is to make sure green speeds are consistently 9.5 to 10 feet. Height-of-cut ranges from .100 to .115 and greens are double

cut and rolled every day.

"The MAGKnife is extremely easy to work with," Keith says. "I have 169 reels, so whatever it takes to make my life easier is a good thing. For me, MAGKnife is the answer."

According to Keith, a high quality-of-cut with paspalum requires extremely sharp reels.

"Changing bedknives frequently is one good way to keep the quality-of-cut consistent," he says, "and there's less stress on the grass. And the only way to accomplish that is with the MAGKnife. It's critical that the bedknife is level across the entire length. MAGKnife magnets hold just as good as screw-on bedknives, but they are 10 times faster to change."

SLF-1880 provides high-quality fairway cut

The staff maintains 110 acres, including 4.5 acres of tees and 3.5 acres of greens. Fairways are cut at .400 and roughs kept at 2 inches.

Jacobsen's SLF-1880™ super-light fairway mower with 9-blade reels gives the course a greens mower quality-of-cut, and allows the staff to mow faster than with triplexes.

"The cut with the 1880 is exactly what I'm looking for," Bladen says. "We have grooming reels that we use once or twice a

month. I've been a proponent of turf grooming for seven years. Most grasses have a tendency to lay over, and grooming is the perfect way to get it to stand up."

The three-wheel-drive G-Plex™ triplex mower is the choice for approaches and surrounds.

"Mr. Floyd wants a lot of chipping areas on the green surrounds," Bladen says. "The G-Plex lets us achieve that without sacrificing quality-of-cut. It's very maneuverable and easy to work on."

The natural way

The goal at Old Palm is to limit chemical use. A great deal of effort is spent developing natural cures, such as balancing soil microbes to reduce fungicide applications.

"We try to build up the soil and keep healthy plants so they can withstand microorganisms," Bladen says. "We increase resistance to fungus by making the plant healthier through the use of microbes and liquid fertilizers to maintain a level that suppresses disease in the soil. We do everything we can to avoid just dumping chemicals to solve a problem."

Old Palm is fashioned after the great clubs of the turn of the century, with an ambiance designed to cultivate camaraderie and service to delight, with a full-time staff offering members every possible convenience.

"We pride ourselves in offering a lifestyle centered around the club," Bladen says. "We maintain very high standards on the golf course — tournament conditions every day — and have the best people in all departments. We want to be better than anything else in the area." **YC**



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Don Keith, head technician