

# GOLF IS BACK FOR 2016 OLYMPICS



**Compiled by Suz Trusty** from postings on the official website of the international Olympic organization, [www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org); the official website of Brazil's 2016 summer games, [www.Rio2016.com](http://www.Rio2016.com); the Bladerunner Farms website, [www.bladerunnerfarms.com](http://www.bladerunnerfarms.com); and interviews with David Doguet.

Golf is making a comeback at the 2016 Olympics—after a 112-year absence. The 18-hole Rio 2016 Olympic Golf Course, designed by American golf course architect Gil Hanse of Hanse Golf Course Design, based in Malvern, PA, is set to play host to many of the world's top players, the International Olympic Committee reports on [www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org).

Built entirely with private funding, the course, which includes facilities for 15,000 spectators, was constructed on a piece of reclaimed land in the Barra da Tijuca zone of Rio, not far from the main Olympic Park. The challenging course, which covers 970,000 m<sup>2</sup> (239.69 acres or 97 hectares), includes two artificial lakes and a host of other

features and obstacles that promise to bring the best out of players as they battle for Olympic gold.

David Doguet, president of Bladerunner Farms, says, “Zeon Zoysia was selected for the course’s fairways, tees and roughs—88 percent of the grassed area—to help Hanse and his team create the environmentally sustainable course that was the goal of the Rio 2016 organizers.”

According to Doguet, key factors in that decision were Zeon’s very low water and low fertilizer requirements; and its ability to stand up to heat, drought, insects and disease; coupled with its fine-texture and high-density that offers golfers a firm, fast, quality playing surface.

Zeon Zoysia was developed in Poteet, Texas, by Bladerunner Farms, the largest privately held zoysiagrass and buffalograss breeding and research facility in the world. Zeon is licensed by The Turfgrass Group, Doguet Ventures and Team Zoysia International.

The grass was grown in Rio for use on the golf course by Green Grass Brazil, the company owned by TPI member Marcelo Matte. Green Grass Brazil is a licensed sod producer of Zeon Zoysia and of SeaDwarf Seashore Paspalum, which was selected for the greens. SeaDwarf’s ability to tolerate the salty water used to irrigate the greens was a chief consideration in that decision.

“Natural grass will dominate the Olympics—there is no synthetic turf, except for field hockey—which is huge for the turfgrass industry,” Doguet says. “And TPI members were involved in every aspect of it. Marcelo Matte and his team at Green Grass Brazil did a tremendous job on the golf course. Owner Roberto Leal, and his team at Itograss, produced the turfgrass and, working together with Sod Solutions and local contractors, did great work at the stadiums and on the cross country equestrian course, as well as on the turfgrass landscaping of the boulevards and around the



Construction crews and the Green Grass Brazil turfgrass installation team worked side by side in much of the course development.

buildings. (For details on the Itogress projects, see “Encore Performance Plus—Worthy of a Celebration,” pages 18-21.)

## The Process

Matte began growing the turfgrass in January of 2013 to develop a large enough inventory to quickly plant the golf course when construction allowed. In all, Green Grass Brazil produced between 35 to 40 hectares (85 to 100 acres) of turfgrass for the 18-hole course. Working in partnership with David Doguet, they developed the most effective growing regime for production that could also be applied once the turfgrass was installed on the course.

Neil Cleverly was hired as golf course superintendent in May of 2013. He'd handled new course construction in remote areas before, including in Egypt and the Dominican Republic, but Rio was a greater challenge. Not only would he need to find and train a crew, but there was no local or regional source for everyday golf course maintenance items or specialty equipment. It all had to come from overseas. Tracking down what he needed—and arranging for it to arrive at the course when he needed it—was a constant factor throughout the construction, turfgrass installation and grow-in stages.

Matte also spearheaded the installation of the turfgrass on every playing surface of the course. Planting the grass from the sod farm onto the golf course playing surfaces began in May 2014, with 20 staff members allocated to the project. Matte used a combination of big rolls, slabs and sprigs to install the Zeon Zoysia. Only sprigging was used for the SeaDwarf Seashore Paspalum on the greens.

Hanse, Matte and Cleverly proved the power of resourcefulness and the strength of their partnership in tackling whatever was needed to get the job done.

“When we build a golf facility in the U.S.A., we have the money, the equipment, the experienced crew,” says Doguet. “Neil had to assemble everything and then serve as trainer. Marcelo bent over backwards in his service to this site—the money he spent, the number of people he employed, the hours dedicated to making sure all the pieces fit together—it’s a great testament to his professionalism and commitment. When I saw what they had to go through to create this course, it made me appreciate even more what they accomplished.”

Doguet also points to the incredible comradery within the “TPI family.” He says, “I was in Brazil nearly four months during this two year process, and the hospitality shown by Marcelo and his staff the entire time was also just amazing. They were there to help, no matter what. They treated us like royalty.”

## Testing the Course

The Olympic Golf Course hosted its first competition March 8th, allowing organizers to test operations and train volunteers. It ended up being a Brazilian affair, with nine of their top men and women golfers playing in a four-hour tournament. Brazil, as the host country, gets a slot in the Games for one man and one woman. They have until July, when the selection is made, to earn that spot.

Doguet, who attended, notes superintendent Cleverly did an outstanding job, preparing for and during the event. “I was surprised to see so many golf associations, media personnel and volunteers,” he says. “There will be hundreds more for the Games. Neil is bringing in 50 superintendents from around the world to assist his staff. The course got rave reviews from the players and from the officials. And, even better, they were all talking about how great the grass was.”

It was just a taste of what’s to come

with the Olympic Games when 60 men and 60 women will compete in their 72-hole events. The men’s tournament is scheduled for August 11th through the 14th; the women’s from August 17th through the 20th. With the practice rounds, that’s two weeks on the course.

The Brazilian Golf Confederation (CBG) will be responsible for the course up to May 2016, when it will be handed over to the Rio 2016 Organizing Committee to make the final preparations for the Olympic tournament.

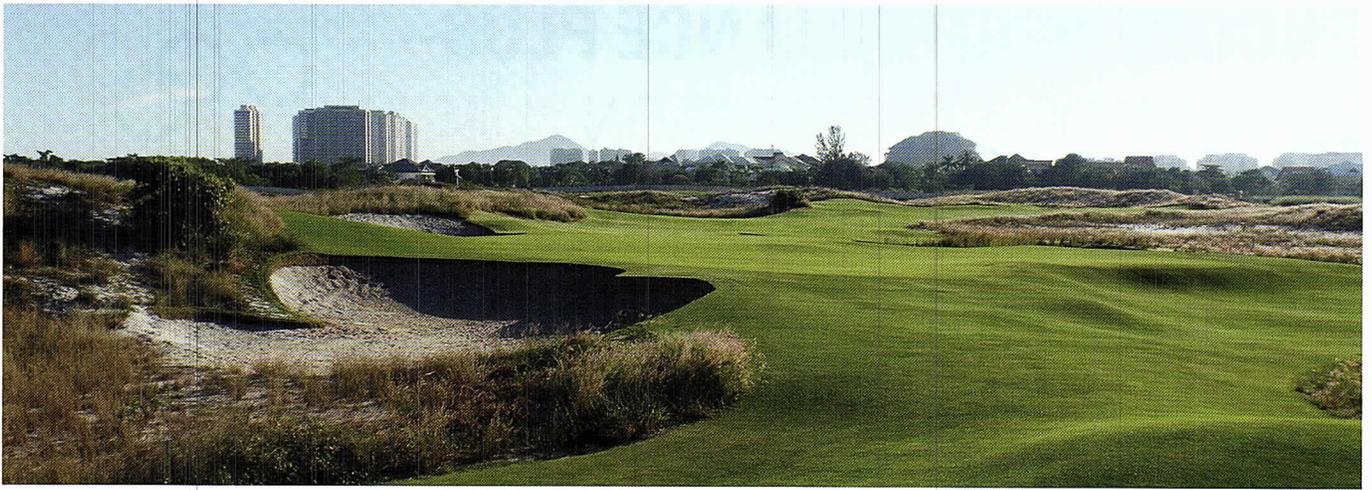
## The Golf Channel Documentary

Doguet met Frank Nobile, lead analyst for the Golf Channel’s PGA TOUR coverage, at the testing event. He’d observed how Nobile’s excitement ramped up once he was immersed in the experience, and how that reaction seemed universal. Then he learned the Golf Channel would be making a documentary on building the course.

At first they were focused only on the construction, but with so many people praising the grass they keyed into it, too. Doguet says, “It was intriguing for them to learn that the grass came from Texas, a two-foot by two-foot slab of sod shipped to Rio in a small



The leadership team: (from left to right) golf course architect, Gil Hanse; owner of Green Grass Brazil, Marcelo Matte; president of Bladerunner Farms, David Doguet; and golf course superintendent, Neil Cleverly.



The Olympic Golf Course is ready for play. Let the Games begin!

box, and from that it grew to become the turfgrass for all the fairways, tees and roughs of the Olympic course. So, they'll start with the architect, then the superintendent and work their way down to the grass, but at least part of the documentary will be about the turfgrass."

With this documentary, all those who personally participate in the 2016 Olympics, and the anticipated 2.5 billion viewers devoting screen time to the games, Doguet says, "This is going to be the most talked-about golf course in the world." The potential impact for natural grass is enormous.

### An Environmental Plus

The following information is taken from a post on the official website of the 2016 Olympics, [www.Rio2016.com](http://www.Rio2016.com). According to an expert report released on February 26, 2016, by the State of Rio de Janeiro's Department of Justice, the construction of the Olympic Golf Course in Barra da Tijuca has contributed to the growth of local vegetation in the Marapendi area. The inspection was carried out in December of 2015 at the request of a civil lawsuit filed by state prosecutors who questioned the environmental impacts of the project, and involved prosecutors, legal advisors and environmental specialists. The Rio 2016 Organizing Committee has monitored the changes in the region since the beginning of the work in 2013.

Approximately 80 percent of the total area was degraded due to sand

extraction activities and the deposit of cement. "The disfigurement of the natural environment that happened in the 80s and 90s led to an extensive area with no vegetation," reads the report.

Among the environmental benefits in the report is the 167% increase in vegetation, which led to a "positive cycle for fauna development." The report also indicates that 263 species are found in the area now—before the construction there were only 118 species. The study also points out that the green protected areas at the margins of Lagoa de Marapendi were not affected by the construction of the golf course.

"As it marks the return of golf to the Olympic Games after over a century of absence, this course represents the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the sport. It will enable Rio to host important events in the international calendar and it will be an example of sustainability and preservation of an environmentally protected area," said Carlos Arthur Nuzman, president of Rio 2016.

### Looking Ahead

After the Games, the course will be jointly administered by the Brazilian Golf Federation (CBG) and Rio's city government, and will be redeployed as a public facility for a minimum of 20 years. Previously, Rio de Janeiro had only two private courses. "This will be the biggest park in the city,"

said Rio mayor Eduardo Paes. "Our aim is to get families and children interested in golf and help grow the sport in Brazil." As well as an asset for social projects, the course will provide a space for top-level players and other golf-related professionals to work and train, and serve as a top-level competition venue and an attraction for golf-related tourism.

Doguet says, "Because so much planning and effort was directed to sustainability, they should be able to maintain the course to Olympic-level standards. Then, having seen this great course in this amazingly-beautiful setting during the Olympics, playing here will be on every golfer's bucket list. The impact to Rio's tourism dollars will be huge."

And it could accomplish even more. As Dr. Frank Rossi, associate professor in the Department of Horticulture at Cornell University, who served as a consulting agronomist on the project, said, "During the Olympics, the whole world will see that it's possible to design a course that's challenging for professionals, playable for amateurs, yet with less environmental impact." This course could provide the opportunity not only to influence the public's perception of golf courses—but also its perception of natural turfgrass.

Suz Trusty is co-editor of *Turf News*.

All photos courtesy of David Doguet.

