

ACE Group Classic moving to The Quarry for 2010

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NAPLES — For the third time in three years, ACE had to find a new place for its Champions Tour golf tournament.

February's ACE Group Classic will not stay at TPC Treviso Bay for a second year, instead it will move to The Quarry, located east of Interstate 75 on Immokalee Road.

The announcement comes a year and two days after the tournament, which will be Feb. 8-14, moved from Quail West to Treviso Bay.

Why the move? Tournament director Jason Camp pointed to delays in building Treviso Bay's infrastructure, in particular the clubhouse.

"They helped us out last year when we needed to make a move from Quail West," Camp said. "For the 2010 tournament, it's best for the tournament to go to The Quarry ... and let the TPC finish its infrastructure. We would certainly look for a return to the TPC in the future."

Camp termed the ending of the relationship with Treviso Bay for 2010 was "mutually agreed."

"We talked about it, and it was best for the tournament and best for them to table it for a little while," Camp said.

"Overall, it was a great experience," said Sanjay Kuttemperoor, president of VK Development, Inc., the developer of Treviso Bay. "The economic downturn has had severe impacts, globally, nationally, and in particular the real estate world. We took a step back earlier this year to re-evaluate our amenity program. One of the important factors for the tournament was the opening of the clubhouse. Since we put that on hold, the tournament decided for a lot of understandable reasons to move for 2010. It made complete sense. We were in complete agreement."

The \$1.6-million tournament's contract with ACE Group ends after the 2010 event -- ACE renewed for one year on May 1. Camp said negotiations are ongoing for another extension. This was the first time since becoming title sponsor in 1999 that ACE Group

didn't have a three-year contract. Camp said The Quarry would be interested in hosting the tournament beyond 2010.

"It's a great opportunity for us," said Doug Reed, General Manager, and Vice President of Golf & Club Operations for Coral Hospitality, the Naples-based company that manages the golf operations at The Quarry on behalf of Pulte Homes, Inc. "The golf course, some of the tour players have been here and everything, and really liked the golf course. The Quarry's not a golf course that a lot of people know a lot about because it's fairly new."

When the move to Treviso Bay was announced, Camp and others said they had hoped to be there a long time. Tournament Players Clubs or TPCs are designed to host professional tour events, and the PGA Tour frequently has a stake in the ownership of the club or the golf course; it's the golf course, in the case of Treviso Bay. The full layout, designed by Arthur Hills with Champions Tour player Hal Sutton as a consultant, did not open until Dec. 2.

Roughly two months later, Loren Roberts won the 2009 tournament with a birdie on the final hole. Some players expressed some disappointment with certain elements of the new course's layout. Balls frequently landed in what appeared to be safe places, but due to mounding and the lack of rough, sometimes rolled down into the water. The location of some bunkering also was brought up, but overall the players seemed to give the course high marks, with an eye toward its potential as it matured.

Speculation on a drop in attendance because of the move farther south in the area was just that. A record 110,000 fans attended -- in the years previous tournament attendance topped or hovered around 100,000: 102,700 in 2008, 103,800 in 2007 (both at Quail West), and 99,300 in 2006 (the last of five years at The Club at TwinEagles).

"At the end of the day, logistically, the property, because the amenities have not moved forward due to the economic situation in Naples, it just didn't make sense for the developer to move ahead at this point," said John Huggins, senior vice president for operations for Tournament Players Clubs. "... We're just going to have to wait and see how the economy allows the property to be completed."

"We've never experienced anything like this," Huggins added, when asked if there was a comparable situation. "It's just really bad timing."

While Treviso Bay's clubhouse was not originally scheduled to be completed until the fall of 2010, tournament officials and those from Treviso Bay had expressed hope that it could be used in some manner for the 2010 tournament.

"With having to build a number of temporary facilities, it was certainly a large expense," Camp said. "... We needed to do what's best for the tournament and best for the charities involved."

Kuttemperoor said Treviso Bay is looking at some other options with its clubhouse, which was originally designed to be 74,000 square feet.

"We're obviously waiting to see what and how the overall economy reacts," Kuttemperoor said.

"Even last year, we were really just in the beginning stages of our buildup process," he added. "How the buildup unfolds is going to be largely dependent on the overall economic conditions."

Camp said that talk of looking into a new venue came about three months ago. The ACE Group of Companies, the tournament's title sponsor, and the PGA Tour have been on board throughout the process, Camp said.

Camp said the tournament looked at The Quarry, designed by noted architects Michael Hurdzan and Dana Fry, a year ago when the move from Quail West was occurring. So when the decision was made to look at other venues, he had an idea of what the facility was like.

Tour officials made their last site visit on Nov. 9. Hurdzan and Fry designed Naples National Golf Club, as well as The Plantation in Fort Myers, and Fry was the main architect at Calusa Pines Golf Club, the only course in Southwest Florida on Golf Magazine's and Golf Digest's respective national rankings lists.

"It's a great facility with a good clubhouse," Camp said. "I think from a competitive standpoint, inside the ropes, it's going to be great for the Champions Tour."

"Here you've got a tour event that's 2 1/2, 3 months away and everybody's looking at the golf course and saying we're comfortable with having a golf course that is capable of hosting some of the best players in the world to play in a Champions Tour event," Reed said. "I think that means a lot. I think a lot of golf courses, it would be difficult to do that on such short notice."

The Quarry does present some other challenges. The nines are non-returning, meaning No. 9 doesn't end near the clubhouse. Camp said the tour has agreed for all players to tee off No. 1 each of the three tournament days to help deal with that.

"We're just working on finalizing the footprint of our buildout," he said.

Camp said included in the club's amenities is a Beach Club, featuring a white sand beach, lap pool and recreational pool. The Quarry, built on the site of an old limestone quarry, also has a pair of lakes, including the 320-acre Stone Lake. The course opened in January 2007.

"What we're going to be able to set up over at the Beach Club will be truly something we've never had before," Camp said.

Public parking has yet to be finalized, but Camp is attempting to get all parking on site.



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