

Decisions get tougher toward the end

By [Joel Zuckerman](#) from the Bluffton Today



Editor's note: Today continues Vagabond Golfer Joel Zuckerman's examination of the best 18 holes to play in the greater Bluffton area. Island courses are excluded from consideration, and Zuckerman's list will include his thoughts on the overall design beauty and thrill of playing the hole. While not necessarily the 18 hardest holes, there are definitely elevated degrees of difficulty across his list.

It's not getting any easier as we head down the homestretch here with Bluffton's Best18Holes. Consider this: In the first 16 iterations of the series, I was choosing a single hole out of 18. But in this penultimate column, there are 27 separate choices under consideration, the sum total of golf holes at underrated, understated Callawassie Island, about five or so miles north of U.S. 278 in the town of Okatie.

This trio of nines is early work by celebrated architect Tom Fazio, but the courses were recently refurbished in totality.

Two of the nines (Magnolia and Palmetto) were shut down in spring of 2008, and the third nine (Dogwood) was completely renovated during the summer just past. There were changes made across the board to the property—lengthening, pruning, clearing, regrassing, etc, but the single most significant change are the newly added green contours which now make putting a real adventure.

Though the membership was inconvenienced during the five-month closures over the two year renovation period, ultimately the feedback on all the changes has been very positive, reflected in the comments of both members and their guests.

While the Palmetto nine is completely inland, the Dogwood and Magnolia nines offer the stunning marsh-side scenery heading down the stretch. One of the best examples of such is the par-5 8th at Magnolia, which gets the nod for this week's Best Of. As a longtime member explains, "the drive is tough, the second shot tougher than that, and the approach shot the toughest of them all." It's 550 from the blues, and a gargantuan 600- plus yards from the tips, so cutting the corner by launching up and over the lagoon on the inside of the dogleg left makes sense, if one can pull this grip-tightening shot off. But even if the drive finds position 'A,' the golfer is still facing a tough second, with water bracketing the entire left side of the fairway, and a thick copse of oak trees causing a nuisance for balls drifting too far right. The approach is relatively straightforward, though a massive bunker guards the right side of the green, and the expansive marshland behind the hole can sap one's concentration.

Jeff Spencer has been at Callawassie's helm for a year-and-a-half, having come over after a three-and-a-half year stint at Colleton River. "It's all you want from the back tees, even from the blue tees. Cutting the corner with the tee shot is a gutsy play, but doesn't provide a huge advantage, as the second shot is still tough. Playing the tee shot safely out towards the right makes just as much sense, because with a big second shot, you are still in position to reach the green with your third. There are a couple of different ways to play the hole, but any way you look at it, it's a tough golf hole."

THE BEST 18 SO FAR

Aug. 1: 14th hole, May River Golf Club, Palmetto Bluff
Aug. 8: Fourth hole, Chechessee Creek Club, Okatie
Aug. 15: Ninth hole, Eagle's Pointe Golf Club, Bluffton
Aug. 22: Seventh hole, Old South Golf Links, Bluffton
Aug. 29: 15th hole, Colleton River Dye Course, Bluffton
Sept. 5: 11th hole, Pinecrest Golf Club, Bluffton
Sept. 12: 11th hole, Rose Hill Golf Club, Bluffton
Sept. 19: 16th hole, Colleton River Nicklaus Course, Bluffton
Sept. 26: Third hole, Moss Creek Plantation North Course, Bluffton
Oct. 10: Ninth hole, Crescent Pointe Golf Club, Bluffton
Oct. 17: Seventh hole, Tradition National Golf Club, Hardeeville
Oct. 24: 17th hole, Belfair West Course, Bluffton
Oct. 31: 13th hole, Oldfield Golf Club, Okatie
Nov. 7: 11th hole, Berkeley Hall North Course, Bluffton
Nov. 14: Fifth hole, Belfair East Course, Bluffton
Nov. 21: Sixth hole, Berkeley Hall South Course, Bluffton
Nov. 28: Eighth hole, Callawassie Island Magnolia Course, Okatie