Recovering from Hugo

Hurricane struck Carolina courses in random fashion

BY TOMMY BRASWELL

With Staff Reports

Some greenskeeping and tree-company crews in the Carolinas continue to clean up golf courses that, in the wake of Hurricane Hugo’s 135-mph winds, looked like a giant game of Pick Up Sticks.

Of the $4 billion trail of destruction Hurricane Hugo left as it hammered the region from Charleston, S.C., to Charlotte, N.C., on Sept. 21, millions of dollars of damage were done to golf courses.

Courses from Charleston to the Grand Strand as well as some 200 miles inland were closed — for days, weeks, months, and some for as long as a year — because of the devastation.

Continued on page 34

Europe opens arms to golf experts

BY JAN BELJAN

Countries from Spain to The Netherlands and from Sweden to the United Kingdom are hoping to go “golf crazy,” yet are engulfed in the same mass of red tape that faces golf course builders in the United States, according to experts speaking at Golf Course Europe ‘89.

The exhibition and conference in Wiesbaden, West Germany, in October drew some of the top names in the golf industry from around the globe, and in concert they agreed the opportunities in Europe are great.

“...There is a pent-up demand for golf in Europe,” said Michael Redd, president of Team Plan, Inc., in Florida. “The opportunities for American professionals are great, but along with them come some constraints — elaborate language, time, working conditions...”

Continued on page 28

Supers' needs foster inventions

By PETER BLAIS

A Florida company has developed a long-sought solution to the problem of fairway grass encroaching into greens and tees. Boca Raton-based DomiTTrimmer Inc. has installed the $50,000 system on an experimental basis on four Southern courses.

Despite the hefty price tag, company officials claim Greens Encroachment will pay for itself in labor savings within two years.

"It will really be a big thing for the golf course industry in the coming years. It's something we've needed very badly and should become very popular,” said Wilmington (Del.) Country Club's Paul Latshaw, one of the country's best-known superintendents.

The Greens Encroachment product is the brainchild and the latest in a string of labor-saving turf equipment.”

Continued on page 35
Hugo

Continued from page 1

left by the Force 4 hurricane. Hundreds of 100-year-old pine trees like toothpicks, uprooted many majestic oaks and left its own indelible imprint on one of the country’s major golf destinations.

One course received an estimate of more than $300,000 for tree removal alone. High tidal surges, reaching as high as 30 feet, cut their own trail through some of the golf courses, exposing irrigation lines, undermining cart paths, leaving a 32-foot boat perched on a green, washing away dunes and removing part of the 17th green and tee at one course with surgical precision. Some of the millions of trees standing are “in shock” and it may be a year before golf course superintendents will know if those trees will indeed survive the root damage and possible future disease infesting their broken limbs.

Much of Hurricane Hugo’s fury hit two Tom Fazio-designed courses at Wild Dunes on the Isle of Palms, just a few miles north of historic Charleston. The seaside 17th and 18th holes of the Links Course were severely damaged, and there still remains some question as to whether the holes can be rebuilt because of the state’s recent enactment of Beachfront Management Act.

Already, Fazio has visited the course to survey the damage and begin the process of replanting.

The damage estimate on Wild Dunes alone may run more than $2 million. The irrigation system received severe damage. Pump stations were submerged in saltwater and now are useless. Many of the control boxes were uprooted and all along pump stations were submerged. Much of the irrigation pipe itself remained intact and is expected to be salvageable.

Many bridges on the Harbor Course also were destroyed in the hurricane, some of them washing across the Intracoastal Waterway onto neighboring Goat Island.

Cleanup efforts began almost immediately, but greens superintendent Mike Fabrizio was forced to search throughout the island for maintenance equipment, which had been commandeered by National Guard troops protecting the island while martial law was imposed for more than a week after the storm.

Wild Dunes laid off all but 62 of nearly 500 employees in the aftermath of the storm. Director of golf Al Powell, 800 to 1,000 trees were

Hurricane Jerry easy on Texas

Most golf courses in the Galveston, Texas, region escaped heavy damage from Hurricane Jerry, which touched down about 9 p.m. Oct. 15 and was gone three hours later.

While superintendent Hank Rhodes of South Shore Harbor Country Club next to Clear Lake reported “significant tree damage,” spokesmen in the maintenance departments at a number of other courses said Jerry did little harm.

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DonuTTrimmer
Continued from page 1

management inventions by company founder Thomas Wait. With tongue firmly planted in cheek, Wait claims the concept for Greens Encroachment, like his other inventions, took root in his own laziness.

"Anything I can find to make my job and others' easier intrigues me," he said. The need for a more efficient way to maintain some of the Sunshine State's median strips led to the company's flagship product — the DonuTTrimmer edging blade.

In talking to course superintendent and partner Joseph DeMino of Rochester, N.Y., Wait discovered the circular blades (which come in diameters of 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 inches) could also be used to edge around sprinkler and mist heads, bunks, cart paths and sidewalks in a fraction of the time and cost. Wait and DeMino determined there was a need for the product after attending the 1988 GCSAA International Golf Show in Houston, Texas, and they patented the blades.

To gain exposure, they volunteered to detail the courses at several tournaments including the 1988 Honda Classic held at TPC at Eagle Trace in Coral Springs, Fla., and other 1988 and 1989 major tournaments.

Their efforts were well received by course superintendents attending those tournaments. The response was overwhelming in April 1988 when the first advertisements for the blades appeared.

"Our marketing company told us a new product did well if it got eight to 10 responses a month from a single ad," said Wait. "We were getting that many a day." Meanwhile, the second product was invented by a local superintendent and was developed and marketed by DonuTTrimmer. The Aqua-Quick is a disc made of solid aluminum that can instantly turn any Toro or Rainbird valve-in-sprinkler into a 1-inch water source. It can be used with a standard swivel or quick coupler valve. It can also be used directly for syringing greens, tees, hot spots or connecting a temporary sprinkler.

"We had the drought last summer, so it was a good time to be introducing a product like that," said Wait. Meanwhile, Wait was devising two other products — the Level-Eez and Greens Encroachment.

The Level-Eez allows the superintendent and his staff to drastically cut the time to complete one of their distasteful tasks, raising sunken valve-in-head sprinklers, quick coupler valves and valve boxes. The everything-you-need kit reduces the time to raise a sprinkler head from about 90 minutes to as little as 5 without digging. The stainless steel and aluminum kit raises the object by forcing water around it and pulling it upward with a platform pulier. This product does much less cosmetic damage than the traditional method of digging and setting the object being raised.

"It looks like your course is full of potholes when the sprinkler heads sink," said Wait. "Carts and mowers are always running over them and can be damaged. Also, a golfer can twist an ankle in one of them. Raising a sprinkler head is one of the worst jobs on a golf course. This makes it a lot easier."

As useful as the other three products are, they don't compare to the possibilities of Greens Encroachment, according to Paul Latshaw, the only superintendent to oversee three of the four major tournaments, the 1978 PGA Championship and 1985 U.S. Open at Pittsburgh's Oakmont CC and the 1987-89 Masters at Augusta National. Latshaw became a consultant and stockholder with the company last June.

Fairway grass encroaching on greens has been a problem that has long defied solution. It has been particularly troublesome on Southern courses where the typical Bermuda grass fairy chips away at the size and quality of the typical bentgrass and Bermuda greens.

The idea for Greens Encroachment came, oddly enough, while Wait was peeling the top off a 12-pack of chewing gum. It occurred to him that a device that would lift an offending grass off the course, like the string lifted the top off the gum package, might do the trick.

He devised a two-piece plastic border, about 8 inches in depth and 1/2 inch in width, that is buried about 1 inch below ground level around the fringe of the green. A manual edging devise that fits in between the track is pushed around the green, lifting out the encroaching grass including the stolons that try to root themselves to the putting surface.

The product will come two ways, the first being a complete package including material, installation equipment and training so the superintendent and crew can install it themselves. The company will also install it, bringing in a four-man crew to put the border around all 18 greens (and tees and other areas if necessary) of an average course in about 20 days, without interrupting play and leaving little or no evidence of the installation.

The cost of the procedure will start at $50,000 for an average 18-hole course. Greens Encroachment will pay for itself in labor savings within two years based on replacement costs of contaminated sod, Wait predicted.

The company and products were introduced formally at February's GCSAA annual convention. Lines formed at the DonuTTrimmer booth to get a look at and discuss Greens Encroachment, Wait said. The response was so great that Wait and DeMino had to take names and telephone numbers and promise to call back.

The product is currently installed on a test basis at Carolina Country Club in Spartanburg S.C., Plantation CC in Ponta Verde, Fla. and Loxahatchee CC in Jupiter, Fla.

"That's where we are with it right now," said Wait, who has begun marketing Greens Encroachment as the other three products vigorously in preparation for February's annual superintendent's show in Orlando, Fla., his home state.

He predicts DonuTTrimmer 1990 revenues will exceed last year's 70 percent increase, mainly because of Greens Encroachment. But Wait said he'll be looking for more ways to make his job, and those of other people in the turf profession, a little easier.

"I've got another five ideas or so rolling around in my head right now," he said, "but our company's goal is to market these four products so everyone in the industry can take advantage of these labor-saving devices. I think the industry focuses on safety first, budget and product performance third. I know our products fit into these categories."

Hugo
Continued from page 34

uprooted or broken to the ground. "I've never seen any storm of this caliber in my life," said Powell, who has been the club's superintendent for 20 years.

"There are huge haps where trees once stood. You could call it a major thinning."

Some of the trees were 90 or 100 years old, Powell said, estimating their value at $250,000.

The timber company contracted to remove the debris was expected to be at least six or seven weeks on the job. Powell and his 15-man crew opened the front nine on Oct. 14 and the opening of the back nine singing and changing the Ground Committee's decision on whether to wait for the trees to be hauled off.

Powell attributed much of Hugo's damage to soft ground, saying he thought many of the big trees would not have been uprooted if the summer had been drier.

A few miles away, Quail Hollow CC was in "perfect" condition on the eve of the Senior Tour's Payne Webber Invitational when the storm tore into town. The result: a canceled tournament and more than 700 down or damaged trees, according to assistant superintendent Mark Harris.

"The press tent was demolished and everything went down," Harris said, but the overall look of the course has not changed because most of the larger trees that fell were along the tree line of the tees and fairways.

The clubhouse also lost part of its roof, but head superintendent Ray Avery's 22-man crew had the front nine holes open seven days later and the back nine open in two weeks.

Tommy Brasswell is a golf writer for the Charleston (S.C.) Post-Courier newspapers.

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