BRIEFS

BRUSSELS, Belgium — With permits and financing firmly in hand, developers of Domain Des Princes Golf Course began building their Jack Nicklaus-designed layout here in late 1989. A local environmental group went to court and succeeded in having the permit revoked. Five years later, the course is no closer to reality than it was in the late 1980s.

This is the typical situation the newly formed European Golf Association Ecology Unit hopes to stop from happening again.

Hurdzan pursues yellowed pages & hickory sticks

By MARK LESLIE

I t is like “Christmas and an Easter egg hunt all rolled up in one.” It captivates, excites and enlightens.

And it has made Dr. Michael Hurdzan a frequenter of flea markets and dusty old book stores.

It is the hobby (and treasure hunt) of golf collecting. “I just can’t describe to you the excitement of finding something you’ve been searching for for years,” said Hurdzan, a golf course architect whose massive collection includes books, club, ceramics, glassware, buttons, games, you name it.

“I can almost tell you the time, date and place I found each one of them, and what I paid for them. It’s like an Easter egg hunt and Christmas all in one. And every single day is like that. Collecting is the most exciting thing, if you really treasure the things — which I do.”

Hurdzan, young and far from wealthy, caught the collecting bug unaware of Christmas Day 1967. “Someone gave me Book of the Links by Sutton. I had no idea those kinds of books even existed — let alone on golf course architecture. I was absolutely captivated by the idea. I read it and reread it. It was a wonderful experience. It became so exciting to me that I started to collect more and more things. I went to book stores and flea market — and still do.”

Hurdzan pulled out an old cigarette dispenser for rolled cigarettes. "Just last weekend I discovered this. It’s probably from the 20’s or 30’s, but it’s a wonderful piece.”

Hurdzan’s “primary love is books,” and, indeed, like beloved family, every one in his cache has a story.

• There’s Scotland’s Gift, written in 1885 by Charles Blair Macdonald, and Golf in America; which Hurdzan bought in a book store in 1969 for $3 and $5, respectively.

Von Hagge lays claim to the unbearable lightness of course design

By ROBERT VON HAGGE

An agricultural engineering degree-holder who played on the PGA Tour a few years and as a club professional before joining Dick Wilson's architectural firm in 1957, Robert von Hagge has established his own design practice around the world. Eighty percent of his work is abroad. "And it doesn’t seem to be letting up," he said. Managing editor Mark Leslie caught the 63-year-old von Hagge at his Spring, Texas, headquarters.

Golf Course News: It seems you have your own idea of golf course design. What do you do that says: “This is a von Hagge design”?

Robert von Hagge: Visually, our courses speak profoundly to folk because I think we’re the only ones who really work with light. We’ve studied light for years. The way the light works from morning to evening across this plane of vertical ex-
Playing hickory in the Old World

When Dr. Michael Hurdzan goes to Scotland or Ireland he feels of what links golf was all about. A lot of times I play with a reproduction gutty ball. When I played St. Andrews I played one hole with a real 1600's gutty. It allows me to relate to what golf was like at that period of time. Wooden shafts were popular until the 30's. Playing with wooden-shafted clubs, Hurdzan said, is "a different brand of golf. You don't hit the ball as far. You have to be a lot more accurate. You have to learn to keep the ball down."

Hurdzan Collection

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"As it ended up, they probably both came out of Mac's own library. Golf in America has his signature and personal stamp in it. And the value of Scotland's Gift today? "A thousand dollars."

Then there's a little paperback written by Robert Trent Jones Sr. The booklet was to be auctioned and Hurdzan wanted it so badly he bid $95. "The auction results came out and I didn't get it. I was stunned." A friend who bid $225 himself told Hurdzan it had sold for $975. A short time later, Hurdzan received a packet in the mail from architect Roger Rulewich, who had ripped a page of one of Hurdzan's books while photocopying. The packet contained the Jones book — signed by Jones and by Rulewich, who wrote: "For someone who collects rare treasures from the history of golf from someone who only manages to destroy them."

In the realm of clubs, Hurdzan has many sets, but perhaps none as special as the wooden-shafted set made by George Nichols Co. in Scotland. While in Scotland, he visited the Nichols company and asked an old clubmaker about his clubs. The man couldn't believe a set still existed intact, but when Hurdzan showed them to him, the clubmaker "broke down and cried." Hurdzan said, "He remembered those particular clubs."

There is a world of clay pipes — you know, the kind you see the old Irishmen smoke in 'The Quiet Man." Hurdzan found one, with crossed golf clubs, in a flea market in Columbus, priced at $15. He bought it and later discovered it's worth about $2,100 because the end isn't broken.

Then there's the rare Braille Book for Golf, printed 1935.

The greatest treasure of all is a Rembrandt print, The Cloven Player, sometimes called The Golf Player. Circa 1660, it is a second-state printing of a man golfing.

Club-fitting and teaching devices, scores of wood-shafted clubs (I would buy any wood-shafted club for $10. I've got thousands of clubs I've bought for $5.75, club buttons dating to the 1700s, an array of unique clubs — Hurdzan has them all.

Among new items, I usually look for something that's not going to be on the market long — that I know is weird, or so ridiculous it won't be around long," he said, "like the putter with a level on it, which you can hide with a shutter. How many of those will sell? Not many. But my son 50 years from now will have an oddity." On the one hand, Hurdzan said, "I've overdone it here. I collect everything. There isn't anything on the market that I wouldn't try to get some of." But on the other hand, "I get dupes to trade, but I never sell anything." Hurdzan laments that golf collecting has become a business, and, today it is "buyer beware."

"A lot of people now are in it for the money, unfortunately," he said. "When I started, it was just collectors. And it was inexpensive. You could amass these things. A book like this that I bought for $50 is now $600 or $700. And, not only is it a business, but there are forgeries. You have to be very careful."

His advice for collectors beginning today? "You have to decide: Are you collecting as an investment, or for something that you love. If it's for something you love, pick what you like — if it's books, stick with books. Then isolate yourself to instruction books, architecture books, travel books, whatever."

Other advice:

• Least expensively, a person can collect bag tags, pencils, tees, scorecards, balls, glassware.

• "Try to get the patterns to the golf clubs."

• "When I started out, if I could buy two editions versus one first edition, I would buy the second editions. In retrospect, I should have bought the first editions."

• "Join the Golf Collectors Society, which has regional and national meetings. 'There are tables and tables of things for sale or trade. They have regional meetings as well."