ESPN founder proposes stadium facility for Naples

By Peter Blais

NAPLES, Fla. — Naples resident and ESPN founder Bill Rasmussen plans to build a $100 million, 54-hole corporate entertainment retreat that includes a 12,000-seat stadium overlooking the final four holes of the championship layout.

"We hope to have the facility ready for play by 1999," said Mark Kizziriz, a project consultant. "To meet that goal we would have to start construction in 1997 and plant in 1998."

Regulatory and environmental permitting have been put on hold while Rasmussen concentrates his efforts as an organizer of the LG Championship, a Senior PGA Tour event scheduled for Feb. 7-9.

"We'll begin the permitting process as soon as the tournament is over," said a Rasmussen spokesperson.

Kizziriz said participants expect little problem obtaining regulatory approvals since most of the 1,339-acre area is zoned residential. "A golf course makes much more environmental sense," he said.

John Norris, chairman of the Collier County Board of Commissioners, noted: "This project is attractive to us because of the positive tourism and business aspects. It is environmentally sensitive as well, since approximately 1,500 acres will be set aside essentially for green space forever and nearly 5,000 potential residential units are eliminated. This is exactly what the County Commission is trying to accomplish."

Plans call for the championship course to be the permanent home of the LG Championship. The second course would be a members-only facility; the third a resort track open to the public. No architects have been selected.

In addition to Rasmussen and Western Golf, other participants in Stadium Naples include Maricopa/Hardy Development of Naples and Tournament Services, Inc. of Tacoma, Wash.

According to developer David Mobley, chairman of Maricopa/Hardy: "This will continue on page 91"