El Niño’d: West Coast gets hammered, with rains, floods

By DAVID WILBER

The winter’s intense El Niño-driven storms have hammered California golf courses, highlighted in early February when a series of weather-related records were broken. Several areas of the state recorded the lowest barometer readings ever in February.

California courses found that no amount of installed drainage could handle the rains since they began on already wet ground. El Niño was not choosy about the golf courses it attacked as rivers, streams, drainage and retaining walls

IN DEMAND ON THE GRAND STRAND

Golf course architect Mike Strantz has followed one Best New Upscale Course selection in 1996 — Stonehouse — with a second Best New pick, Royal New Kent, in 1997. Now he is in such high demand that he is turning down developers each week. See Q&A, page 35.

A First Tee ‘first’ looms

By MARK LESLIE

RICHMOND, Va. — Neighboring Chesterfield County is "fast-tracking" the Richmond First Tee Foundation (RFTF) proposal through an approval process that could lead to earthmoving in May and put it on target to be the nation’s initial project built from the ground up as a First Tee facility.

“We are thrilled with the county’s support,” said Fred Tattersall, a financial adviser and the moving force behind RFTF. “They have put us on a fast-track program they reserve mostly for large businesses moving to the area.” If all goes smoothly, an April 6 informational meeting with the general public and representatives from the County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission will be followed.

Employees come first at Gotham

By PETER BLAIS

Building a course operations firm that is both financially successful and provides a first-rate quality of life for its owners and managers are the dual goals of Gotham Golf Partners, according to company President R. Danny Mays.

"Family and quality of life are very important to all my managers," said Mays, who along with many of GGP’s upper-level executives are former employees of KSL Fairways, a Virginia-based multi-course operator.

Mower manufacturers see ‘ease’ to please

By JOHN FARRELL

Hoping to make life a little easier for golf course operators, major mower manufacturers are addressing real-life concerns — everything from ease of operation and maintenance to noise pollution — as they bring the next wave of products to market.

In what is part of the largest new product roll-out in the company’s history, Jacobsen is introducing its new HR-9016 Turbo (TM) Wide-Area Rotary Mower. First unveiled at the GCSAA show in Anaheim, the HR-9016 is a 16-foot-wide rotary mower with a 90-bhp turbo-charged diesel engine and 4-wheel drive.

"One of our goals in designing the HR-
First Tee’s ‘first’ goes to Va. county

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owed on April 21 by a Planning Commission vote on land use and permitting and on April 22 by a Board of Supervisors session to approve a lease that has been drawn up between the county and RFTF.

RFTF’s move to work with Chesterfield County followed closely on the heels of a proposal to the city of Richmond. But Richmond officials wanted to delay any decision beyond the timeline desired by RFTF. Tattersall and his board were adamant that the Richmond First Tee be the first in the country to be built. Other existing golf facilities have added First Tee programs, but Richmond’s would be the first from the ground up.

“It’s a terrific project and quite inspirational,” said Tod Leiweke, who took over in late February as administrator of the national First Tee program. “What we saw there was a very committed group of people who had come together and donated time and money. But, more than anything, they had a passion to see something happen — to make a difference in the lives of kids through this great game of golf.

“Chesterfield County stepped up and provided an excellent piece of land and are in a real fast-track to get this thing done.” The First Tee, Leiweke said, “is not a lay-down concept. It takes some imagination and a leap of faith... There is something unique about being the first on an agreement project that will be the model for many of the agreements we get into.”

The First Tee’s vision, he said, “isn’t 10 facilities. Our vision is hundreds across America.”

Inquiries have already been fielded by Leiweke’s office at PGA Tour headquarters in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. They have ranged from people saying they would love to see a First Tee facility in their community to people, like Tattersall, saying they will do whatever it takes to make it happen, Leiweke said.

For his part, Tattersall is excited about the Chesterfield County property. It is a 125-acre parcel of land in Iron Bridge Park within 10 miles of 11 elementary schools, four middle schools and three high schools.

“Draw a five-mile circle around it,” said Chesterfield County Director of Public Affairs Don Kappell, “and the demographics are such that it would very well serve the stated needs of The First Tee organization: underprivileged youths, seniors and women. You have Petersburg, Richmond and other areas that have a lot of immigrants and others who meet that criteria.”

“All the discussion has been very, very positive,” Kappell said. “It’s a tremendous site. The relationship has been very good among all the different parties. The caveat is that we’re still discussing it and nothing has been signed — yet.”

While Tattersall said RFTF still hopes to do a First Tee facility in Richmond, he said the county property is twice the size of the city’s. That will allow an 18-hole course instead of nine holes.

“It will have a full driving range that will probably be lighted,” he said. “And we are planning a three-hole peewee course for 60- to 100-yard shots, for the kids to practice on after graduating from the range, but before they’re ready for the full course.”

Golf course architect Lester George, who is donating his services to design the course, said, “This is a beautiful property — rolling with creeks meandering through it.” He even plans a waterfall between the 9th and 18th greens.

“It is really important not only for the First Tee to be developed here but that it is the first,” said PGA Tour golfer Robert Wrenn, a Richmond native who is donating his services. “Being first creates phenominal exposure for this area and the greatest opportunity for greater expansion of the program locally... More importantly, it would quickly create the opportunity for underprivileged inner-city kids to enjoy...
Graves, Pascuzzo ink Southern Cal projects

The golf architect will be Damian Pascuzzo. Design development is underway, with construction documents immediately following. Ground-breaking is scheduled for November.

Meanwhile, Sunroad Enterprises has contracted with Graves and Pascuzzo to design an 18-hole course on the "Old Coach Site" in Poway, in northern San Diego.

This is Sunroad's first venture into golf development following a history of commercial office building development.

The 7,100-yard, par-72 course has been named Sunroad Country Club. The parcel has a history as a former stage coach stop. Rock outcrops will punctuate the design and a streambed will wind through the course and play into the strategy of the design.

The project will also feature an 18-hole putting course and a practice range.

Robert Muir Graves and senior golf course architect and Neal Meagher will collaborate on the design.

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