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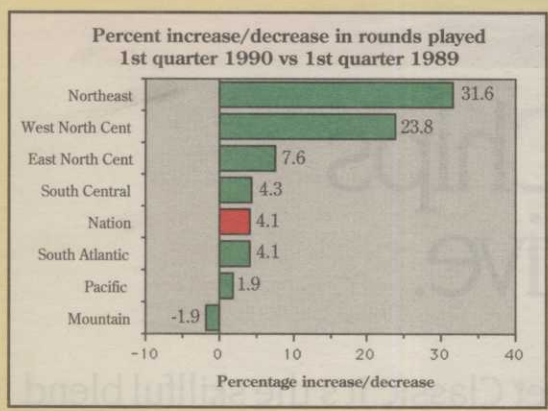
GOLF COURSE NEWS

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A worker at Sweetwater Country Club in Sugarland, Texas removes bermudagrass sod from a green damaged by this winter's record cold. The facility was among numerous Southern courses that suffered extensive winter kill requiring greens to be torn up and replanted. The extent of the damage wasn't known in many areas until the bermudagrass emerged from dormancy this spring.

Kill costs courses millions

BY PETER BLAIS
The winter freeze cost Southern courses millions of dollars, forcing many to reseed greens and some to close for as long as two months. The cold temperatures that struck in early December killed much of the Bermudagrass on courses from Texas to South Carolina. Unfortunately the problem went undetected until spring when the overseeded ryegrass began to die out and the Bermuda traditionally starts to grow. Only this time the Ber-

muda never greened up. "It just stayed dirt brown once the rye died off," said Gilbert Medrano, head superintendent at First Colony's new public course in Houston. The damage was so bad First Colony closed its doors May 29 and wasn't scheduled to re-open until July 26. It cost \$25,000 to reseed all 18 greens. Assistant pro Scott Rethlake pegged lost business at another \$180,000. Most courses were able to remain open, but had to resort to temporary

greens. Nearby Sweetwater Country Club in Sugarland was "pretty severely" damaged but continued play on temporaries, according to superintendent Todd Stevens. "We lost enough grass that we decided to replant all 27 greens to keep them consistent later on. We stripped the sod, tilled them up, fumigated, contoured and re-sprigged. We planted June 22 and they look good. They are about 80 percent covered." *Continued on page 31*

S&L crisis hits golf

Let's make a deal goes nationwide...

BY PETER BLAIS
Golf courses nationwide are available at bargain-basement prices thanks to a savings and loan crisis that has left several courses in the hands of the Resolution Trust Corporation. In the Phoenix, Ariz., area alone, two courses are for sale. Superstition Springs in Mesa and Happy Trails Resort in Surprise were the property of Western Savings, which was placed into

receivership May 31, according to Western Savings Vice President of Real Estate Investment and Sales Paul Timm. They are being marketed by the RTC, which was established to sell off closed savings and loan properties. Superstition Springs is a 646-acre project undertaken by Western Savings and Loan Association in the early 1970s. The 18-hole Greg Nash-designed *Continued on page 27*

...as foreigners, pensions pick up slack

BY PETER BLAIS
Foreign investors and pension funds are replacing beleaguered savings and loans and commercial banks as major funding sources for existing courses and new course construction. "With the S&L crisis, those institutions are basically out of the golf course business. A lot of money used to come from the S&Ls. Now they're history," said Stanton Abrams, president of Senior Tour Players Inc., a Boston-based

company involved in golf course communities and representing many famous Senior players. "Commercial banks have had a lot of problems with bad loans. So that money has basically dried up, too." **Foreign investment**
Led by the Japanese, foreign investors are now filling a large part of the funding void. The Japanese have bought *Continued on page 26*

Seed harvest excellent

BY MARK LESLIE
A bumper crop looms this month, creating good and bad news for people in the turf seed and golf industries. "This is shaping up as the best crop for a number of years," said Scott Patterson, vice president in charge of turf seed at Peterson Seed Co. in Savage, Minn. "There is a lot of acreage. We had good burns last fall. Growing conditions were excellent last winter and good growing this spring. And now they're out and dry like they need to be for harvest." Dennis Hays, executive vice president of the Oregon Seed Trade Association, whose members grow the vast majority of seed used on golf courses, *Continued on page 19*

Winter kill

Continued from page 1
ered," he said during the second week of July.

The cost to replace the greens was \$105,000. Play was down 50 percent in June and early July, knocking revenues off about \$100,000, according to Stevens.

"People don't come to play and they don't stay to eat and drink. It adds up," he said.

Two Houston area courses — The Club at Falcon Point and Lochinvar Golf Club — came through the freeze better than most because they were planted in bentgrass, Stevens said.

But most suffered.

Between 50 and 100 percent of

the hybrid Bermuda on overseeded greens was lost in Texas, according to Richard Duble, extension turfgrass specialist at Texas A&M University. The damage extended from Corpus Christi, up the Gulf Coast to Port Arthur and from there north.

"I've got one green that was pretty bad and the rest are spotty," said Tom Fox, superintendent at Oso Beach Municipal Golf Course in Corpus Christi and president of the Texas Gulf Coast Superintendents Association. "It's the worst I've seen in 22 years here."

"We hit them with about two tons of Milorganite. It's a good, safe fertilizer that stimulates root

'It's the worst I've seen in 22 years here.'

— Tom Fox, president

Texas Gulf Superintendents Association

growth."

Ironically, courses that didn't overseed with ryegrass suffered less damage. "I don't know why," Fox said. "You'd have expected the extra cover to help, not hurt."

Rockport Country Club a little farther north along the coast had "a little" winter kill and Riverside Municipal Golf Course at inland Victoria "lost a couple of greens," Fox said. But for the most part, the Gulf Coast and inland valley escaped

the severe damage suffered to the north in Houston, Dallas and Austin. Courses in Fox's area have benefitted from the extra business as north Texas golfers have ventured south to find better playing conditions.

"In Houston people don't call to ask for a tee time. They call to ask how many temporary greens you have. Golfers just don't like them," Fox said.

The damage extended well

eastward. J. Hal Richburg, immediate past president of the Louisiana-Mississippi Golf Course Superintendents Association and head superintendent at Belle Terre Country Club in LaPlace, La., reported extensive damage throughout the two-state area.

"We replanted all 19 greens," he said of his own course. "There were seven or eight greens that were killed and the rest damaged. It was a good excuse to do them all. It cost about \$33,000. Nobody was playing anyway because of the conditions, so it seemed just as well to do them all."

According to Richburg, Louisiana courses that had to replace all or some of their greens included Santa Maria Country Club in Baton Rouge, New Orleans Country Club, Metairie Country Club, English Turn Country Club in Gretna (home of the USF&G Classic), Bayou De Siard Country Club in Monroe, Chateau Country Club and Old Harbor Country Club.

Mississippi courses included Diamond Head in Bay St. Louis and Shreveport Country Club, he said.

"The newer courses with sandier greens were hurt most," Richburg said. "The older ones didn't seem to get hit so bad. The older ones probably had more clay. They held the water better, froze and protected the grass. The sandy greens dried out with the wind and were hurt more by the cold. There was no killer frost before the cold, either, that would have forced the grass into dormancy."

The damage has meant a booming business for nurseries whose plants survived the cold.

"We've been straight out," said Tom Nalls, director of golf course sales and service with Southern Turf Nurseries in Omega, Ga., which has answered urgent requests for sprigs from the Carolinas to Texas "We've been concentrating on replacing greens. But in a lot of cases we've had to just ship merchandise rather than put it in ourselves. The courses have had to put it in because we're just too busy."

Nalls said it takes 2,500 to 3,000 bushels of sprigs to re-do 18 average greens. He has already sent more than 50,000 bushels to Texas this year, he said.

"Our price has stayed about the same as last year. But there have been big increases in some areas," Nalls said.

There is little superintendents could have done to minimize the damage during "one of the worst freezes I've ever seen," Nalls said. "There is no way any superintendent should be considered negligent. The damage was just too widespread."

Medrano plans to put hay on First Colony's greens this winter and soak then with water to build a protective layer of ice if similar conditions appear likely.

"But I really don't know what you can do," said Rethlake, the club's assistant pro. "It was a freak of nature."

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