

Cuba welcomes 1st golf course project in 30+ years

By PETER BLAIS

VARA DERO, Cuba — Construction of the first course to be built in Cuba in more than 30 years is underway in a resort area a 2-1/2-hour drive hours northeast of Havana.

Golf Design Services Ltd. of Canmore, Alberta, Canada, designed the 18-hole championship layout. The course will be located in the middle of a 1/2-mile-wide, 5-mile-long peninsula jutting into the Caribbean Sea. Eight Canadian- and German-

owned resorts, some of the 5-star variety, line the beachfront.

"We began clearing and excavating lakes just before Christmas," said GDS associate designer Reg Down. "We're trucking in fill from 20 miles away because the peninsula sits on a coral base. What little local fill there is is brackish, which would leach salt into the grass and kill it."

The course was originally scheduled for completion by late last year. But a slow-moving

Cuban bureaucracy and the difficulty of obtaining construction equipment because of the U.S. trade embargo with the Communist country, pushed the timetable back.

To bypass the embargo, drainage materials that would normally come from the United States are being produced locally or in Canada, which trades freely with Cuba. Down estimated that 70 percent of the PVC pipe and 90 percent of the electrical irrigation wiring will be produced locally.

Water is a problem, as it is elsewhere on the Caribbean golf development scene. The government is making 1,500 cubic meters (approximately 390,000 gallons) available daily. Two-thirds of that is potable water and the other third treated effluent.

"It's tight, but we can get by on that," Down said. "A constant breeze blowing off the ocean will dry things even quicker. We'll use water-efficient irrigation materials and drought-resistant

Bermuda-grass."

The government was concerned about the shoreline environment, but gaining course approval was "not as intense as a Canadian Alpine project would be," said Down, whose firm has designed more than 40 courses including Predator Ridge in Vernon, B.C. and Morningstar on Victoria Island, B.C. GDC has also designed projects in formerly Communist-bloc nations, including ones outside Prague in the Czech Republic and Budapest, Hungary.

"Les Ferbur, who was with Robert Trent Jones, Sr. for many years, is one of our principals," Down said.

The Cuban government has invested \$12 million in building the course and upgrading the surrounding infrastructure. Down estimated the course alone will cost about \$5 million. Incorporating an existing nine-hole layout built by the DuPont family years ago will help hold costs down. The former DuPont mansion will be renovated into a clubhouse.

Golf is in short supply in Cuba, easily the largest of the Caribbean islands. It is about three fourths the size of Florida, which has 1,100 courses. A nine-hole addition is planned that will double the size of Havana's only course. An 18-hole layout is also located at the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay.

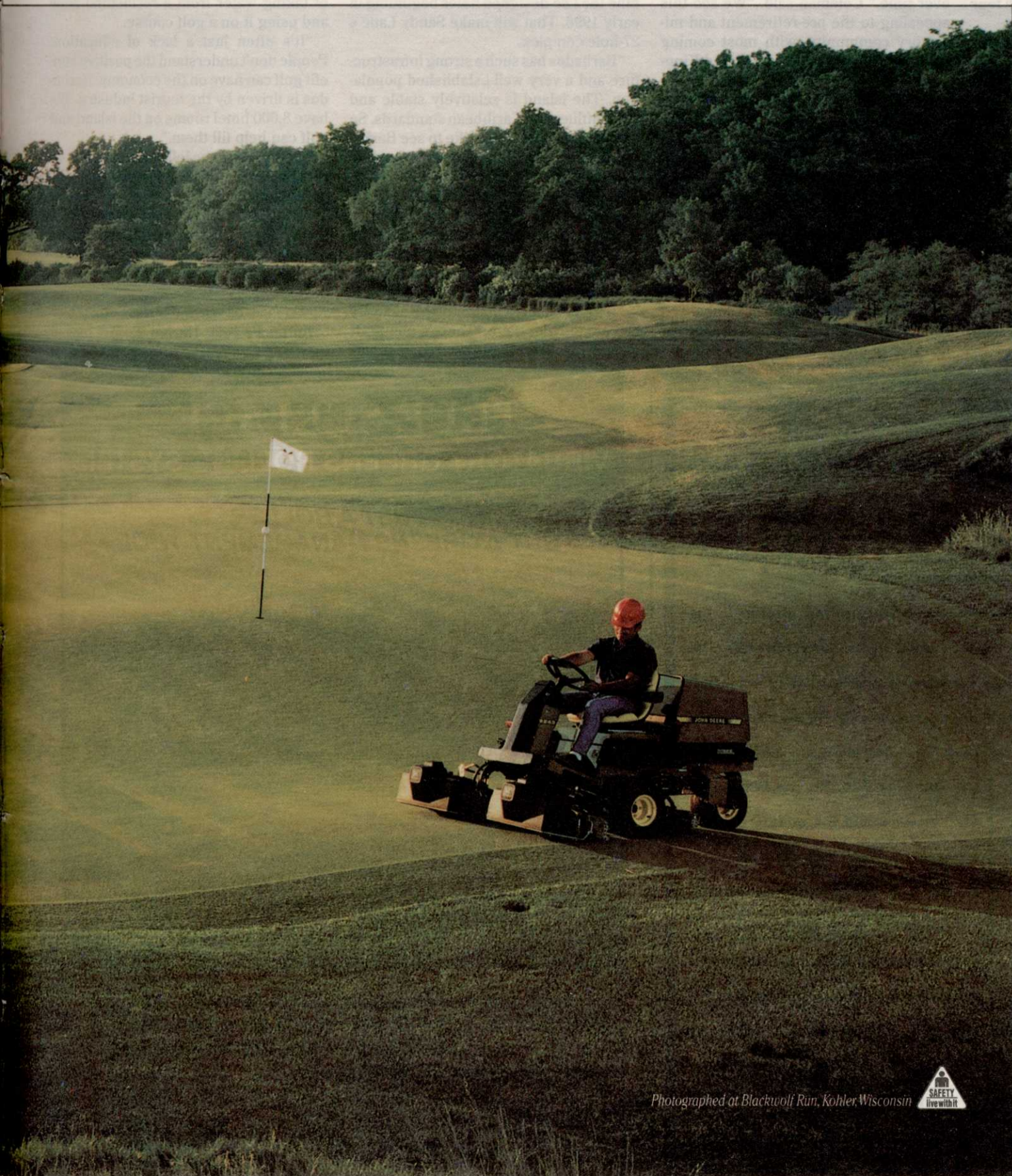
"That's it as far as I know," Down said. "There's potential for a lot more development, although it will never approach anything like Florida. Other areas like Vara Dero exist that would make wonderful golf destinations. And they are accessible. For instance, you can fly directly to Vara Dero from Montreal or Toronto."

Golf highlights Jamaican resort

PORT ANTONIO, Jamaica — Golf Management expects to open San San Resort & Golf Club here by April. Frank DiNenna, president of Golf Management from Sarasota, Fla., has completed contract negotiations with Ernest Smatt, owner of San San Development Co.

The new layout, designed by Roy Case, will play like an 18-hole, 6,252-yard golf course. There will be 18 sets of tees, 12 greens and nine fairways. The greens (six doubles and six singles) and tees will be designed in the field to fit the valley terrain. Each set of tees, strategically placed, will give the player a new look at the same fairway. With this concept, the player will have a different shot to the green.

Golf Management will manage all aspects of construction, including grow-in, employee training in maintenance and management of the pro shop and clubhouse.



Photographed at Blackwolf Run, Kohler, Wisconsin



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