

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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### FLOCKING TOGETHER

Birds of a feather: PGA Tour star Tom Lehman (right) will team with former Tour player John Fought on a course design project in Arizona. For story, see page 37.

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## Stress tests bear fruit

Super-dwarf Bermudas gain favor

By MARK LESLIE

BELTSVILLE, Md. — Turfgrass breeders are concentrating more on warm-season varieties than cool-season types and their work is bearing fruit, some of it extraordinary, according to the national director of the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP).

Advances are being reported on the zoysiagrass and seeded Bermudagrass fronts, yet vegetative Bermuda may prove the greatest immediate impact on golf courses, said NTEP's Kevin Morris. "Even though bentgrass is the ultimate in quality in the



FOR A SPECIAL SECTION ON SUMMER STRESS, "BEATING THE HEAT," TURN TO PAGES 30-34.



The Fazio Course at Barton Creek Golf and Conference Center in Austin, Texas, has already converted to a stress-tolerant super-dwarf Bermudagrass.

South, as some of the newer Bermudas come out that rival the bents in texture, people will move away from the bents in stressful areas," Morris predicted.

"There's a chance we have something practically as good as bent is in the North," said U.S. Golf Association Green Section National Director Jim Snow. "The goal is to get a

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## Operations biz has new Player: Gary

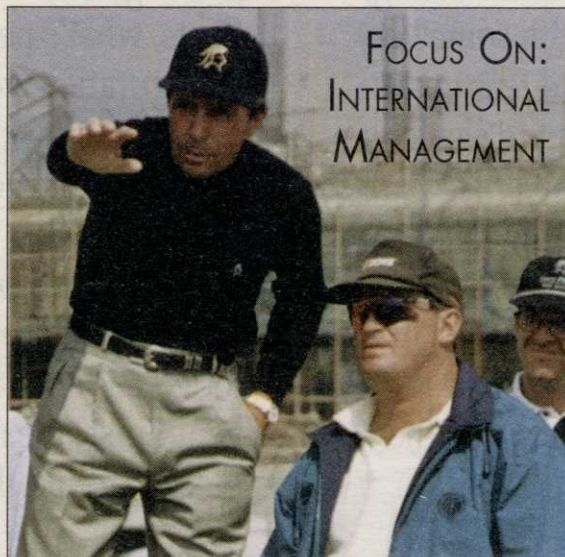
By HAL PHILLIPS

SINGAPORE — Not content with its considerable presence in the design, golf academy and club-manufacturing markets, The Gary Player Group has entered the course operations business, touting a full-service ability to develop, manage and brand its member clubs.

Unveiled here at Golf Asia '97, Gary Player Management Services (GPMS) has already signed its first club, Verdemar Golf Club, a Philippine project still in the early stages of development. However, don't read too much into the GPMS decision to launch in Asia-Pacific, where its sister course-design and academy divisions are better established, compared to the U.S.

"It's our full intention to be global," said GPMS Managing Director Mark

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FOCUS ON:  
INTERNATIONAL  
MANAGEMENT



Gary Player (at left) has added facility management to his design and club-making ventures. Above: The New Course at Portmarnock near Dublin, Ireland — one of a growing roster of courses managed by the European PGA Tour. For stories, see pages 43-46.

## Participation rates lag, compared to course supply

By PETER BLAIS

Golf's two main growth indicators, the number of golfers and rounds played, remained relatively flat at 25 million and 477 million, respectively, in 1996, according to a National Golf Foundation (NGF) report.

But while demand continued stagnant, the golf industry continued to increase the course supply at a near-record rate, with 442 courses coming on line last year. Though concerned about this seeming demand/supply imbalance, the NGF and others remain optimistic about golf's future, pegging their hopes on the continued interest of aging Baby Boomers and the newfound interest of their offspring, the so-called Echo Boomers.

"I don't think those numbers are a true indicator of the interest in the game," said Myrtle Beach, S.C. architect/developer Ken Tomlinson, who



NGF's Rick Norton

Continued on page 62

## Golf, ecology look to curb 'Us vs. Them'

By BILL SUGG

WASHINGTON, D.C. — "Let's think beyond golf," said Audubon impresario Ron Dodson during last month's day-long symposium, *Golf Environments of the 21st Century: Integrating Wildlife Conservation Into Golf Courses of the Future*, held here at the National Geographic Society (NGS). "Our purpose in creating cooperative sanctuary systems was to create a vehicle that would lead to communication among a whole variety of individuals across the country. We are beginning to see that now. We are

Continued on page 13

## Participation

Continued from page 1

designed and built the successful Tidewater Golf Club & Plantation in the heart of the city with the most golf holes per capita in the country.

"There are many courses that probably should not have been built in certain places or built for different markets. There's a right way and wrong way to build

courses. If you do your homework and do it the right way, a new course should do well."

According to the annual *Golf Participation in the U.S.* report, the senior golfer segment [age 50 and over] has shown the most growth in recent years. Since 1991, senior golfers have grown 16 percent, approximately 1 million golfers. Today's 6.4 million senior golfers represent 26 percent of all golfers, up from 22 percent five

years ago. All other groups have decreased or remained steady.

"We've been saying for several years now that, when they leave their child-rearing years and begin to approach retirement, today's 78 million Baby Boomers will be one of the driving economic forces in golf," said NGF Vice President Rick Norton, who heads up the foundation's research department.

The first wave of Baby

Boomers turned 50 last year. The reasoning goes that if they act like their parents and play more as they get older, the golf industry should benefit.

"Today's seniors are among the game's most avid players," Norton commented. "They not only average about 36 rounds a year, which is about three times what it is for all other golfers—they also spend half again as much on golf."

The NGF also takes heart in

the fact that, while participation has remained fairly level, spending on golf has increased dramatically, from \$7.8 million in 1986 to \$15.1 million last year.

"It would appear," Norton said, "while they might not be playing more, today's golfers are willing to spend more on everything from equipment to lessons and fees."

And golf travel, hopefully. Michigan, which has led the nation in course openings the past four years, has made a major financial commitment to attracting golfers to its many golf resorts.

"People here are very aware of the participation rates," said Michigan Golf Course Owners Association Executive Director Harry Klingeman. "We have to continue developing our customer service programs and be aggressive in bringing tourists to the state. We scratch our heads every year when the new course figures come out and there is Michigan at the top. I don't know why. Maybe it's the natural beauty and the distinct topography. Our operators need to be sharp, just like in any other business."

Developers need to be sharp, as well, said Samuel Sakocius, president of Sajo Construction, winner of the *Golf Course News*' 1996 Builder of the Year Award.

"We can't disregard the participation figures," he said, "but they haven't changed much the past few years. We're still building courses and people seem to be playing them."

"We've been successful in the smaller markets, cities in the 150,000 to 300,000 range," he added, noting the firm has projects underway in Kingsport, Tenn., Jonesboro, Ark., and York, Pa. "There are plenty of spots where courses are lacking and that's where they are being built."

At the other end of the spectrum are beginning golfers. Over the past 10 years, that group has grown by 2 million annually, led by the 18-29 age segment. Prior to 1996, 18- to 29-year-olds accounted for 35 percent of all beginning golfers. Last year it jumped to 42 percent. The first of the Echo Boomers turned 18 last year.

"We expect to see the 18- to 29 age group be even more predominant among beginners as Echo Boomers move into their 20s," Norton said. "And, of course, one of the big unknowns here is the influence that players like Tiger Woods and Karrie Webb will be having on these young men and women."

Added Klingeman: "The demographics seem to be good for golf. And Tiger Woods could bring in a whole new breed of golfer. Golf should never be viewed as just an old-timers' game."

The national mail panel survey of 30,000 households was conducted for the NGF by Market Facts Inc. of Chicago, a major market research firm.



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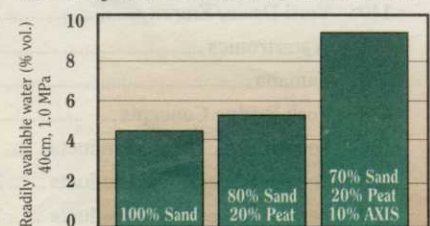


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