

Chemical exhibitors pump up the volume

Making noise is perhaps the primary objective of exhibitors at the annual Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) show. By that I mean creating some buzz on the show floor. You know what I'm saying: People talking about, making noise regarding a particular company or its products.



Hal Phillips, editor

Without a doubt, chemical companies made the most noise in Las Vegas. This industry sector was busy on several different fronts, from new product releases, to division realignments, to distribution relationships.

Who made the most noise? It's a toss-up between Novartis — the newly merged entity comprising what were formerly Ciba and Sandoz — and Zeneca, which rolled out its highly anticipated new broad-spectrum fungicide, Heritage.

The Heritage buzz was enormous (see stories page 59). Testing has shown the product to be effective on just about everything except dollar spot. Indeed, the prospects are so good for Heritage that companies were lining up to distribute it on Zeneca's behalf. Not just anyone, mind you. But The Scotts Company, United Horticultural Supply, Lesco, Terra, Wilbur-Ellis and others. Clearly, this is a product to watch.

Another new product creating a stir, though it has yet to receive Environmental Protection Agency approval, is Mach2 — an insecticide born of the collaboration between American Cyanamid Co. and Rohm and Haas (GCN/February '97). Principals in the joint venture, called RohMid, held a news conference in Las Vegas to herald the coming of Mach2, which has tested very well in the field. When EPA signs off sometime this spring, Mach2 will go directly to market.

Novartis made noise by distilling the message behind its mega-merger, which was announced last spring and finalized Jan. 1. While Novartis is Latin for "new skills," the company brings a plethora of existing skills to bear. At a news conference held in Las Vegas, Novartis formally introduced its new Head of Specialty Products, Thomas McGowan; its Director of Turf & Ornamental Products, former Sandoz employee Gene Hintze; its National Sales Manager, former Ciba employee Jose Milan; and its new Market Manager for Golf, Jerry

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We need another dead-ball era

Thump. Thump. Thump. The drum beat escalates, calling for a special less-juiced golf ball for the Tour. It is a call that has ramifications for all in the golf industry — a call that would "protect the integrity of our older golf courses," according to Denis Griffiths, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Was it Jack Nicklaus or someone else who began the cry for a special Tour golf ball — one that reduces the distance, say, 10 percent? At Pinehurst last spring Nicklaus declared that a 10-percent reduction in distance would return a course to the way it was meant to be played.

Now others are banging the drum. It has become a hue and cry. In Las Vegas in February the beat went on:

- Ben Crenshaw: "I'm close to agreeing with Jack. We've got to do something with the golf ball... We're at a critical red line about a lot of things with equipment."

- Griffiths: "We can look at USGA statistics all day long. But if you look at black-and-white, real-world examples of what's going on, I don't think the statistics support the way the Tour is playing."

Griffiths lamented the fact that Tour pros oftentimes need not hit their mid-irons because they can drive today's ball so much farther than was possible when the grand old classic golf courses were designed.

"Take a par-4 from 1970 on which you hit a driver-7 iron, or even driver-wedge," he said. "In 1970 the average Tour player hit the driver around 260 yards and the wedge 115 yards. That's 375 yards. Today, they hit a driver an average 280 yards. Put a wedge in their hands at 135 yards, and you're at 415. How do we put a medium iron in these guys' hands? You have to have a 500-yard hole."

Historically, a shot of under 100 yards demanded finesse — determining how much of a swing to take. It was one of the toughest shots in golf.

But in 1997, pros are carrying three or four wedges, pared off so that they can be played with a full swing from 80 to 135 yards out.

A Georgia guy, Griffiths used a NASCAR analogy. Here it goes: "Car racing and golf are very similar. They require ultimate concentration. The first thing you have to do is beat the track you're on, or the golf course you're on. The second thing is to beat your competitor. In 1969, about 175 miles per hour won the pole position at Daytona. That speed climbed — very much like our [golf's]



Mark Leslie, managing editor

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Letters

A SPIKELESS BUT HARDLY TOOTHLESS REBUTTAL

To the editor:

Mr. Crist's comments on the spikeless revolution taking place now in golf ["They wouldn't let me wear my spikes, your honor", GCN January 1997] are both uneducated and that of the ambulance chasers that are lurking everywhere now.

Apparently he hasn't read about the gentleman member of a country club that just recently was awarded a large amount of money because he tripped with metal spikes and fell off the front walk of the clubhouse after consuming eight drinks. Why are cart paths finished rough or grooved? It is so golfers with metal spikes don't slip.

Furthermore, courses are not mandating "softspikes", they are mandating that metal spikes may not be worn. I think he is right in his second paragraph where he stated that he is "getting old," meaning he is unwilling to change. Of the centuries that golf has been played, spikes have only been around since the 1920s. And if he is so old he should check with an orthope-

dic doctor, who would probably recommend that spikeless golf shoes will save his feet and ankles in the future.

And to end, the traction of metal spikes are no better than tennis shoes — if you would take the lunge out of your swing.

Corey Eastwood, CGCS
Bakersfield, Calif.

GCN LINKED TO NGF DIRECTORY

To the editor:

I am happy to inform you that your company's Web site has been linked to your listing in the National Golf Foundation's online 1997 Directory of Golf. This new industry-wide directory is available on the Internet via GolfWeb (www.golfweb.com) and the NGF's own home page (www.ngf.org). Visitors to either site are now able to simply click on your Web address, which is a part of your company listing, and have direct access to your own Web site.

The reason behind this initiative is to provide NGF members with increased value. Since putting the Directory on GolfWeb's site, we've learned that GolfWeb's traffic has increased significantly.

We hope you will also benefit from increased traffic to your site and that this translates to more business for your company.

As always, we are grateful for your support of the NGF, and I welcome your input on how we can continue to improve our products, services and member benefits.

Barry S. Frank
Vice President,
Membership Services
National Golf Foundation
Jupiter, Fla.

FROM THE CYBER MAIL BAG

Ed. — The Golf Course News website, up and running for two months now, has received considerable praise from Internet-savvy superintendents. Below are a sampling of their comments. Have a look for yourself at:

www.golfcoursenews.com

Congrats to your mag and the wonderful new Website on the Internet. As a golf course superintendent in Fulton Ill., at Fulton Country Club, it is a pleasure to read such a fine magazine on the goings on in the golf course business. In reading your latest mag

I found your new website and was thoroughly impressed with layout and content. Keep up the good work and remember to think green!!!!

A. Simmons
Fulton, Ill.
asimmons@sanasys.com

I'm a golf course superintendent, just new to the web. I'm totally impressed with the job you did on the *Golf Course News* web site! As the newspaper itself is broad and diverse, your work exceeds it! As only the web can! Great job, keep up the great work. I'm currently seeking to educate myself on the environmental and OSHA laws that apply to new golf courses in Vermont. Any suggestions? I'm going searching... thanks for any or everything.

Mary P. Knaggs
knag0002@gold.tc.umn.edu.

Great! I just purchased my new office computer and added *Golf Course News* to my "favorite places" folder... Good timing. Nice addition to a good publication!

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Phillips comment

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Osborne, another Ciba veteran. In Vegas, Hintze was asked whether the merger of two such enormous companies had resulted in any product redundancy. "None whatsoever," he explained, adding that Banner, Subdue, Sentinel, Primo and Barricade are perfectly complementary and account for 70 percent of Novartis turf and ornamental sales. All of these products

will be available for 1997 with full service and support, he said.

As for new product development, Hintze said to expect Novartis' first packaging innovation in August and six new products over the next four years. Medallion, a contact fungicide for ornamental use, will launch this year, he said.

•••

Though not all the players were represented in Las Vegas, the various GPS cart-tracking companies garnered

a great deal of attention. Currently, there are five manufacturers of these systems, which allow cart-renting golfers to measure their distances to the pin while also allowing course operators to know the exact whereabouts and pace of a particular cart.

The competition among these five manufacturers has been fierce. Indeed, at least two are in court claiming patent infringement.

However, talking to various insiders, look for the following developments: 1)

There will be a winnowing of manufacturers from five to three; 2) Patents mean nothing, so the various legal proceedings will only drain those parties of capital; and 3) These devices will really take off — and soon.

According to one course operator who has a system already installed, "anybody charging more than \$70 per round can't afford not to have these things." Why? Because people will pay the extra \$10 to use the system, and they cost the operator half that amount per round.

Leedom comment

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independent owners have sought professional managers to run their courses. American Golf, the largest operator of golf courses, leases approximately 250 golf courses nationally and is responsible for the daily operations and maintenance of each facility. NGP and American Golf constitute an example of closely tied firms with a clear division in course ownership and operation activities.

Many of the younger management companies are regional operators specializing in particular locations to achieve economies of scale. This market clustering has firmly established some companies in specific regions. In addition to institutional funding, companies such as CCA are actually providing seed capital to new management ventures to establish a foothold in a particular region.

The coming years will see the continued emergence of regional operators and the initial stages of consolidation between the operators themselves. These "super-regionals" will attract the attention of larger investors and eventually the public markets. Newcomer, Meadowbrook Golf [GCN November 1996], publicly traded on the lowly Bulletin Boards, has already begun such a strategy by purchasing management companies on both the East and West coasts as regional operating divisions. Though Meadowbrook remains undercapitalized, this concept will likely provide a blueprint for further industry consolidation.

Alliances between management companies and large home builders is a relatively new concept. Management companies have established these ties to add business in newly constructed golf communities. Arnold Palmer Golf Management has allied with Toll Brothers on the East coast and Western Properties recently teamed with U.S. Homes following completion of the Heritage Palms golf community in Palm Springs, Calif.

O.B. Sports [GCN July 1996] of Portland, Ore., has differentiated itself by creating unique innovations in course management. On one 36-hole facility the

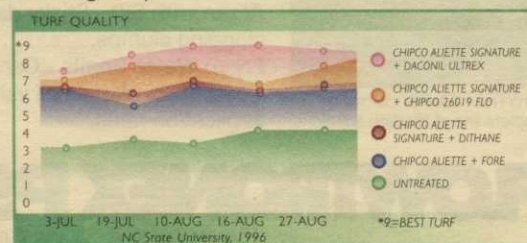
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