

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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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.

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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.



Access to the 15th tee at Pebble Beach Golf Links is destroyed as a result of the El Niño-driven storms in early 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

SEE EL NIÑO COVERAGE, PP.30-33

statewide reached their limits. The Monterey Peninsula received no mercy. "We had the highest tide and the biggest swell ever

recorded in Stillwater Cove," said Mark Michaud, superintendent at Pebble Beach Golf Links. "If we hadn't put in the new seawall on the 18th hole, I'm sure we would have had some ma-

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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 fol-

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Employees come first at Gotham

California Golf Club was one of the early purchases that propelled Gotham Golf Partners into the world of course operations.

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 Vir-

ginia-based multi-course operator.

"In the golf business, it's always been a given that you work seven days a week. But to properly manage entities you have to put people in place who can perform and do their jobs. We have sophisticated management so that there is time for other things in our lives.

"We push our managers to make sure they get their days off. If a manager can't take his days off then he

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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 prod-

uct 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-hp turbo-charged diesel engine and 4-wheel drive.

"One of our goals in designing the HR-

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A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT...

When 25 inches of rain fell on a 10-day period, the Santa Ynez River rose to record flows and redirected its course right through Rancho San Marcos Golf Club's 3rd hole. Below is the 3rd hole before the El Niño-driven rains, with no river in sight. At right, a photo taken on Feb. 10 shows half the green and fairway washed away. Far

right is the 3rd hole as photographed on Feb. 25. Notice the bunker at far left.

Photos courtesy of Scott Nair



to the bottom of the blade on a D-4 dozer and basically started pushing silt across the fairway," he said. "The pipe acts as a sort of training wheel and we avoid digging up grass and damage to sprinklers. We windrow the material into the rough and then pick the piles up with a loader. We finish the cleanup with box scrapers, then we drag, drill seed and water."

The greens are top priority, Costa said, adding: "We have to hand-remove the silt and wheel it away. We squeegee and water to finish the greens, but we get as much silt off as we can before we use any water."

The Carmel River chose to make its own path and took out a large chunk of fairway on No. 12 hole of the East Course, he said.

"We lost two-thirds of the par-5 hole clear to the left rough as the river eroded the bank," Costa said. "One of our irrigation wells ended up in the middle of the river."

In 1995 a part of the course was closed 76 days, and Costa said: "We are probably looking at the same thing this time."

They opened 18 holes on March 6. Costa expected engineering near the

riverbank to restore the lost fairway, but promised, "We will continue to open as much of the golf course as possible."

One of Southern California's newest golf courses, Rancho San Marcos Golf Club, located inland from the coastal community of Santa Barbara, was heavily damaged as the waters of the Santa Ynez River rose to record flows of over 80,000 cubic feet per second.

"That's just too much force of water," said Rancho San Marcos superintendent Scott Nair. "We got 13 inches of rain on Feb. 2-3 and a total of almost 25 inches in that 10-day period."

While the storm caused heavy erosion around the course, the river cut a new path, removing more than half of the 3rd green. As Nair's crew established a temporary green and cleaned up to continue play, a second big storm struck.

"When it started to rain hard again, I knew we were in trouble," Nair said. "There was no place for the water to go."

The second system took what was left of the 3rd hole.

"I saw trees with 60-inch-diameter trunks just get swallowed up and swept away," recounted Nair. The water-soaked soils were not able to take the rain from the second storm and the highway connecting the golf course to Santa Barbara fell victim of a large rock slide. Work to reopen the road may take until early May.

"There's a way around but it takes an extra 45 minutes," Nair said.

Nair plans to reroute the golf course and, he said, adding: "It looks like we are going to be just fine. Play is impacted, but amazingly enough, we have people coming to play the course now that the weather is better."

In Northern California, the San Francisco Bay area received the same punishment from the ocean. Nearly 50 feet of coastline was swallowed up by record high surf in more than a few areas.

Santa Barbara's Olympic Club, site of the 1998 U.S. Open, received some damage to its recently constructed cliff holes nearest the ocean, but the damage was limited to two holes. Olympic Club superintendent John Fleming said, "We are assessing the damage to those holes and making plans."

The Lake Course which will host the Open was not affected, Fleming said.

Elsewhere around the state, golf courses everywhere felt the impact of having too much rain. Many were closed for the first time ever.

"This storm caused the first time in my 11 years that I have ever had to close all 18 holes of my golf course at once," said Sam Williamson of the Ojai Valley Inn and Spa, which is located in storm-ravaged Ventura County. "We even lost a

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El Niño out West

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Dave Wilber is a consulting agronomist and owner of Wilber Turf and Soil Services in Rocklin, Calif.

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West 'watered'

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few trees from wind — and the wind hardly ever blows here.”

While insurance companies count the losses in real estate and property in the state of California at nearly \$1 billion, it seemed obvious that economic impacts will be felt by the golf courses that have endured damage and by those that have just simply been too wet.

“The sun came out for a few days recently and we realized that not many people had been out to play golf and all of the sudden it seemed like they all came out at once,” said Nair.

Ojai's Williamson has another way to look at it, saying: “Our golf revenues are down 40 percent, but the hotel stayed busy due to people using our new spa facilities. We have plenty of smiling faces here. It could have been worse.”

“We really have an opportunity to work with this situation and make the golf course better,” Nair said. “Our staff really pulled together. By that, I mean our entire staff: my people, the pro shop staff and everyone else. We had members of the office staff filling sandbags and the food-and-beverage people pitching in and helping to clean up and get us open after the storm.

“Everyone really gave 200 percent and I am proud of them. I cannot imagine getting all the work done just to be able to use the cart paths again if it were not for all of those people working their tails off. I saw Rancho San Marcos at its worst and its best. I'm looking forward to making the course better than it was before the rains.”

“We're doing better now,” said Pebble Beach's Michaud. “We definitely do not need any more rain. There is going to be a bunch of work being done in the area, but the golf course is doing just fine now.”

“This sort of thing is not a good time for democracy,” said Costa. “We can't really gather everyone around and start asking them their opinions and taking votes on how to get things done. We just have to work hard and keep the staff informed about our plans.

The superintendent at Rancho Canada, Tim Greenwald, and his assistant, George Young, have done a great job of getting a ton of work behind them, Costa said.

“We have found that the only way we get through this is to take the problems in small bites and help everyone stay focused,” Costa said. “In a perverse sort of way it is exciting because it is a challenge in lots of problem-solving and I think that is what draws many of us to this business.”

Bob Costa agrees that a team effort is needed during these

times. “We've had the pro shop staff and the cart attendants out working with everyone else. I know they get a sense of ownership when they see what it takes to get through these things,” he said.

Nothing would have led those in the golf business to be able to see what was coming in 1998 — even the hype over the possibility of a hard winter due to the El Niño effect. However, golf

courses have endured the storm and soon the normally mild springtime weather will have golfers lacing up their shoes again. Most may never know that the course they are playing on was in some stage of flooding only a few months earlier.

Record rainfall, combined with high tides and pounding surf, left this bank unable to support trees along the 6th fairway at Pebble Beach Golf Links.



We never said you wouldn't see unattractive spots on your course. They just won't be dollar spots.