



The view from the proposed 7th tee at The Victoria Golf and Country Club Resort course near Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Golf paradise unfolding in Sri Lanka with hotels, course

By TREVOR LEDGER

KANDY, Sri Lanka — Towards the end of the last century British Colonists in the former Ceylon imported golf to this island. Now, approaching the end of the millennium, another group of Brits, Donald Steel and Co., are adding a third golf course, the first for more than 100 years.

The development, including two hotels and 300 houses as well as the 6,900 yard, 18-hole course, is sited on "...one of the most spectacular sites the company has had the pleasure of designing a course over," said Steel architect Martin Ebert.

There are only two courses in Sri Lanka: Royal Colombo and Nuwara Eliya. Both are consistently very busy.

"This will be the best course in Sri Lanka," Ebert said. "People playing the other two courses will want to play here. Villas [on the course] are already being sold to locals, which is very important."

Planning and bureaucratic negotiations ran from 1993-1998. The main course is now being prepared by 100 estate workers at a good local rate of around £1.00 sterling per day. Much of the construction work is being carried out by hand following initial instruction by Nigel Ely, a British golf course shaper.

Ely traveled here to instruct local machine operators how to build tees, greens and bunkers according to drawings. But, material preparation and placement has been carried out almost entirely by hand.

"Such construction techniques, with dozens of labourers performing the tasks we normally associate with hi-tech machinery, makes for slower yet perhaps more controllable shaping. As the economy of this Third World country is far behind Europe's, it is very much in keeping that the building of this Edenesque course is so labor-intensive. The sight of soil being graded by hand in a tin-roofed shack takes us back to the days of Park and Braid *et al.* It gives pause for thought considering that the sand for the root zone has been provided by

divers using bowls to scoop up sand from the bottom of deep rivers. Assuming two things: That the greens and tees will require approximately 4,000 cubic meters of sand; and that the average bowl will contain .2 of one cubic meter, that equates to roughly 20,000 bowls of sand required. That's twenty thousand dives in deep rivers, minimum.

The topography of the site adds further to the achievements of the project.

The bulk of the golf course lies on an isthmus jutting out into the Victoria Reservoir affording water views for the majority of the holes.

Ebert is enthusiastic. "The land is stunning both in terms of views and golfing character. Significant undulation, steep in places, has provided a challenge for the routing of the course but this will provide many exhilarating tee shots and vistas."

The development is the brainchild of Mark Bostock, former chairman of John Keells Hotels, although the inference that tourism is the primary target should not be swallowed in this case. The company which is financing the initial build is Rajawella Holdings, a group made up of Sri Lankan businessmen, who recognise that the strong local demand for such luxury housing is proof against the facility becoming entirely dependent upon tourists — a dangerous dependency in a country which suffers from an unstable civil political climate.

Bostock himself is of English extraction but has lived all his life in Sri Lanka, it should come as no surprise that his former company, (Keells), has agreed to take on one of the hotels — a move which has added financial impetus to the project. While the current arrangements will see the development completed, give or take, further backers still have the chance to 'get in on the ground floor.'

No firm date has been set for course opening at this point but golfers should be enjoying all the site has to offer by the end of 1998.

Taking golf 'downtown' in major \$1 billion Manila development

MANILA, The Philippines — Imagine building a championship golf course in New York City's Central Park with Wall Street nearly abutting the park's south border, instead of the Park Plaza Hotel. While far-fetched in New York, this scenario is a reality here in the heart of Southeast Asia's busiest city, where Golfplan has designed 18 holes as part of a \$1 billion multi-use development.

The Fort Bonafacio Development Corp., an international consortium of major economic players, has planned a golf course, a series of high-rise office buildings, at least two five-star hotels and mid-rise apartment blocks for 450 acres in downtown Manila.

The former U.S. military base had been located on the city's outskirts for many years. But this city of 11 million souls has grown out and around the former base, which sits just two miles from Makiti, Manila's bustling financial district.

The course construction effort will break ground in October when the rainy season has ended, according to Ron Fream, president and founder of Golfplan,

the design firm based in Santa Rosa, Calif.

At 6,200 yards, the par-70 course will fit neatly on 115 acres.

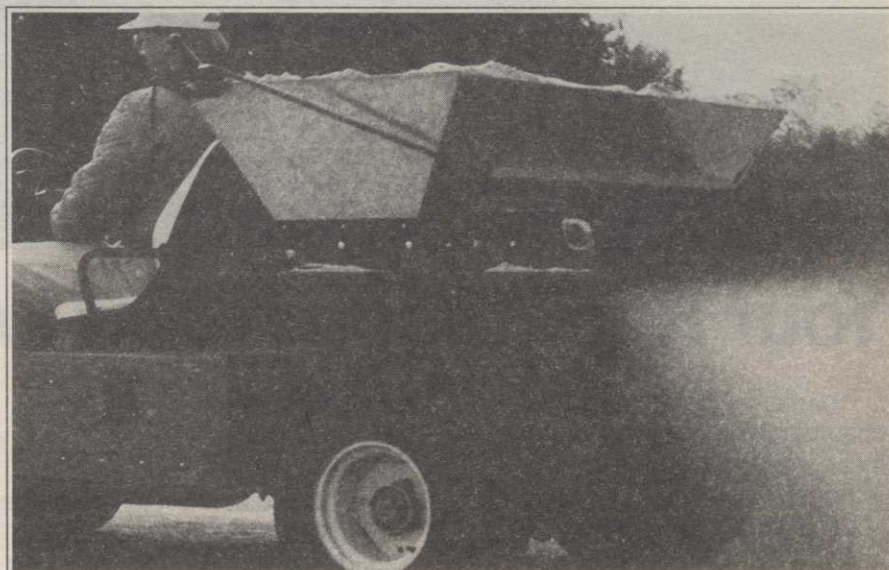
"The design is a little short due to acreage constraints, but we're currently negotiating for five more acres which would allow us to make the course 6,400 yards at par 72," said Fream.

"Either way, it will be a tournament quality design. The focal point will be the towers — indeed, we've designed the course to look beautiful from a 20th floor penthouse. We've done that through large statements of water and color. We've shaped the bunkers and lakes to make visual statements from both vantage points: ground-level and bird's-eye. We've massed trees and flowering bouganveilla in the same manner."

Investor interest in the Fort Bonafacio project has been unprecedented, according to Fream.

"The consortium sold in two months what it thought would take four years to sell," said Fream. "The demand for this

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Greece aims for 30 courses

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line the proposals. This was followed up in November 1997 with a congress in Thessalonica where the draft plans were firmed up, to a degree at least.

Nikos Scoulas, director general of EOT, explained that the Greek government is pushing through a law which will give financial incentive to new golf projects in Greece and the Greek Islands. Grants will be worth approximately 40 percent of cost to developers, a vast figure which goes a long way towards confirming just how keen Greece is to develop golf courses quickly.

Costas Deriziotis, assistant to Scoulas, conveyed a steadfast determination on the part of Greece. "Greece

assures the international community that it is willing to construct 30 golf courses during the next 3 years," said Deriziotis. "Greece meets all the prerequisites; an excellent climate, available properties, the required national legislation, the funds and the specialists.

"Furthermore, we, as the Hellenic Tourism Organisation, have the technical specifications required for courses, ready for any investor. These standards are based on international standards and allow for quick state approval of grants and other incentives."

The incentives are lip smackingly attractive, including a 40-percent grant for new golf course construction with further grants — 100-percent tax breaks and

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CIRCLE #119

Manila

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location — in the center of one of Asia's largest cities — is overwhelming. There is no other site in a major city anywhere in the world where you could do this sort of project."

In addition to Fort Bonafacio, Fream and Co. are collaborating on five separate projects in The Philippines. In Silang, the firm is collaborating with Kwok Philippine Properties, Inc. (KPP) on one of the country's most ambitious real estate, commercial and leisure projects.

When completed, the Silang development will be home to more than 10,000 people, a Shangri La hotel, shops, schools and commercial properties. The golf course, designed with help from PGA consultant Colin Montgomerie, will be an ultra-exclusive enclave within the 2,500-acre (1000-hectare) development.

Elsewhere, the 18-hole Crystaal Golf Club, developed by a Manila commercial real estate developer, will feature spectacular views of the volcanic Lake Taal — the "taal" in Crystaal. Located south of Manila, Lake Taal is a volcanic crater that features several islands — the products of still more volcanic activity. In nearby Tagaytay, Golfplan has also been contracted to provide master planning and design services for 36 holes at Batulao Highlands. The developers are a consortium of Filipino and Singaporean companies. In Cavite, Golfplan is working with Santa Lucia Development Inc. on Santa Lucia Saddle and Clubs Residential Estates.

At Sparrebosch, Golfplan's hotly anticipated South African design, site construction is underway and dedicated course construction will begin in June, according to David Dale, Golfplan vice president and senior designer.

Dale added that Golfplan's native plant restoration designs are complete, and the project has received all its approvals from South Africa's various coastal commissions.

Located outside the resort town of Knysna, the 18-hole Sparrebosch course will sit atop a naturally contoured parcel on East Head, the spectacular headlands overlooking the Indian Ocean. Upon completion — a dramatic New Year's Eve 1999 opening has been planned — Sparrebosch will be the southernmost golf course on the African continent. This will provide Golfplan a unique bookend, as the firm also designed the continent's northernmost course: the 27-hole Golf de Tabarka Resort high above the Tunisian port city of Tabarka.

