

Nickels' 3 Korean projects creep toward completion

By MICHAEL LEVANS

SEOUL — Nickels Golf Group's recent activity may be a sign that golf is alive and well in South Korea and will continue to be so when the current economic cloud clears.

Over the last year, Doug Nickels was commissioned to evaluate existing, and create original course designs for three projects being sculpted on the sides of the mountainous Korean landscape. One project is near completion, while the other two are scheduled to open in full before 2000.

Nickels recently oversaw the near completion of Mauna Ocean Resort near Kwangju, South Korea's ancient city. "Over the winter, this may have been the only golf course construction project going in Korea. The shaper left about a month ago," said Nickels.

Built by Kolon Development

Co., a subgroup of the Kolon Group, a textile and apparel company, Mauna offers ocean views from gentle, rolling hills — uncharacteristic of the typical Korean golf landscape.

Kolon plans to add condominiums and is considering the construction of a high-tech theme park on the site.

According to Nickels, Kolon decided to push ahead with course completion through the economic turmoil due to its proposed opening date. "We were close enough to finishing and the owners had the foresight that everybody will be coming out of this crisis in a year or two, right when then they would be ready to open."

Club 200, an 18-hole facility one hour northeast of Seoul, is Nickels' second Korean project. The owners plan to limit membership to 299.

"The course has one hole left



A typical Korean golf course construction scene: Nickels' Mauna Ocean Resort course slowly takes shape along the hillsides.

to shape, so we're waiting to see when we can finish," said Nickels. "Membership sales have pretty much stopped, which means capital expenditures have also stopped." The entire course is planted with the exception of two greens and one fairway. The 50,000-square-foot clubhouse is half done.

"It's in a gorgeous valley," said

Nickels. "There are some mountainous holes then there are some holes that blend together in a big bowl. The clubhouse will overlook six or seven holes."

Club 200 plans to open nine holes this year and nine holes in 1999.

The third project is Tong Yang Country Club, 27 holes located one hour south of Seoul near

Yong-In, a town which already has several golf courses.

At this time, all rough shaping is complete and irrigation is half done. However, construction here has been put off until late summer, early fall. "The goal here is to stabilize what we have until work picks up," said Nickels.

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Ristola scores environmental victory in Germany

EMSTAL, Germany — A success story has been created here on the banks of the River Ems by architect Tony Ristola in the shape of an extension to the Lingen Golf Course.

The extension was vehemently opposed by environmental group Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V. (BUND).

"The beginning of the construction phase was, for both the environmentalists and the club, a small part of Hell," said Ristola.

The resulting course, Ristola's second in Germany, led BUND to announce: "We admit this: We made a mistake. [The project] is now a model for the integration of a sports park in a protected area."

The flat site was covered with 7-foot-high stands of corn.

"The second site visit got my heart racing with excitement," Ristola said. "A property bordering the course gave me the feeling that something truly special could be created."

To the southeast Ristola stumbled upon a 28-acre natural

reserve of sand dunes, hillocks and hollows. The way forward for the Lingen extension suddenly became crystal clear — "To restore the barren farmland to a version of it's original beauty."

Test borings on the property revealed differing varieties of sand throughout, allowing Ristola to plan for extensive areas of exposed sand and sandy waste.

Course construction began on a Tuesday and by the Friday

BUND had called in the police and work was halted. A missing permit was finally granted and work recommenced in an atmosphere of hostile tension. Ristola can now laugh at the situation which confronted him, but at the time, "No one was happy; the club, contractors, BUND or myself."

All interested parties met for a site visit and Herr. Claus Alfes of BUND expressed his displeasure at the prospect of a "glorified graveyard" of flat, green ex-cornfield.

It was here that Ristola made the breakthrough in communication. "I pointed to the eroded dunes on the nature reserve and explained that we would have vast expanses of open sand with grassy islands and native plantings. Herr. Alfes expressed his approval and I added that there would be more than he could possibly imagine."

A much healthier communication line was opened up and construction continued with the support of both the city authorities and BUND itself.

At the end of May the finishing touches were applied. BUND cited the following aspects as being crucial to its cooperation: That the new section of golf course (10 holes) has the dunes-like character of the Ems river banks; that a wide corridor between the course and the reserve be left fallow; that the underground pipe drainage (in place from agricultural use) be replaced with creek and wetland drainage system; that only native deciduous trees are planted; that a 1.5-km public footpath should run through the new section of the course.

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Nickels project

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Developed by Tong Yang Leisure Co., Tong Yang Country Club is a good example of just how huge Korean golf course construction projects can be.

Being a semi-mountainous country, Korea's flatter land in the bottom of the valleys is dedicated to agriculture or urban growth. Golf, and other recreation, is relegated to the mountains.

Tong Yang was carved out of a mountainside following the movement of 7 million cubic meters of earth and rock to accommodate not only the course, but access roads and other construction amenities.

"Golf courses are huge civil engineering projects in Korea," said Nickels. "Our involvement has been to work with the Korean architects, who are basically civil engineers. We lend our expertise in the design and sculptural side. They move the millions of yards, we work with them to sculpt it."