

BRIEFS

AUGUSTA, Ga. — While the Big Three Golf Club is not trying to be the next Augusta National, it will bring together three of the biggest names in the golf industry. Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Gary Player are teaming up to design a 27-hole course here among the tall Georgia pines. Nicklaus, Palmer and Player will each design nine holes of the course, which is situated on dramatically contoured land that borders the Savannah River. Several holes will be on a 220-acre island along the river. The club will feature 50 lodges, clubhouse and meeting facilities. Agreements between Nicklaus, Palmer and Player were signed in April and the course is currently in the planning stages.

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VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. — After scrambling to recover from after effects of Hurricane Bonnie, the \$15-million Pete Dye-designed Tournament Players Club of Virginia Beach held its official grand opening June 8. Curtis Strange, a Virginia Beach native, served as the PGA Tour player/consultant on the layout. The 7,442-yard, par-72 course is due to play host to its first tournament next spring when the Nike tour comes to town.

NGF notes slight drop in golfers, rounds

The number of U.S. golfers and rounds played remained steady in 1998, figures the National Golf Foundation (NGF) finds both reassuring and troubling.

The total number of golfers in the United States reached 26.4 million in 1998, a slight drop from the 26.5 million the previous year. Likewise, the total number of rounds dipped slightly to 528.5 million, down from the record 547 million set a year earlier, but still representing the second-highest total ever.

But the NGF saw the slight decline as good news since the industry last year was able to hold the major gains in golfers (up 7.3 percent) and rounds (up 14.6 percent) it made in 1997.

"We know from past experience that one year's participation numbers are not indicative of much of anything," the report reads. "Back in 1990, the industry experienced significant growth. However, that growth proved to be a flash in the pan as golfer numbers receded by 11 percent

the next year and stayed there until 1997. The reaffirming results of 1998 indicate that golf is indeed gaining in sustained popularity over the early years of this decade."

Yet, the lack of growth in players and rounds come at a time when the supply of golf courses is escalating at a near-record pace. The golf industry added 448 new courses in 1998, the second-highest total ever.

"The report reinforces several of the messages delivered in the NGF's recently released future of the game study *A Strategic Perspective on the Future of Golf*," the report adds. "That study notes that,

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Number of golfers in the U.S./1994-98

Golfer Segment	Golfers (millions)					Percent Change 1997-98	Compound Annual Growth 1994-98
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998		
Avid (25+ rounds/yr.)	5.1	5.5	5.3	5.6	5.4	- 2.9%	1.6%
Moderate (8-24 rounds/yr.)	6.1	6.1	6.1	7.9	8.4	6.8	8.6
Occasional (1-7 rounds/yr.)	11.4	11.5	11.6	10.6	10.4	- 2.0	- 2.4
Junior (Ages 12-17)	1.7	2.0	1.8	2.4	2.1	- 8.9	5.9
All	24.3	25.0	24.7	26.5	26.4	- 0.2	2.1
Beginners	1.6	1.8	2.0	3.0	2.9	- 3.5%	15.9%

Source: National Golf Foundation

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