

## 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,

Continued on page 5

### 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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## Number of rounds in the U.S.

Golfer Segment	Rounds (millions)					Percent Change 1997-98	Compound Annual Growth 1994-98
	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998		
Avid (25+ rounds/yr.)	322.5	340.3	330.3	369.2	348.8	- 5.5%	2.0%
Moderate (8-24 rounds/yr.)	84.8	85.2	85.4	114.0	116.7	2.4	8.3
Occasional (1-7 rounds/yr.)	36.7	36.8	37.1	34.0	33.5	- 1.5	- 2.3
Junior (Ages 12-17)	20.9	27.9	24.6	30.0	29.5	- 1.7	9.0
All	464.8	490.2	477.4	547.2	528.5	- 3.4	3.3
Avg, rounds per golfer	19.1	19.6	19.3	20.7	20.0	3.4%	1.2%

Source: National Golf Foundation



## Participation

Continued from page 3

unless the industry works smarter to recruit and retain players, participation is not likely to grow any more than 1.5 percent per year for the foreseeable future.

"The industry has been favored by two successive years of high interest and trial. However, retention efforts have not been as successful as desired."

Specifically, the game attracted 2.9 million new players in 1998. But since the total number of golfers went down, that means slightly more than 2.9 million also abandoned golf last year. In other words, as many people are taking up the game as are giving it up.

"This churning effect has been inhibiting golf's growth for most of the 1990s," the report states.

The largest single group of new players (33.5 percent) in 1998 fell between the ages 18 to 29. This group has traditionally supplied the bulk of new players, although seniors (60-plus years of age) are taking up the game at a growing rate. Between 1996 to 1997, the number of beginning senior golfers grew substantially from 44,000 to 140,000. Seniors accounted for 142,000 of the 2.9 million Americans taking up the game in 1998.

By way of comparison, while seniors made up just 2.2 percent of beginning golfers in 1996, they accounted for 5 percent of beginners in 1998.

Females continue to make up about 20 percent of the golfing population and 40 percent of new golfers, numbers in line with past years and indicating that women are subject to the same churning effects as other groups in terms of entering and leaving the game.

Junior golfers, who grew by a whopping 34 percent in 1997, declined by 12.5 percent, or 300,000 golfers, last year. Juniors also made up 19 percent of new golfers in 1998, compared to 22 percent the year before. Much of the 1997 growth was attributed to the attention paid Tiger Woods and other new golfers.

According to the report: "This perhaps underscores something many have believed all along. And that is, while Tiger may have lit the fire among many youngsters, it falls primarily to everyone in the industry to keep that fire burning."

"While thankfully the industry didn't have a decline in participation or rounds played to the magnitude of what happened in 1991, neither was there any movement forward in either category. And according to the *Strategic Perspective* report, lack of forward motion may eventually lead to the demand gap which is looming on the horizon."



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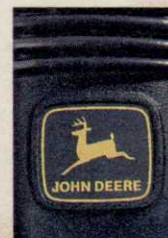
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