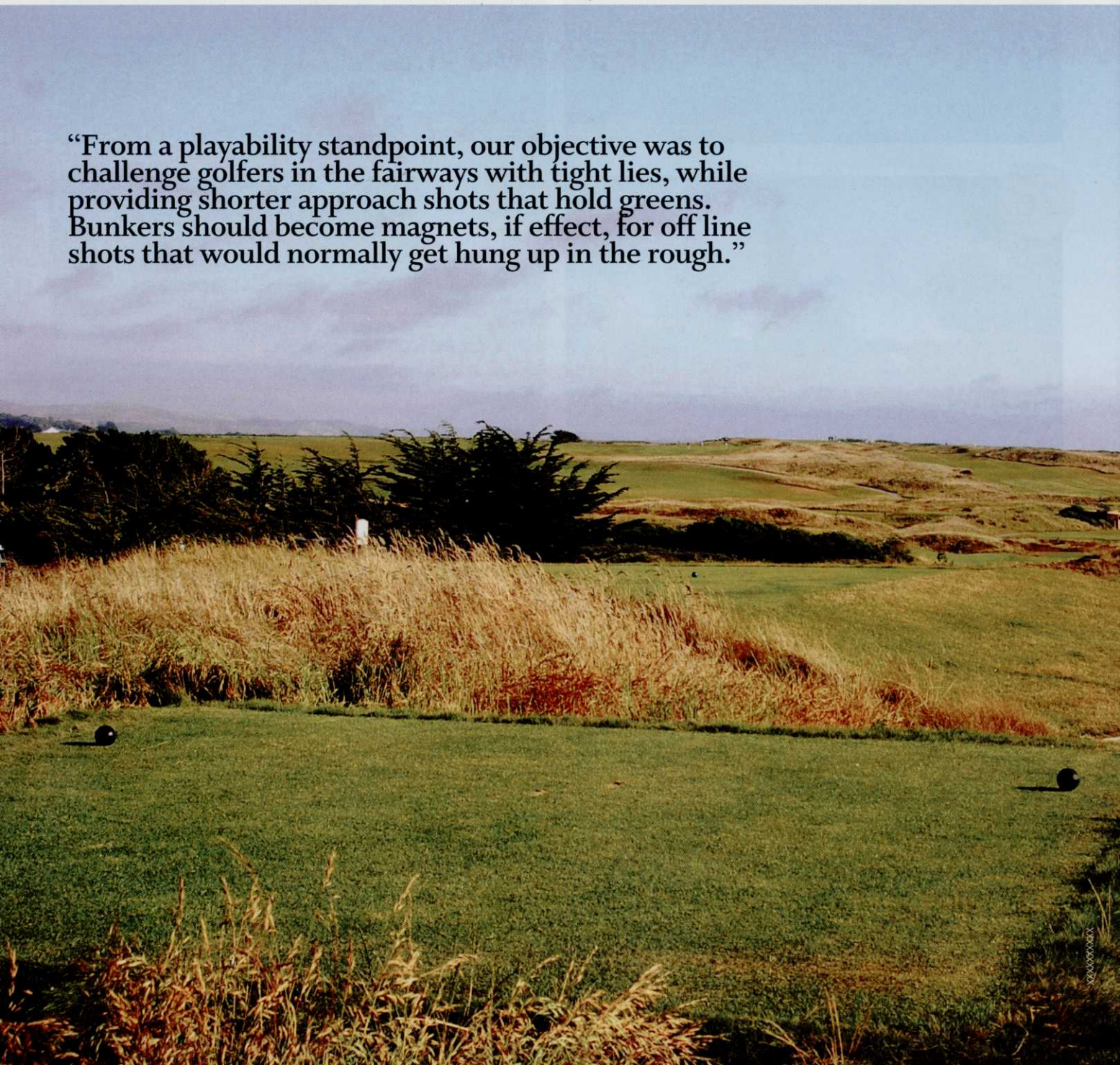


Firm, *Fast* and Furious

Through a links enhancement project, Half Moon Bay Golf Links transformed into the links-style course it was always meant to be.

“From a playability standpoint, our objective was to challenge golfers in the fairways with tight lies, while providing shorter approach shots that hold greens. Bunkers should become magnets, if effect, for off line shots that would normally get hung up in the rough.”



by Dan Miller

“Firm and fast” has been the preferred playing condition of British links courses for centuries. Only recently has the trend found acceptance in the U.S., where a handful of courses have transitioned from lush green to a drier shade of brown.

This is partly borne out of necessity: parts of the Southeast and Texas have been mired in one of the worst droughts in recent history, and water shortages in Southern Nevada, Phoenix/Scottsdale and Palm Springs have wreaked havoc on the water supply of these popular golf vacation hot spots.

At Half Moon Bay Golf Links, Half Moon Bay, Calif., the idea of converting the Arthur Hills-designed Ocean Course into a firm and fast, links-style playing experience was the brainchild of Kenmark Golf Management, operators of our 36-hole facility just 40 miles south of San Francisco.

Since opening in 1997, the Ocean Course had gradually morphed into a *Poa annua* playing surface similar to so many of Northern California’s coastal facilities. Rough was high and thick, the greens surrounds were spongy and mowed well above green height, and putting surfaces were quick, but not necessarily firm.

Yet everything about the Ocean Course cried out for it to be a links style course, not an aerial golf affair: the tra-



ALL IMAGES: HALF MOON BAY

At Half Moon Bay Golf Links, the idea of converting the Arthur Hills-designed Ocean Course into a firm and fast, links-style playing experience was the brainchild of Kenmark Golf Management.

“The goal of the links enhancement has been to reposition the Ocean Course as one of the best links golf experiences in the U.S. through a series of agronomic upgrades creating a firmer, faster playing surface with an emphasis on shot values and the ground game.”

ditional out-and-in routing; the natural fairway contours that allows movement on the ground around greens and bunkers; the mounding between holes; and the course's setting along one of the most breathtaking swaths of coastline in North America.

In an effort to capitalize on these elements, and restore the Ocean Course it links golf intent, Kenmark Golf Management initiated the “Links Enhancement Project.” It has become the primary focus of our agronomic plan over the past 18 months, and its principles will continue to guide maintenance practices well into the future.

A word about the Ocean Course: to this day, Mr. Hills considers the seaside layout one of the best marriages of golf, land and sea in North America. The first two holes take golfers out past the onsite Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay and the ocean.

Holes No. 3 through No. 9 turn inland, with holes separated only by fescue mounding, sporadic bunkering and a water feature on the seventh hole. The back nine begins the dramatic return trip to the ocean, and the final three holes play along a cliff overlooking the crashing waves of the Pacific.

The goal of the links Enhancement has been to reposition the Ocean Course as one of the best links golf experiences in the U.S. through a series of agronomic upgrades creating a firmer, faster playing surface with an emphasis on shot values and the ground game.

In August of 2009, several areas on the Ocean Course were rejuvenated through seeding and mowing, bringing hazards

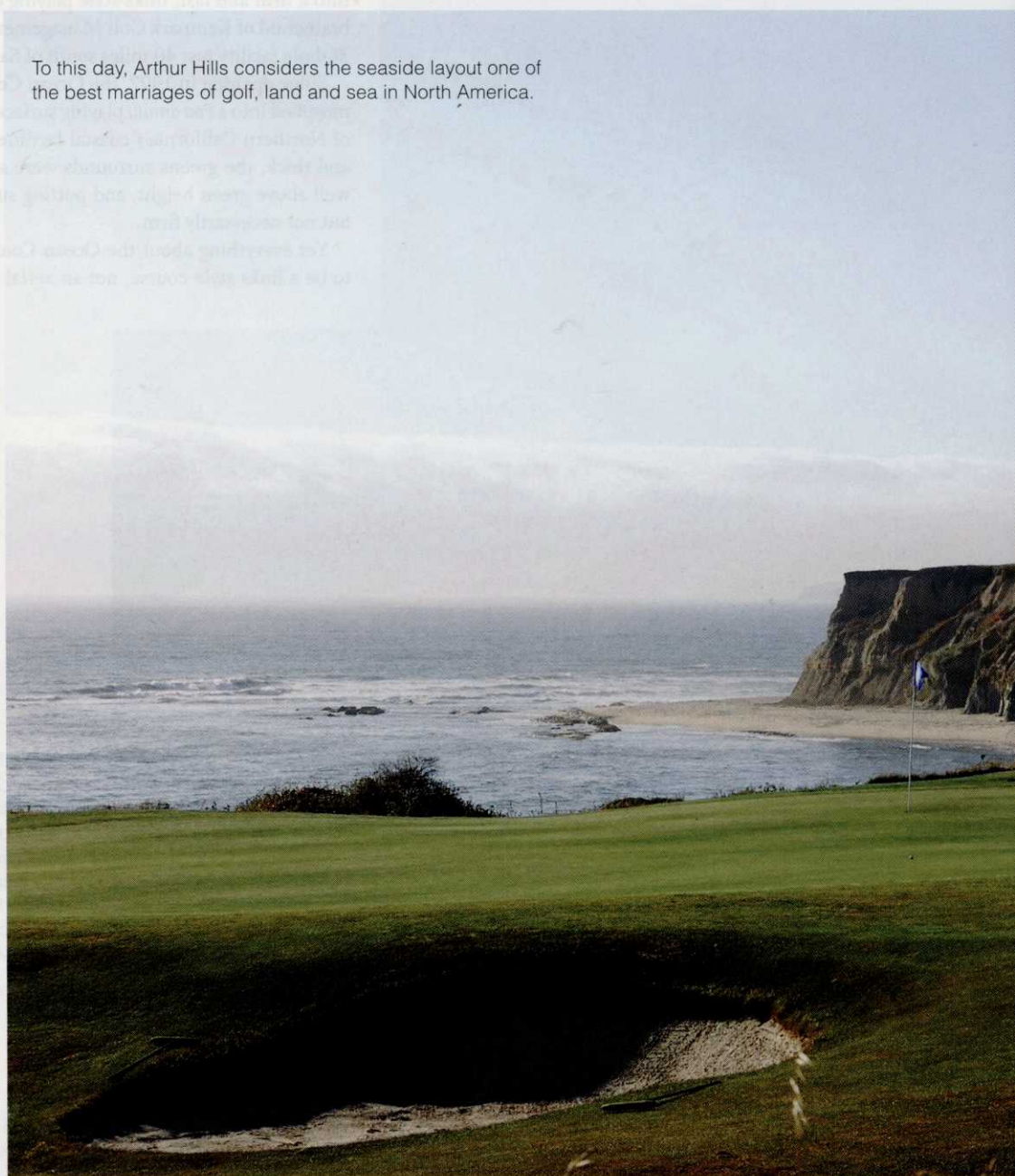
and fairway bunkers back into play off the tee. In late July this year, the installation of five new tee boxes added 200 yards to the course and created new angles and strategic approaches.

FIRM, FAST AND FURIOUS. The primary agronomic objective for 2010 has been to create decidedly firmer and faster fairways. Immediately, we addressed our year-round climate and condi-

tions to see if this was feasible. The rainy season for Half Moon Bay is November through March, with a total of up to 23 inches of rainfall annually.

With approximately 160 dry

To this day, Arthur Hills considers the seaside layout one of the best marriages of golf, land and sea in North America.



days per year, we were still able to accomplish our goal of harder surfaces throughout the Ocean Course.

To do so, irrigation was drastically reduced from previous years. Year to date, the Ocean Course is using about 50% less water than it did in 2009. With drier, harder conditions the ball rolls farther off the tee, allowing for variety in club selection (but also bringing numerous hazards back into play). The ground

game is back in play around the greens, allowing for a range of shot options and fostering player creativity.

Poa annua remains the predominant grass on the Ocean Course, however irrigation practices are designed to maximize the growth of the perennial ryegrass. The *Poa annua* is allowed to stress out and, in some cases, even die in order to maintain the hard fast conditions we are striving for.

From a playability standpoint, our objective was to challenge golfers in the fairways with tight lies, while providing shorter approach shots that hold greens. Bunkers should become magnets, if effect, for off line shots that would normally get hung up in the rough.

NATIVE GRASS CONVERSION. Approximately 2.5 acres of maintained turf was converted to native grass in the fall of 2009. This is the first phase of a three-year program to convert a total of 10 acres, reducing the total amount of maintained acreage from 85 to 75.

In preparation for the native conversion, turf was sprayed once with "Round-Up" for four weeks prior to seeding. A second application was made two weeks prior to seeding to pick-up any

areas that were not controlled after the first application.

Most of the dead turf was removed before seeding using dethatching reels on a National 84" triplex mower to insure better seed-to-soil contact. Finally, the seed was broadcast on the surface at a rate of 60 pounds per acre and incorporated into the soil using the same de-thatching reels.

Keeping the seed moist was not a problem as the irrigation heads were still in place. The new native areas not only reduce irrigation and fertilization, but enhance the appearance of the golf course.

The converted areas were closely monitored to gain an understanding of how play was impacted. Mowing of the rough was discontinued in March at the end of the rainy season.



Irrigation

Consulting, Inc.



**Design, GPS, Evaluation
and Audit Services**



*Independent Golf Course Design Services
Experience on more than 300 Golf Courses*

Corporate Office: (978)433-8972
Providing innovative design solutions worldwide.
www.irrigationconsulting.com

www.golfcourseindustry.com/readerservice - #24

COURSE RENOVATION

We allowed the areas to grow without water and, as the season progressed, the grass became thin and more playable.

Areas throughout the Ocean Course that appear thin will be reseeded prior to the beginning of rainy season in November. We have initiated the process of converting three more acres to native areas and will closely monitor it as the climate and seasons change.

MOWING, DESIGN AND CONDITIONING.

To give golfers the option

of playing an array of shots and clubs around the green, the rough around greens was completely eliminated to provide a uniform surface. This mowing strategy also places a greater premium on hitting the greens: errant shots that miss the green can now come to rest some 30 feet from the putting surface or in a bunker.

Speaking of mowing: The net effect of the water reduction and native area conversions has been a drastic reduction in the mowing frequency from tee to green.

This has allowed for a reallocation of staff to other areas and responsibilities.

Future phases of the Links Enhancement include converting a series of sand bunkers to stacked sod (we've already converted one on the No. 8 hole) without altering the contours of the course. If golfers find themselves in a new stacked sod bunker, they will still be able to take a full swing, but the lie and feet placement could create a new (and more penal) predicament.

The feedback from our mem-

bers, daily fee guests and even local and national golf media has been outstanding. Even Arthur Hills sent us a wonderful email thanking us for restoring the Ocean Course to its intended design pedigree and agronomic condition. Courses and clubs that have been hesitant to transition to faster, firmer conditions might find the rewards greatly outweigh the risks. **GCI**

Dan Miller is director of golf course maintenance at Half Moon Bay Golf Links.

The primary agronomic objective of the project was to create decidedly firmer and faster fairways.

