

Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

Business briefs

Syngenta, Bayer settle dispute

Syngenta AG and Bayer AG announced an agreement to settle their patent disputes in U.S., European and Japanese courts over intellectual property rights for neonicotinoid-based insecticides. Under the terms of the agreement, Syngenta will pay Bayer \$120 million in return for full access to crop protection and related markets worldwide.

There are three subclasses of neonicotinoids — chloronicotinylns, thianicotinylns and nitromethylenes. Bayer's Merit (imidachloprid) is currently the only chloronicotinyln registered for turf and ornamentals. Syngenta is developing a thianicotinyln which will be called Meridian or Flagship, which will be positioned as a grub control insecticide in the golf/turf/landscape market.

Syngenta's thiamethoxam brands include Actara, Cruiser, Helix, Platinum and Centric. These crop protection products are not yet approved for turf and ornamentals in the United States. Bayer's imidachloprid-based insecticides are Confidor, Admire and Gaucho. It also recently launched the chloronicotinyln insecticide Calypso.

Neonicotinoids have a mode of action which makes them useful for "preventive," as opposed to "curative," control approaches.

USGA proposes limiting clubhead size, length

The USGA intends to restrict clubhead size and club length (except for putters) by 2004. USGA has decided that "excessive" clubhead size and length is contrary to the Rules of Golf. However, most clubs already conforming to the current Rules of Golf will not be affected by these proposals. On Dec. 19, the organization sent a letter describing the proposal to club manufacturers.

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Linked to the Links

PROGRAM AIMS TO GROW GAME

By James E. Guyette

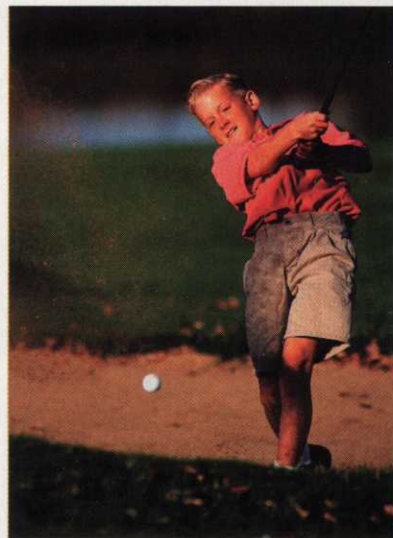
Doubting duffers nationwide may be finding new courage to take on the links this summer as courses across the country join the planned national rollout of the World Golf Foundation's Link Up 2 Golf program.

Designed to free beginning golfers from feeling intimidated when they make their golfing debuts, this industry marketing initiative was successfully pilot-tested last summer at eight facilities in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area in North Carolina.

Under the program, more than 300 aspiring golfers paid \$199 for six hours of lessons, a series of seminars, range time and five rounds of golf. The key concept is to get potential golfers up and swinging while dispelling the fear factor.

"If you haven't played much, it's intimidating to go on a golf course," says Dean Allgeyer, general manager of Wake Forest (N.C.) GC, whose course participated in the event. "But the plan worked out well for us. Getting people out here was the main thing, and we exposed a lot of new people to the property."

Link Up 2 Golf gets good marks from Allgeyer because the scope provides more of a foundation than any one-shot session with a pro. "You have contact with them for over a month;



DIGITAL STOCK

Link Up 2 Golf offers a structure and format that specifically accommodates new golfers.

it gets people *playing* the game," he stresses.

About 65 percent of the golfers in the pilot program reported feeling "uncomfortable" or "very uncomfortable" when pondering their first approach to the tee. But 61 percent of these same folks said they are more than ready for the fairways following their participation in Link Up 2 Golf. "We want to create a comfortable environment for the new or aspiring golfer," says Randy Stevenson, who directed the pilot program.

This summer's national rollout of Link Up 2 Golf is being organized by the PGA of America in conjunction with the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA).

"We're very much dedicated to

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"There was a sudden appearance of excessively sized club heads," said Dick Ruggie, USGA's senior technical director. "This demonstrates the ability of golf club manufacturers to stretch technological limits beyond what was anticipated. The USGA must act now to prevent erosion of club traditions."

Originally, the USGA proposed that golf club heads measuring more than 385 cubic centimeters in volume clubs measuring more than 47 inches in length would be considered non-conforming. On Jan. 10, however, the organization amended its proposal to set maximum size of clubheads at 460 cubic centimeters plus an additional 10 centimeters to account for differences in manufacturing processes and measurement variations.

The USGA invites written comments from all interested parties, including manufacturers, until Feb. 19. Written comments and materials can be directed to Ruggie at USGA, P.O. Box 708, Far Hills, N.J. 07931, fax: 908-234-0138, or e-mail: drugge@usga.org.

Edwards retires from Deere

Kenneth J. Edwards has retired from Moline, Ill.-based John Deere. Edwards was director of marketing and sales for John Deere Golf & Turf since 1986.

Edwards helped grow and strengthen the company's ties with the golf industry. His achievements include managing a nine-year deal naming Deere the official equipment supplier to the PGA Tour and helping Deere become the preferred turf equipment supplier to the 2002 Ryder Cup.

Edwards created the John Deere Golf & Turf Feedback program that allows superintendents to test and evaluate John Deere Golf and turf equipment and provide direct input to the company's engineers and marketing specialists.

Gregg Breningmeyer replaces Edwards.

Remodeling rules

Remodeling will take precedence over flashy new courses in 2002, representing a shift from the new-course boom of the last five years, says Damian Pascuzzo, president of

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making this work," says Mike Hughes, NGCOA's executive director. "We have a lot of motivated people to make this a success because they have the most to gain by creating new players."

Active participation among the industry's owners, managers and professionals will bring solid economic benefits, notes Ruffin Beckwith, senior vice president of the World Golf Foundation.

"If they embrace it and believe in it, it will work," he says. "We learned a lot from the test."

One of the strong points of Link Up 2 Golf is that it creates a structure and format that specifically accommodates new golfers. Follow-up is on the way to coincide with the national rollout, Beckwith reports. "We're going to track these people (from the North Carolina test) over the next 12 months to see how much golf they actually play," he adds.

For more information on the program, visit www.linkup2golf.com.

Guyette is a free-lance writer from Cleveland.

Quotable

"We are employed by the players to meet their expectations. That's not unlike what the members of a private club demand of their golf course."

— Jon Scott, vice president of agronomy for the PGA Tour (*USA Today*)

"Find a way to deal with the advancing technology. Pretty soon, Augusta National will have to buy the Hardee's on Washington Road to build a new first tee."

— Alan Shipnuk on a New Year's resolution for the golf course industry (*CNN/ISI.com*)

"If I want to take off, I'm going to go hunting. I don't want to be with a bunch of superintendents in a place I don't to be."

— Mike Pock, superintendent of Whisper Rock GC in Scottsdale, on attending the GCSAA Annual Conference & Show

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the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA).

Pascuzzo says more courses are finalizing remodeling plans each year, ranging from small projects to correct minor problems to entire makeovers.

"The trend is across the board," Pascuzzo says. "Our members report that remodeling work on the drawing boards represents a true cross-section of the country's golf courses — country clubs, public courses and municipally owned facilities."

NGCOA, Club Car form partnership

The National Golf Course Owners Association has formed an exclusive "premier partnership" with Club Car. The alliance represents "an unprecedented commitment on behalf of the organizations to work together to help golf course owners operate more efficiently and profitably," the groups said.

The partnership is designed to be a resource and ally to help owners and operators identify and evaluate solutions that meet a range of their business needs, including golf transportation, utility and hospitality vehicles, GPS-based distance measurement, communications and course management systems, and equipment financing.

Aquatrols issued European patent

Aquatrols was issued a European patent for the application of dry spreadable water dispersible granule compositions. This technology is also covered by two U.S. patents. Developed jointly by Aquatrols and Rhodia, the process allows activated charcoal to be manufactured in a dry spreadable form that will dissolve and disperse instantly with water.

Sod companies form alliance

Bladerunner Farms (bladerunnerfarms.com), Gardner Turfgrass (gardnerturf.com) and Patten Seed (pattenseed.com) — three regional turfgrass developers and producers — have formed the Super-Sod Alliance, a coalition that will strive to provide top-quality grasses to golf courses throughout North America.

Looking for Golf Course Labor in All the Right Places

By Mark Leslie

Superintendents in recent years have been ingenious in their recruitment methods, said certified superintendent Bruce Williams, director of golf operations at Los Angeles CC.

While Williams hires Hispanics and doesn't face the labor problems that plague some of his colleagues, he's impressed with hiring techniques used by his peers, including superintendent Gerry White of Point Sebago Resort in Casco, Maine, who reports excellent results from hiring young people at job fairs in Europe. Various countries in Europe hold huge job fairs each year as part of a program called Resort America, which offers a labor pool of young people hankering to work in the United States for six months. "A lot of kids want to come over here, and so we get to pick and choose who we want to hire," White said.

Like Hispanics, the Europeans often prove to be tireless and willing employees. "They never complain about the hours," White said. "They want to make as much money as they can. They're happy to be here and want to be here, and that reflects on their work ethic."

Point Sebago Resort has hired through the program for four years. It has worked so well that the resort brings a number of past employees back each year. This year it hired 25 people, including a few each on the maintenance crew and in the pro shop. After Labor Day, White moves two or three more people on to his maintenance staff to work until mid-October.

Superintendents interested in the Resort America program can contact 800-727-8233 or www.resortamerica.aif.com.

Leslie is a free-lance writer from Monmouth, Maine.

We asked superintendents: Do you feel as secure in your position today as you did a year ago? Why or why not?

"I do feel secure in my position because of the product that my staff provides and the professional relationship I have with my superiors."

Kevin Goolsby, Superintendent
The Sportsman at Perdido Golf Resort, Pensacola, Fla.

"I've been a superintendent for 25 years, and I'm not feeling secure about my position. Superintendents are too vulnerable to the weather and the whim of disgruntled golfers."

Dale Walters, Certified Superintendent
Royal Palm GC, Naples, Fla.

"Yes. I feel more secure in my position this season than ever before [Last year], we experienced the most challenging conditions (drought) than ever recorded. But we lost very little turf and passed a project budget for the next three years."

Greg O'Heron, Superintendent
Peterborough G&CC, Peterborough, Ontario

Off The Fringe

The 'Step of Fame'

CC OF MOBILE HONORS ITS VETERAN GOLFERS

By Mark Leslie

Having watched as a major Ron Forse-designed reconstruction of his beloved Country Club of Mobile (Ala.) took place, octogenarian T.J. Bender Jr. thought it a minor thing to ask that a new step be



T.J. Bender Jr. plants his hand in the wet cement of the Country Club of Mobile's new gazebo step, initiating the procedure for a dozen octogenarian buddies.

built at the club's gazebo, where he and his buddies hang out.

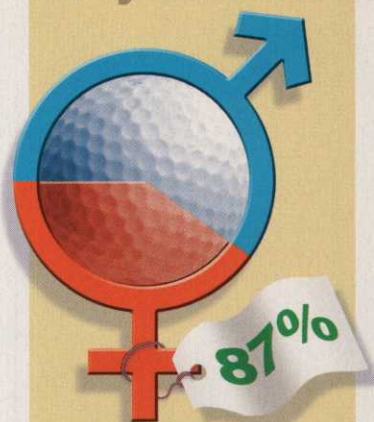
Taking the call from Bender, General Manager Don Vance experienced a flash of brilliance: Bender and his buddies would each plant their hands in the wet cement of the new step and, a la Hollywood's Walk of Fame, create CC of Mobile's own "Step of Fame."

"These 13 gentlemen, all World War II veterans, are part of a tight-knit group and have known one another all their lives," Vance says. "They have shared a common bond, and that is their passion for life, family, friendship and, of course, golf."

The step was built, and the hands were laid on it Oct. 1.

"We poured the concrete step, I

Did you know...



...that even though only 40% of all new golfers are women, they influence 87% of all sales in the golf shop?

SOURCE: NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION
ILLUSTRATION: DAN BEEDY

brought some champagne and we had a ceremony," Vance said. "Now it's a reminder of part of our history."

Vance said Bender and his friends are members who "ran the country club back" when they were in their primes. "They are long-time prominent residents of the city and are now taking that step in life down memory lane."

Take the Major Challenge with Deere and *Golfdom*

So you have a brilliant hunch about which Tour players will dominate the Majors this year. You're dreaming about Tiger or Vijay and you've even got a good feeling about Freddie. Here's a chance to play out that hunch ... and maybe even win big.

John Deere and *Golfdom* have joined forces to present the Major Challenge, an online fantasy golf competition for superintendents and other turfheads who want to test their luck against colleagues around the world.

The object of the contest is simple, says Mike Scaletta, advertising manager for Deere's golf/turf division. "You pick the six players you think

will score best in each of the four Major tournaments and their combined stroke score is your score in the Challenge," he says. "You can change players and tinker with your team any time up to the day before each event. It's fun, and it's free."

The Major Challenge contest events are, of course, the Masters, U.S. Open, British Open and PGA Championship. Fabulous prizes await winners

of each of the events, and the grand prize is an expenses-paid trip to stay and play at the John Deere Team Championship in Scottsdale in November.

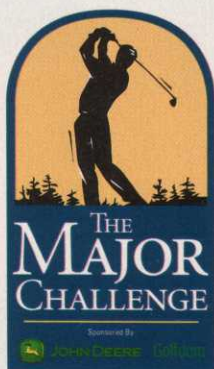
You can also win prizes when you "Beat the Big Guy" by pitting your

team against teams selected by *Golfdom*'s Pat Jones and Deere honcho Gregg Breningmeyer. In a joint statement, Jones and Breningmeyer said: "You wanna a piece of us? Huh? Bring it on!"

You can register online now by visiting www.majorchallenge.com or by clicking on the Major Challenge link at www.golfdom.com. Contest information, complete rules, eligibility, standings, stats and player information are also available on the site.

BONUS: You'll receive a special early-bird gift if you register before St. Patrick's Day, March 17, but you can still modify your team before the Masters begins in April. Look for more details in the March and April issues of *Golfdom*.

So log on, sign up, have fun and win.



The Golf Business Ain't in Great Shape

Q What's your take on the golf course industry's financial state? What's it take for a course to make money?

A Times are tough in the golf industry, at least for management companies and some daily-fee operators — not to mention the golf club, shirt and hat manufacturers.

Job layoffs have traditionally been good for business at the low green-fee public operations — to a point. A guy will still play your \$15 or \$20 course and drink your \$2 beer while he's looking for work. He's got to do something besides watch soaps. He won't, though, buy much of anything other than golf, and he'll probably walk instead of renting a cart.

And, don't forget, while 2 million new souls have been taking up the game each year in America, more than 2 million leave it — potentially forever. The growth in individuals desiring to play golf has been flat for the past several years, while the industry has added some 3,000 courses to its inventory in the past six years. That's a 20 percent supply increase with a 0 percent demand increase.

No wonder golf operators throughout the country are looking to draft women and children. Somebody has to replace those traditional golfers who left because they can't get around in four hours on your course, can't quit slicing, can't find their balls and can't putt your greens. You know the drill — “Too fast, too slow, too tight, too thick, too dry, too wet . . .”

In the past decade, many entry-level and old-line private clubs consistently outperformed their yearly financial projections. Those days are long gone, however. Other yuppie golfers lined up at high-end daily fees two, three and four times per month, salivating over the chance to pay \$100, \$200 or \$300

Been there, seen that

BY MIKE HEACOCK



for a single round of golf at “member-for-a-day” courses. How overbuilt is that market in your area today?

How do you amortize a \$20 million golf course investment on a \$50 green fee? You could gross \$15,000 to \$20,000 a day if a foursome at rack rate filled every potential tee-time. That amount multiplied by 365 days pushes \$7 million a year, a strong figure. But how many days do you lose to rain or snow, and how many hours per day do you lose to frost? How many rounds can you get before 8 a.m. or after 3 p.m. if you don't discount to \$20 or \$15 or \$10? Everyone's full at 8 a.m. on Saturday, but how about 6:30 a.m. on Tuesday?

Tee times at a public course are like seats on a scheduled airline: Once the plane's gone, the empty seats are gone, and you didn't get any money for them. In order to fill perishable tee times, the question eventually becomes, “Would golfers play at that hour for free?” If the answer is, “Yes,” then you “guesstimate” how much above “free” you can charge for those times, implement those charges and see what happens.

How many rounds do you do at an average green fee of \$25 (rack rate is \$50)? In Southern California, with 20 or 30 rain days per year, you might do 80,000 maximum for a gross of \$2 million, and you're open 365 days a year. In Ohio, you'll do 60,000 for a gross of \$1.5 million, but you're closed in winter with limited expenses. In

California, that \$2 million will just about cover debt service. In Ohio, you'll land \$.5 million short of covering debt service each year. In neither case have you paid any help or vendors. In short, you'll go belly-up quickly.

Let's say you have a great enough golf course operation that you can average \$50 as a green fee, which means your rack rate would be above \$100. Now you're at a gross of \$4 million in Southern California and \$3 million in Ohio. Debt service is still \$2 million, but now you've got \$1 million or \$2 million to play with and pay for the overhead (including the clubhouse and the appurtenances). But there's something else in this picture — somebody owns this deal, and that entity probably wants some monetary return. So you still don't have much for maintenance.

What if your course and your golf market is so great you can average \$100 green fees, meaning your rack rate is over \$200. Now you're in business, right along with Pebble Beach and the other heavy hitters. But is your course Pebble Beach?

Consider: One course in a famous magazine's top 100 list reportedly cost more than \$80 million to build, allegedly sold out of bankruptcy at about 15 cents on the dollar and still didn't make money. But it's a great golf course!

How do you maintain a \$20 million golf course on a \$500,000 budget for everything, including maintenance, equipment, repairs and capital improvements? Some of you are going to have to find out.

Editor's Note: Mike Heacock, former vice president of agronomy and maintenance for American Golf Corp., fields your questions in his bi-monthly column. You can reach him at: mike.heacock@verizon.net or 310-849-5011.