

Off The Fringe

Blown Away

MOUNTAIN WINDS BLAST SAND AROUND THREE CROWNS

By Curt Harler

More than weeds or diseases, it's the blowing sand that causes headaches for Bob Brownlow, superintendent of Three Crowns Golf Course in Casper, Wyo. Winters mean Brownlow gets sand blasted along with the snow. Summertime means he gets sand blasted without snow.

The winds off the Rocky Mountains are so strong and consistent that they blow the expensive, imported sand right out of Three Crowns's bunkers. Casper is a very windy place, and wind plays a large role in both the golf and Brownlow's maintenance practices.

There are 86 bunkers at Three Crowns, each stocked with eye-catching white sand imported from Idaho. It's painful — in more ways than one — to stand downwind of a bunker and watch the sand get blown up and out across the green it was meant to protect.

Brownlow has a couple of simple but effective remedies he uses to keep the sand in place, including placing snow fence around affected areas to encourage snow to accumulate and cover the bunkers.

"Our main strategy was to use covers as we do on the greens," he says.

While tarps are the ready answer to the situation, encouraging and keeping snow in the bunkers works just as well as a mechanism for holding the sand in place, Brownlow says.

One handy, inexpensive tactic is to put snow fence in the bunkers. The snow fence is positioned just like snow fence would be along a highway — to encourage the snow to pile up next to the fence and in the bunker.

The course uses a flexible, plastic snow fence that is inexpensive, easy to install and easy to remove. The orange color might not be the most aesthetic feature to hit a golf course, but it does the job.

Three Crowns began its first full year of operation this past season. Brownlow, who was an assistant under Chris Condon during the building of Three Crowns, is blown away by the wind problems.

"We just didn't know what a problem the wind would be," he says. Brownlow has worked at other courses in the Mountain region. He took over as superintendent at Three Crowns last year when the course opened in May.

The constant wind isn't good for the grass, either. Because of the harsh, desiccating effect of the wind, greens must be irrigated through the winter.

The wind is a problem whether the grass is mature or still at seedling stage. "They tried to seed six holes in October (2004) to get a jump on things," Brownlow recalls. "The wind just blew it all away."

His solution on greens is to keep

Sweeping sand back into the bunkers is a time-consuming task. Snow fences help keep sand in the bunkers.

things moist and growing all year. That might sound counter-intuitive in an area where 18-inch snowfalls are common. But the instant the snow melts, Brownlow knows the turf on his greens will be in trouble.

Trees, too, must be protected from the wind. Young Ponderosa pines that



Superintendent Bob Brownlow uses snow fences and covers to help keep sand in place.

border the fairways are sheltered by wooden forms that block the wind as it howls in along the North Platte River, which runs just above Three Crowns.

All trees are on drip irrigation to assure the water stays where it should.

Brownlow continues to research ways to combat the wind's impact on Three Crowns bunkers and grasses.

"It's just one of those problems that nature throws at you," he says. "You have to learn to put up with it." ■