

Off The Fringe

You are all well aware of the catastrophes that hit Japan on March 11, 2011. Our hearts go out to all those who lost family members and loved ones. The 9.0 earthquake and tsunami that followed struck the shores of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, sealing the fate of not only some 30,000 unsuspecting people, but also affecting the livelihood of the whole country, including that of the entire Japanese golf industry.

The problem is, looking forward, with the gloom of a three-punch disaster: earthquake and tsunami followed by a nuclear incident, the hopes of international golf tourism taking hold here are gone for the short- to mid-term, at best.

The sad truth is that the ripple effect in the golf industry has caused a full stop, affecting the entire country's courses, regardless of geographical location to the three affected prefectures. So a single mother who caddies part-time in Kyoto at a course that has seen zero effect from the radiation, earthquakes or tsunami can't pay her bills for the next six months as customers just aren't showing up. The affected Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures have a total of 126 courses between them, making up approximately 5 percent of the courses in Japan. Although important, they are just a small part of the larger picture.

Regardless of the courses' proximity to the disaster-struck areas, nuclear radiation just isn't something any country's image can bounce back from easily. Without swift closure to the nuclear issue, people will just choose to travel and golf elsewhere. In an in-



Japanese golf in dire straits

By Bennett J. Galloway

Only 5 percent of the courses in Japan are in the devastated areas.

dusty where perception equals reality, a discerned preemptive effort from the Japanese tourism authorities is needed.

In an attempt to counter this disaster, many clubs all over Japan are looking to not only help out with fundraising for charities on the ground in the disaster-stricken areas, but also to increase rounds at their courses to help their own staffs get back on their feet. Let's face it, the majority of your green fee doesn't go to the club; it goes to the people who work there and to the upkeep of the course that makes it all viable.

The Japanese are a resilient and hard-working people who, with the help of all of us working together, will survive. So in the not-so-distant future, stay tuned for great and exciting things from an industry and people that may be down, but are by no means out. ■

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