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BY EDWARD
PITTMAN

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t 3 in the morning on September, 4, 1996, Pinehurst is quiet. The players sleep fitfully, many of them putting and chipping on courses that exist only in their dreams. At the end of a hallway a room-service waiter clears away the dishes from the night before. Out on the course deer pad softly across the lawn. At 5 o'clock the breeze rushes through the loblolly pines, and hints of dawn lighten the darkness. Then the dawn comes, burning through the tops of the trees and flashing on the dew-covered fairways, which sparkle like carpets of diamonds.

This is Pinehurst. It's difficult to imagine a better setting for the Associate Club Team Championships, two tournaments that attract hundreds of golfers from clubs around the world, all with one goal in mind: to win the coveted Putter Boy trophy and see their name inscribed on the traveling trophy. Pinehurst hosted the first Team Championship in 1987, and in the past decade what began as a single tournament has blossomed into two separate divisions — one for city and city athletic clubs, and one for country clubs and club resorts. This tournament, for country club and resort members, features 88 teams — some from clubs as far away as Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa.

Past tournaments have occasionally been plagued by rain, but this time the storm is of a greater magnitude: Hurricane Fran, bringing winds of up to 115 miles an hour, has been angling toward the North Carolina coast for the past day and a half. Pinehurst is in its path.

Meanwhile, rain is inundating North Carolina. Although the courses at Pinehurst are fine, the soil is saturated. On the way to the resort, the van driver points out the tall loblolly pines lining the road. "They've got a very shallow root system," he says, shaking his head while the windshield wipers whip back and forth. "With the ground this wet, it doesn't take a lot to push 'em over." At noon Hurricane Fran is considered a Category 3 storm. As we check in we overhear guests saying that Fran is now expected to make landfall near Wilmington sometime after 8 p.m., just 127 miles away. All over the coast, residents are taping up their windows and heading inland.

On the way to the course we are struck by how dark it is, even though it is only 2 p.m. A steady drizzle falls. The cardinals and blue jays have disappeared, and the brazen fox squirrels that an hour or so ago were darting across the cart paths (and occasionally snatching snacks from the carts) have vanished. In the gaps between the competing fivesomes there is only the sound of wind and rain.

On the brand-new Pinehurst No. 8-The Centennial course, the team from Haile Plantation Golf & Country Club in Gainesville, Florida, plays on through the drizzle as the temperature drops. "It's not really raining, but we're all getting soaked," says golf professional Bob Sommers. "It's eerie, playing and knowing that a hurricane is bearing down on us. We're wondering if we're going to finish the round, or are the trees going to be knocked over, or are we going to live?" Sommers says his team did not do that well on the morning round on the No. 5 course, and just after he laments the team's performance on No. 8, the team birdies the 12th hole. "Hey, what

do you know," he says, plucking the ball from the hole and holding it aloft.

On the 13th hole the team from Lost Creek Country Club in Austin, Texas, drives down the fairway as the wind begins to kick up. "Yeah, yeah, yeah! Putter Boy, Putter Boy!" chants the team, as James Warren drops in the putt and the wind tears loose a cover from someone's golf bag. It tumbles up the fairway to the tee, where the team from Haile Plantation is obscured by the almost-horizontal rain. Passing by the 16th hole, one team — anonymous under anoraks — is covering its bags when one player drops his glove. The wind sucks it into the air and it tumbles, heedless of gravity, 50 yards through the air before disappearing into the trees. In the semi-darkness the carts look like barges as they head for the clubhouse, the cart paths transformed by the rain into rivers.

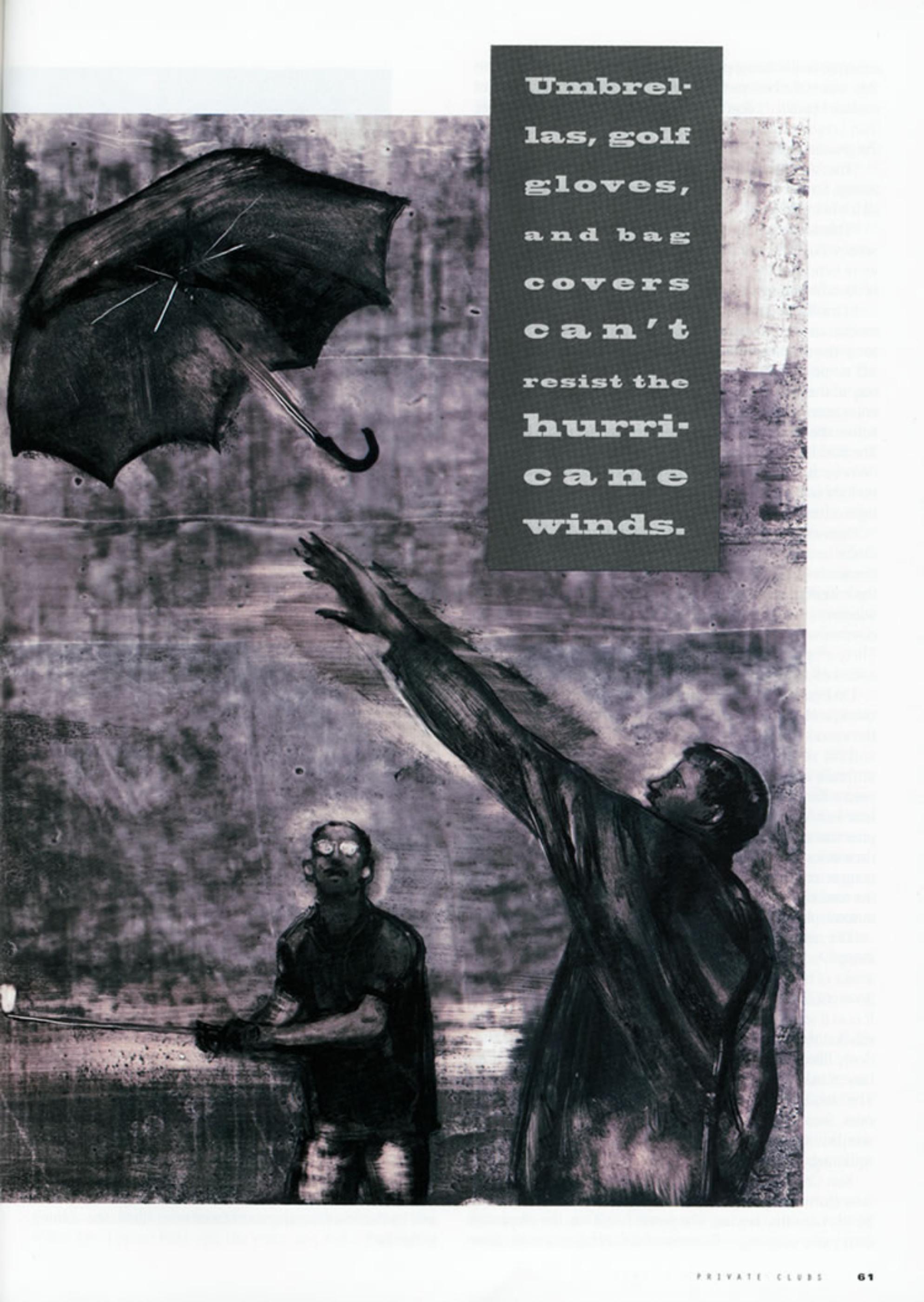
Because of Fran's expected arrival, a decision had been made to play two rounds on the first day of the tournament. Two rounds of battling the elements on the challenging No. 4, No. 5, and No. 8 courses can tire the most stalwart of golfers. But walking down the hall to the grand ballroom, swinging their arms back and forth to loosen tired muscles and practice the chip shots in their heads, the teams still cluster together, joking with one another. "John here is our team nongolfer golfer," says one to a member of another team. "Until he got here, he thought Pinehurst was just a tournament format."

At the end of the first day, two Houston-area clubs are in the lead. April Sound Country Club on Lake Conroe and Quail Valley Country Club in Missouri City are tied at 121. Two strokes behind them are the teams from Hearthstone Country Club (also from Houston) and Providence Country Club in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Although the teams sometimes speak different languages, the appreciation of Pinehurst is universal. "I really like the hotel, the history of it, and that management is very friendly," says Kang Herlim Budiman, a member of Rancamaya Golf & Country Club in Jakarta, Indonesia. Then Johnny Soewardjan, one of Budiman's teammates, chimes in, his smiles and enthusiasm compensating for the language barrier. "We were in the air for 35 hours," says Soewardjan. "Doesn't matter. This is a very fine place to play golf, you know. Maybe sometime I will come here again to play. I hope so. About the tournament — we are very excited!"

After a tremendous buffet dinner in the grand ballroom, we head for the Ryder Cup Lounge for a round of war stories, but when we walk out into the hallway, it is dark. The power has gone out throughout the area — leaving only the east wing of the hotel with electricity. Soon the front desk is handing out disposable flashlights. In the hallways the beams from dozens of tiny flashlights jiggle back and forth like fireflies.

In the hotel lobby, immersed in a pair of couches, I find the team from Oak Pointe Country Club in Brighton, Michigan. Theirs is an unusual group: The members are husband and wife pairs — Harry and Sharon Sosnowski and Jack and Marilyn Keating. "To get here we won the qualifier play-off in pouring rain, just like we've had here today at the tournament," says Jack. Rain seems to be a recurring theme for the Keatings: In 1993 they won the Associate Club Couples Championship after playing through a downpour. Their



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expertise in the rain shows; they finished 8-under for the day. "My wife is the best partner I have," says Jack, putting his arm around Marilyn. "I don't enjoy playing golf with anyone more than I enjoy playing golf with her. And this is without a doubt the greatest golf experience I've ever had."

"The last four holes on No. 8 were absolutely brutal," says Sharon Sosnowski. "The wind was incredible. By that time we all felt like sponges."

"This tournament is just unbelievable," interjects Harry Sosnowski. "The weather's bad, but so what! This is Pinehurst, we're here, and the golf, the food, the room — the ambience of the whole thing is wonderful."

In the Ryder Cup Lounge the flashlights and a few scattered candles are the only illumination. In the near darkness players recap the eeriness of the day's play. Around midnight there is still no power, and now the telephones are out, too. In a hallway of the hotel lit by the dim, yellow glow of the overhead emergency lights, a foursome finishes a round of gin just before the batteries die and they are plunged into darkness. The flashlights come on one by one. "OK," laughs someone. "Whose deal is it?" Outside, the trees are swaying, and there is no light to break up the darkness. The hurricane seems to be right on top of us.

In my room I listen as the rain falls and the wind roars. Once in a while I hear a cracking sound, followed by a resounding thump, and I know somewhere close by, one of the towering pines has crashed to the ground. Looking out the window, it is impossible to see what is happening, so I pull the covers over my head and fall asleep. I dream of hurricanes. There are people in the dream, and they are talking to me, but over the sounds of the wind and rain I cannot hear them.

On Friday morning all is quiet. The face of the clock radio is blank, and after picking up the telephone receiver I hear only the sound of wind, like listening to a seashell. It's very early, and the shuttles are nowhere to be seen, so I pick up my umbrella and set out to survey the damage: In one resident's yard a Range Rover is crushed under the weight of a tree at least four feet in diameter, a couple is shaking their heads at the pine that once towered over the yard but now neatly bisects their house, and a group of children is kicking idly at a tree lying across a driveway. Forty-foot pine trees lie strewn across the road like kindling. Pine straw is scattered everywhere, and in some places it is hard to tell exactly where the road is.

The rain stops just after 9 a.m., and at 10:30 the darkness dissipates like a dream. In the hotel lobby there is a collective intake of breath as the sun suddenly streams through the windows. Golfers begin to smile as they walk out to the driveway. It is as if some great machinery has come to life: the fox squirrels dart through the pine straw and fallen trees, the air is suddenly filled with birdsongs, and a breeze rises that carries no hint of malice, just the elusive smell of pine and wildflowers. The clouds have vanished, and the sky is as blue as a baby's eyes. Steam rises from the streets, and golfers unzip their windbreakers, walk into the street, and stare at the sun, squinting. They stand there for a long time.

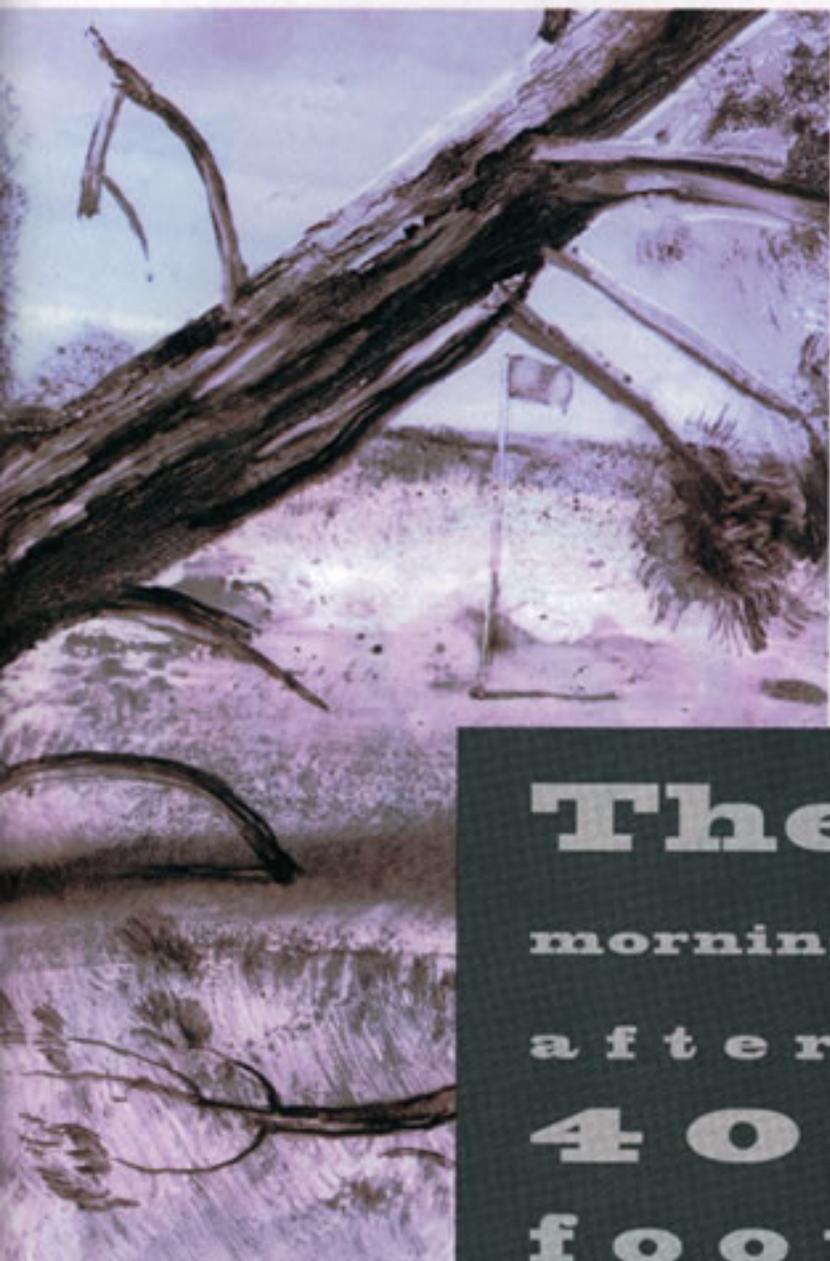
Ken Crow, however, former golf operations manager (he is now club manager at Daufuskie Island Club and Resort in South Carolina) is tense. The power is still out, the telephones can't make outgoing calls, most of the tennis courts are dam-



aged, and a tree has crashed through the porch of the tennis shop. Last night Crow slept for only an hour or so, and at 5:30 a.m. he and assistant director of golf-course maintenance Bob Farren were on the courses wielding chain saws along with more than 100 other workers, struggling to clear nearly 300 fallen trees from the courses. It is a heroic effort, and by 11 his frown softens somewhat as he makes call after call on his cellular phone, checking on the progress at the various courses.

"The first thing we had to do was make sure that all the trees that were blown over were completely on the ground," says Crow. "You don't want them leaning, because they might fall later. The second was to clear all the trees from the cart paths and fairways, and the third was to get them off the tees and playing surfaces. You limb 'em, saw 'em up, throw 'em in the back of the truck, and get 'em out of there. The sun is shining and the winds are about 15 or 20 miles an hour, and that's helping to dry things out significantly."

Pat Corso, president and chief operating officer of Pinehurst, is also on his phone. He hangs up and gives me an update. "No. 6 and No. 7 are open now, and courses No. 8, No. 4, and No. 5 are being cleaned up so we can play the tournament tomorrow." He shakes his head. "Courses No. 1 and No. 3 are a mess. This is the worst damage we've ever had, and it's the first time anyone remembers a hurricane coming in this far."



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Although the hurricane damage is colossal, the clean-up effort is equally heroic. By the end of the day, the tournament courses are clear. Driving along the cart paths, it's hard to

picture the events of the day before. Here and there a freshly sawed stump or a gap in the pine straw marks an absence, but the trees that fell the night before are gone.

By Friday night the members are ready for the final round. They make quick work of the buffet, and at the tables many are planning their strategies for tomorrow. But some, like the seasoned characters from Monarch Country Club in Palm City, Florida, who spent the afternoon playing No. 7, are just having a good time. They won their club qualifier on the 2nd hole of a sudden-death play-off with a 30-foot putt — although the more I talk to them, I realize the putt will have grown to 40 or 50 feet by the end of the night. John Pagano Jr., who defines his role on the team as "ball marker," introduces the rest of his group, which includes Gene Yannalfo, John McLaughlin, pro Kevin McCormick, Frank Costarino, and Frank's wife, Dolly, who is celebrating her 76th birthday. "I've won a lot of prizes here over the years, and met a lot of great

people," says Frank Costarino, self-appointed father of the team. "Some of the caddies here now were here 40 years ago. This is the first trip that I've had my wife with me, and it's wonderful to have her here."

"Do you know what my favorite thing about Pinehurst is?" interrupts Dolly. "The staff here is the most incredible group of human beings. They are simply wonderful." Everyone agrees, marveling about the breakfast this morning: Without electricity Pinehurst somehow managed to turn out a hot breakfast of bacon, grits, and biscuits, in addition to tray after tray of pastries and other cold items.

Saturday morning we take our place in the line of carts by the clubhouse. Some of the golfers are ribbing each other; others are quiet, looking down at a scorecard, playing the course in their heads. Driving around the courses after the start we witness some amazing golf. On the par-4 1st hole of No. 8, the team from April Sound is on the tee. "Thataway," says head pro David Scott, gesturing up the fairway toward the green as Joe Battson steps up to the tee. Battson accommodates Scott with a fat drive straight up the center of the fairway. Then Pat Simpson lets fly and the ball sails high into the air to the right, hooks slightly, and drops a few dozen yards before the bunker that fronts the green. But it's Grant Mitchell's drive that gets the team excited. With a pronounced *thwack* the ball rockets over the fairway, hanging in the air for what seems like forever, before coming to rest on the frog's hair of the green. "Did I make it?" he asks, squinting. "Oh yeah, you sure did," says Scott, slapping him on the back. Once on the green, Simpson sinks the putt. The whole team lets out a whoop, and they high-five each other while chanting, "Yum yum, give me some more!"

Each team is in its own world. Members greet us with a short "Hi" or "Morning" as we pass them on the cart path, but conversations are short, the mood intense. Out on the courses we hear little of how the teams are doing, just a rumor once in a while, a comment seemingly carried on the breeze: "Marina Vallarta is moving up." "Did you hear about the Pinehurst team?" "Canyon Gate has gained a lot of ground." There are rumors of an eagle or two on No. 8, but no mention of a team.

On the 1st hole of No. 4, their last hole for the tournament, the team from Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California, is moving up the fairway. This team is unique in that its A player is a woman. But Deby Anderson is not the only female A player out here today. There's also Sue Sprouse on the team from Barton Creek in Austin, Texas. "What do you see, Deby?" asks the Mission Hills pro, Chipper Cecil, when they reach the green.

"I'm seeing an edge right there," says Anderson, pointing and frowning.

"Don't stress it," says Cecil to Blake Todd, whose putt glides softly to the right of the cup, just a foot beyond the hole.

"It breaks just slightly — half a ball inside," says Anderson.

David Lieberman's putt is strong, too strong, and slides by to the left of the cup. "It never broke!" says Howard Stone, who places his ball, takes a quick look at the cup, and sinks the putt. Everyone's shoulders drop, and they smile at one another. They birdie the hole, and for them the tournament is over.

Back at the leader board, even before the scores are posted, the rumor is that Quail Valley has edged past April Sound by one stroke. "We didn't think we won,"

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says pro Pat O'Hara. "We thought we finished second or third." The rest of the team — Donny Zindler, Jerry Goodson, Mike Skinner, and Offie Walker — crowds together, all smiles.

"On Thursday afternoon we were on No. 4, and it was brutal," says Skinner. "But we made 11 birdies that day, and our play in the rain is what won the tournament for us."

At the awards dinner in the ballroom that evening we bow our heads while Chaplain Duncan reminds us "that the best-laid plans often go awry, but friendships remain, and this fond time will remain in our memory. The sun will return and the rainbow, too, with its promise of another round and another day." In the applause that follows, 15 or 20 tables break into a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday." We cannot tell whether they are singing for Dolly Costarino or for someone else, but we join in, too. Then Jerry Diamond, tournament director, recites the long list of Pinehurst staff members who have made this tournament unforgettable: from the miracle workers in the kitchen, to those who cleaned up the courses after the storm, to all those who coordinated the planes, limos, and rental cars that brought everyone together and that will soon take everyone home. Now the members from Quail Valley make their way to the stage, where they each reach reverently for a Putter Boy, the symbol of everything they came for, turning it over in their hands, smiling as they probably have not smiled in years.

At the table Donny Zindler of Quail Valley is still smiling, turning the Putter Boy on the table this way and that, looking at it from different angles. "It's quite a treasure," he says, to no one in particular. "Boy, was it a lot of fun!"

Now it's late Sunday afternoon, and high in the sky jet contrails wind toward every horizon. What the players leave with is more than the memory of a chance to win a Putter Boy. It is the memory of standing on the tee and feeling the goosebumps rise on their arms before they draw back their clubs to take another shot at greatness. ■

During the tournament Associate Editor Edward Pittman lost a note pad to the hurricane and a package of cheese crackers to some fox squirrels.

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How did you become involved in the world of electronic communications?

I've been very close to the computer and telecommunications industries, and England is a highly computer-literate society. There's a greater penetration of personal computers here in Britain than there is in the U.S. There's a huge repository of archived materials and artifacts that reside here, a tremendous repository of English language learning, and a surprising degree of computer-driven manipulation of images. The Brits have always been inventors, and they are very science-oriented. So here was all this potential. And it just seemed logical that as content became the issue, rather than the technology by which you were interconnected, that Britain should be playing a principle role in its development.

So about three years ago, with a few other like-minded people, we launched Smart Isles. From that emerged the Knowledge Gallery, a cooperation between the private sector and higher education in Britain. It's on its way to developing a resource of images that will support curricula of higher education in Britain and the States, and with linkages with Japan, Holland, and Germany.

From my involvement with the Knowledge Gallery came an introduction to Virtual University International. VUI promises to have its courseware written by the best available faculty at the best research institutions in the U.S. and the U.K. The biggest single markets outside of the U.S. and the U.K. that we are looking at are Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, as well as Central Europe, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The initial commercialization of technologies has been largely entertainment-driven, and product sales-driven. But here is a chance to create a device for credible and quality higher education, which strikes me as being the point of it all.

Is your firm supportive of this education effort?

It's time that I have been given by my partners in the name of doing something worthwhile. It can certainly be described as pro bono. That would probably not be possible if I were a rain-making high-ranking partner at a major Wall Street law firm. I can't wait to see what happens when more people from

more countries get empowered through education. Hopefully it will contribute to the process of ultimate understanding — and the smoothing of the more violent aspects of the human experience. I'm not saying world peace will result from this, but it's the only thing I can do.

Some people say that private clubs are becoming an outmoded concept in this ever-more-democratic world. Others say that freedom means the ability to associate with whom you will. How do you see private clubs as a business opportunity internationally?

Remember, I am sitting in the heart of clubland here in London. The English are very clubby, and their clubs derive from one of the great economic, business, and political notions of all time, which was empire. And the empire was an idea conceived by the established commercial interest in this country, who were able to persuade a monarch to get behind it. The Oriental Club, like the East India Club, was founded for the sole purpose of giving refuge while in London to His Majesty's military and civil servants and to the commercial interest that formed the empire in India.

Today the Oriental Club has a huge number of overseas members. More than half are from India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. There was a common interest in bonding through a club structure when it was formed, which still exists — particularly as it relates to India, which has become of tremendous commercial interest on a global basis in the past five years.

In the U.S., networking is one thing that makes a private club more relevant. The membership of the various clubs that your group has assembled have the ability to communicate with each other across geographies for common educational, business, or political discussion purposes. Asian cultures are especially interested in being part of organizations formed by social bond, and that's an important part of their upbringing. Private clubs will have a huge value throughout the Asian cultures. So I believe clubs remain relevant and will continue to prosper. I hope I'm right, on behalf of *Private Clubs* magazine — and all the clubs whose members you address through your publication. ■