AMERICANS CASH IN ON EUROPEAN JACKPOT

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managing partner of Exposconsult

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Hoogland said 90 percent of the golf courses being built in Europe are on land leased from individuals, farmers, and other small old family estates that have 150 to 500 acres of unused land.

"There are a few superintendents over there from the U.S. who are doing a lot of work, but few from the United Kingdom," Hinckley said.

"What you're going to find is more international-level golf courses with higher maintenance standards. You're going to have to develop more qualified talent over there, and some of that is going to have to be brought over from the United States—superintendents who in turn can train some of the locals."

FOREIGN VISITORS

Don Padgett, director of golf at Pinehurst (N.C.) Country Club and regional director of golf operations for CCA subsidiary Club Corp. Resorts, said contingents from foreign golf course developers visit his course on fact-finding trips every couple of years.

"They don't have the people (trained) to maintain the courses or run the clubs," Padgett said. "When they come to this country and CCA they look at what they have for pool at 3 p.m. and say 'that's a full.'"

Lack of training in operating golf courses is a major obstacle for foreign developers, Padgett said. "A lot of education has to be done. Probably the largest change in American golf in the last 20 or 30 years has been in the conditioning of the golf courses, and that's not going to happen (overseas) overnight. I'm talking about the upkeep and quality of the playing surface."

Padgett said when foreign developers plan to develop courses see the condition of American courses firsthand and that's exactly what they're going to want over there (abroad)."

"And I'm sure most of the American companies will be there to help them," he added. 

Hoogland of Exposconsult said the number of golfers in Europe has doubled in the last decade and that number is expected to double again in the next 10 years.

All parties involved agreed the scramble to fill the needs of all those course developers will be interesting. 

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American golf architecture, builders, club managers, and consultants like the Pleasantsville, N.Y.-based McLoughlin are being beckoned to Europe and Asia to fill that void in expertise as the golf boom spreads internationally.

Allard Hoogland, managing partner of Exposconsult in Holland which is organizing the first Golf Course Europe exhibition and conference, said, "There are more than 500 new courses planned in Europe and many more plans are being made, and a lot of Europeans are looking to the U.S. for information."

Perry Dye, the new president of the Golf Course Builders Association, agreed. "There's no doubt (golf expertise) is an asset that Americans can export..."

"The golfing capital of the world is the United States. We have 13,000 golf courses and more than 60 million golfers, which is crazy over here, golf only has 1,500," Dye said. "We definitively have the expertise. We've built more golf courses; we have more golf course architecture in the United States. So it's not an exporter..."

"It's becoming pretty common knowledge that the golf explosion is going on around the world; the Far East, Europe, even South America," Dye said.

TREMENDOUS INTEREST

Club Car President George Homan, president of the Golf Car Manufacturers Association, said there is "tremendous activity overseas" in his business. "We have had more interest in international sales in the last six to 12 months than we have had in all my history in the business — and that's all the way from the East to the West," he said.

"Europe is getting ready to really bust open. There's no doubt about that," he added, "and it's going to be very interesting to see what happens in Russia. I think it's amazing that those of us who are in golf could even be thinking about (a Russian market)."

And Jim Hinckley, president of Club Corp. America International, headquartered in Houston, Texas, and the world's largest golf course management company, said his firm is very busy developing golf courses and resorts in Europe, especially in Germany, France and Spain, Finland and Italy.

McLoughlin said golf course developers in foreign countries:
• lack an adequate education in course maintenance and operating the equipment;
• need help in overall management of their properties; and
• most often can't afford the "heavy-weight" architects, who generally make their own management teams available.

McLoughlin said, "The Dyers, Palmers, Nicklaus—those heavy hitters — are (involved) with the big boys."

Yet only the 10-15 percent of the new courses that are exclusive private clubs or resorts can afford those "big names," he said, and "when you look below the American heavyweights you see a very steady, very strong growth in the developing of golf courses by local designers and contractors..."

"There's a scrambling going on" among those architects who are designing courses below resort level for the average player, and that's the essence of the game...what's going to happen..." it's going to be very interesting to see if we can get a management team available." 

American architects in fact are in high demand. Some are accepting European proposals; others are staying close to home where they find they have enough business to keep them busy.

Tom Fazio, with six children at home in Florida, is content to stay basically in the United States. But many architects are tapping into the European golf market in the 1990s, golf architecture international, "We have had more foreign visitors..." Hoogland is also pulling together information about all aspects of planning and designing golf courses, legal and tax matters, and management teams available.

Europe will, for the first time, be a special, instructive and commercially relevant conference. People should send a 200-word summary of their proposals or events for consideration for the conference. The agenda for Oct. 4 includes golf architecture, clubhouse architecture and infrastructure.

The Oct. 5 sessions will cover the European golf market in the 1990s, golf course management, the golf club as a going concern, and sponsoring, green fees and advertising.

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