Europe an exciting arena: Asia is next

As mentioned in my last column, Golf Course News attended Golf Course Europe '91 in Wiesbaden, Germany, in early October. Although attendance was less than expected, the quality of registrants was impressive.

Most interesting was the fact that very few superintendents registered for the conference, though the subject matter was to a large extent geared to the maintenance segment of the industry. I discussed this with knowledgeable industry leaders. They indicated that European superintendents, generally speaking, have not yet attained the status of U.S. superintendents, nor do they have access to maintenance education such as we have in the U.S. Furthermore, they simply do not have the travel budgets to attend conferences and exhibitions, as do U.S. superintendents.

I had an opportunity to play a new 18-hole facility near Frankfurt, signed by the Hauisers of Austria. (See page 9.) The fog and mist was so thick we began the round that it looked like a bush. The course was interesting. Like the majority of new courses in this area, it is cut out of farmland — in this case, the highland sheep barn was being totally renovated and re-modeled to become the clubhouse, pro shop, etc. The new greens were in good condition but 70 percent sand, which made them quick and hard to hold, even in wet weather. The greenkeeper is a Scot recruited from his homeland. It's my understanding that more than one United Kingdom greenskeepers are being recruited on the continent for duties at the newer courses. There are even foreign course designers heading up maintenance at new courses.

You may be pleased to learn that the American team (Perry Dye, Matt Dye, Cynthia Dye McGarry and yours truly), retained new-fangled U.S. supremacy in world golf by defeating on a handicap point basis the European team, 67-61. With no help from me, Perry and Matt carried the U.S. team to victory.

We continue to consider a European edition of Golf Course News, as well as an Asian edition. The Asian edition would be published in conjunction with the Golf Asia show in Singapore in late March. I will keep you informed of our progress.

The special feature in this issue lists Golf Course Builders and Architects. This ever-growing segment of our business is most important to the quality and consistency of new courses and the renovation of older facilities.

I believe the United States has the best golf course builders, designers and architects. We have reason to be proud of these men and women.

Quality, quantity of water: a consuming issue

By Charles Putnam

My father was a golf course superintendent for almost 50 years. As a child, I remember how he used to love Mondays. On Monday the course was closed and free of people who would take divots out of his fairways and leave ball marks on his greens. He cared deeply how his course looked and played and worried about it constantly.

One of the worries he didn't have, there in Seattle, was the quality or quantity of water available. He and his contemporaries, in the 1920's and 1940's they were called "greenskeepers," had lots of good water that was cheap. Although I don't know for sure, I believe the quality, quantity and cost of water were not major concerns anywhere that golf courses were being built in those days.

All of that changed sometime in the late 1950s or early 1970s. My first recollection of anyone suggesting the possibility of serious water shortages was at one Irrigation Association technical conference in Dallas. The year was 1973. The speaker was Professor Edward Hiler from Texas A&M University. He warned about the rapid depletion of our ground water supplies and what the future would hold if we didn't take serious action now.

Coincidentally, at that same conference, Francisco Jimeno spoke on "Reclaimed Effluent in Golf Course Conditioning." We talked a lot, in those days, about sluage disposal and effluent use. It was a relatively new topic and had the interest of the irrigation community, both agricultural and turf. Jimeno's comments were interesting because he approached the subject from the standpoint of water and power conservation, rather than just disposal.

This was the year, you might recall, that the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) took off the tap. Considering our situation today, a couple of Jimeno's remarks are worth repeating. Remember, these were Jimeno's statements were made 20 years ago.

The outlook in the availability of water for the irrigation of turf is leading us to consider that the scarcity of this important resource will become critical before the decade of the 1970's comes to an end," Jimeno said. The development of turf or grass-covered areas has proved of great value in providing a better living environment, helping control air pollution, furnishing agricultural and residential/commercial market. Better climatic conditions and adding beauty to the landscape.

Both Hiler and Jimeno suggested that in the future, water conservation management practices, more efficient sprinklers and state-of-the-art controls would all be necessary to deal with this growing problem. How prophetic were these two men? To answer that, look at what happened only a few years later, and where we have come in the past two decades.

In the 1970s, we experienced drought in areas where it would be least expected. Northern California, western Washington, parts of the Midwest and Great Lakes region. All suffered from a severe lack of water in some time in that decade. Later, the depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer and other ground water supplies gave real cause for concern among all irrigators, including those concerned specifically on golf course work.

As the cost of building a golf course increased and energy costs rose dramatically, more efficient irrigation systems were more than just desirable, they were a necessity.

Some irrigation markets were slow to accept new technology. This has been especially true in the residential/commercial market. For the most part, this was probably due to economics. This has not been true of golf course irrigation, however. More than any other segment of the irrigation business, golf course developers and superintendents have been ready to accept and apply technological advances early in their careers.

This, too, is probably due to economics to a large degree. For example, Roger Gordon, a widely known West Coast designer of golf course irrigation systems, points out an Arizona law governing golf course irrigation. The law limits a golf course to 90 acres per 18 holes. To make matters worse, annual irrigation is limited to 4.8 acres per hectare. That is a small change to a golf course designer and future course irrigation systems.