**Course development continues strong in Europe**

**By Dr. Falk Billion**

MUNICH, Germany — Since the new figures (by end of 1997) on the number of courses and golf club members permeate through its players, the European golf industry is becoming aware that there is actually a slow-down in the growth in the numbers of courses.

The increase in numbers of players, however, seems to have sped up again after a slow-down around the middle of the decade. Here are the latest figures, compiled from the National Golf Federations, one important source being the German Golf Federation.

In those 22 European countries with five or more golf courses each (which excludes most of the Eastern European States) there are some 4,500 courses now in existence.

Dr. Falk Billion (Munich) is a leading German golf course management consultant. Billion is a chartered (certified) golf course appraiser and has been actively involved in more than 120 golf course projects with more than 180 studies, reports and appraisals since he established his office in 1991.

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**Golf Courses in Europe in the 1990s**

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<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>1,843</td>
<td>1,874</td>
<td>1,906</td>
<td>1,938</td>
<td>1,970</td>
<td>2,002</td>
<td>2,034</td>
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<td>1,348</td>
<td>1,365</td>
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<td>278</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
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<td>162</td>
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<td>226</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>300</td>
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<td>233</td>
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<tr>
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<td>293</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>445</td>
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<tr>
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<td>413</td>
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<td>565</td>
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<tr>
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The number has increased by 1,660 over the last seven years. The annual growth rate in the early 90s, as high as over 6 percent, is down to less than 3 percent in 1997.

The three leading countries with the highest numbers of courses are England (1,843), Germany (534) and France (508). That's for the supply side.

Continued on page 78
Toro shows new Sand Pro

The Toro Company has introduced its Sand Pro 5020 featuring an 18 horsepower engine. It is equipped with Toro's patented three-wheel drive Series/Parallel traction system that virtually eliminates spinouts in forward and reverse. A 3-stage air filtration system provides clean air to the engine keeping it running longer and stronger. The operator-in-motion design increases comfort with tilt steering and adjustable seat. For more information, contact 612-888-8801.

Jacobsen unveils Aero King 30

Jacobsen has introduced its new Aero King 30 greens aerator. The new Aero King 30 is powered by an 18-hp Briggs & Stratton Vanguard and offers a 30-inch coring width and a true, 4-inch coring depth. Depending on factors such as soil type, moisture content, past aeration practices and type of time used, the new Aero King 30 is even capable of coring depths below 4 inches. For high productivity and versatility on golf greens, the operator can choose from two hole patterns: the standard 2.5-inch x 2-inch and an optional 2.5-inch x 3-inch. The unit aerates up to 14,375 square feet per hour with the standard hole pattern, and up to 21,500 square feet per hour with the optional pattern. For more information, contact 414-637-6711.

European market

Continued from page 3

On the demand side, nearly 3 million golfers all over Europe had registered as members of a golf club by the end of 1997. There are no reliable European counts on the number of regular golfers not belonging to a golf club. The clubs increased by more than 1 million new members in the course of the last seven years, which means a growth of nearly 60 percent in golfers. The countries with the highest numbers of club golfers are England (847,794), Sweden (434,010) and Germany (296,370).

Supply and demand compared, 1997 was the year with the fewest new courses opened (145) and the highest count of new golf club members (193,447) over the decade so far. These figures reveal the fact that the European golf market now definitely has finalized its turnaround from what formerly used to be a supply market to a market that is now lead by demand. It is the golfers telling the developers and managers of golf courses now what kind of courses, in which locations, with what kinds of fees, they want and which will be able to operate successfully.

Take a look at the golfers vs. golf courses ratio in some European countries and you will understand what I mean:
Continued from page 74

Statistically, each individual golf course in Sweden hosts no less than 1,142 golf club members. The average number of players has increased from 555 golfers per course in the 1990s to the present. The establishment of new golf courses has a trend towards more demand-oriented course development.

Beyond the figures, Europe is now witnessing a trend toward more demand-oriented course development. It seems that, while a few European industry players have finally grasped what the NGF meant with its "player/facility development pyramid" issued years ago, it is no longer exclusively the high-end championship and regulation courses that are built. There are more and more executive courses and golf academy facilities being opened up to the new golfers, meeting their demands and accessibility of cash. In recent years — for instance, the "soft opening" of new golf courses in the beginning of the 90s, often enough described as the "golf course boom", the establishment of new golf courses has entered a new phase of more carefully considered, and appraisal-led, new developments.

This figure of courses either being packed or still looking for players also tells us where there is a significant further demand for new golf courses and, on the other hand, developers should think twice before starting another project. The fact that there is a general slow-down in the opening of new courses shows us that after a period of rapid golf course growth in the beginning of the 90s, often enough described as the "golf course boom", the establishment of new golf courses has entered a new phase of more carefully considered, and appraisal-led, new developments.

The Shanghai Links Executive Community seeks to cash in on that fact. It lies just east of Shanghai in the Pudong New area and is the flagship project for Sealand Housing Corporation, Canada. The project, which has been under construction since 1995, sits on 520 acres of reclaimed land.

The specialized expatriate community will include housing, schooling, recreation, clubhouse, health facilities, and an 18-hole links-style Jack Nicklaus golf course. The developers sense that their project will be in the center of the growth of the Shanghai region.

There are already 2,800 offices in this area and 40 financial institutions have moved or are planning moves into this area in the coming year. "During a direct survey of multinationals leading to this investment, we discovered a unanimously increased expatriate presence in Pudong and we think this is only the tip of the iceberg," said Marcus Thompson, deputy managing director of HSBC Private Equity Limited, the largest investor in the group.

The investors have made an unprecedented commitment to this project. The process of reclaiming the land took two years and cost US$21 million, moving 60 billion cubic meters of earth. The construction of the golf course began in June 1997, and the shaping of the back nine was completed in December 1997. The planting of the first nine should be done by March of this year and will be playable by June. The entire course should be completed by the end of this year.

The Shanghai Links project, although it has been long in coming, promises to be a fine golfing facility as long as the Shanghai region continues to attract some 9,000 new golfers over the next five years. The 3,500 of which have converted to club golfers in the meantime, adding to higher frequency of use on the regulation courses.

The future of the golf course industry in Europe has become more solid than ever before. It has had times that witnessed bankruptcies and takeovers galore all over Europe.

Consumer orientation, matching courses to the golfers' demands and the understanding of the industry as a hospitality business should yield sustainable success to those who keep the golfing customer satisfied.