

Demand for golf in Germany to 'explode'

Under the Communist regime in East Germany, golf was rarely played, as the sport was viewed as typically capitalist, and its introduction was discouraged.

For a long time even in the former West Germany there was a suspicion that only the wealthy could afford to play. For this reason the number of players has been, and continues to be, small. Of a total population of about 80 million, there are only 170,000 golfers, belonging to about 370 clubs.

In comparison to the United States or Great Britain, Germany is, in golfing terms, an under-developed nation. Still, there is an unmistakable upwards trend: the number of players has doubled every ten years. Recent surveys indicate that more people would play golf if more courses were available. Many existing clubs will accept no new members and public courses are almost non-existent. The only public course in the whole of Germany is in Düsseldorf, at Lausward.

Many golf course projects in the western part of Germany do not proceed because of the concerns of the politically appointed committees that are responsible for issuing permits, or because they cannot overcome conflicts with environmental protection measures. In addition to their significant successes in national politics in recent years, members of the Green political movement have gained considerable influence in elected bodies at the city and town level. They regularly oppose the construction of new golf courses. Considerations of preservation of the countryside and protection of the environment lead many of them to try to put a stop to a sport they have chosen to mistrust. For these and other reasons the construction of golf courses in the densely populated parts of western Germany has become almost impossible.

So it is not surprising that shortly after the reunification of Germany in 1990 planning commenced for new golf courses in the eastern part of Germany. The eastern part offers many good conditions. It is not as densely populated as the western part, so there is more space available and environmental concerns can be more easily accommodated. Most importantly, there is a more open-minded view of golf in many cities and towns. Golf is associated with expansion, prosperity, and the growth of industry. There is keen interest in any form of investment, which (for example) is a factor weighing heavily in favour of a proposed development when the effect on the countryside is being assessed.

The real boom will only come when the federal Government Ministries have been completely transferred from Bonn and Berlin is fully established as the capital of Germany. The demand for golf courses and golf clubs is then expected to explode. The golf courses that profit most from this boom will be those that were planned properly at the outset. Good sites for popular golf courses won't be available for ever.

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On your

The difference in golf course greenkeeping between Germany and Scotland is quite striking. To a large extent this may be attributed to Germans slavishly following the American example, rather than attempting to develop the traditions of 'real' golf, such as may be found in Scotland and elsewhere in the British Isles. The point must be made: Britain is a much closer neighbour than Florida and one might sensibly assume therefore that it offers a more appropriate example to follow.

Wall to wall manicuring and course 'prettifying' has become the essential criteria, not only in Germany but in many other European countries, and the true turf quality we greenkeepers know to be critical to the game has in general been sacrificed, or at least not fully recognised as being of high priority, in the European quest for a 'beautifully green' golf course.

As with most developing industries, initial influences can have a lasting and sometimes irreversible effect. This may be seen to the extent that fescue greens are unheard of in Germany. To some extent this is understandable, for in very many instances greens have been improperly constructed using poor materials and employing doubtful specifications. They are then built only to about 350 - 500m² in size, with crazy contours which severely restrict pin positions.

In my experience, tees also are generally too small in area, offering little scope for movement following natural wear, whilst often being set at incorrect angles and in many cases being uneven to boot. Bunker design and positioning also leaves a lot to be desired on many courses. Yes, many clubs in Germany have suffered through bad construction, despite having paid a great deal of money,

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