

## 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.

■ Reproduced courtesy of Denton International, from their January 1993 Leisure Newsletter.

# On your

**T**he 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 - 500m<sup>2</sup> 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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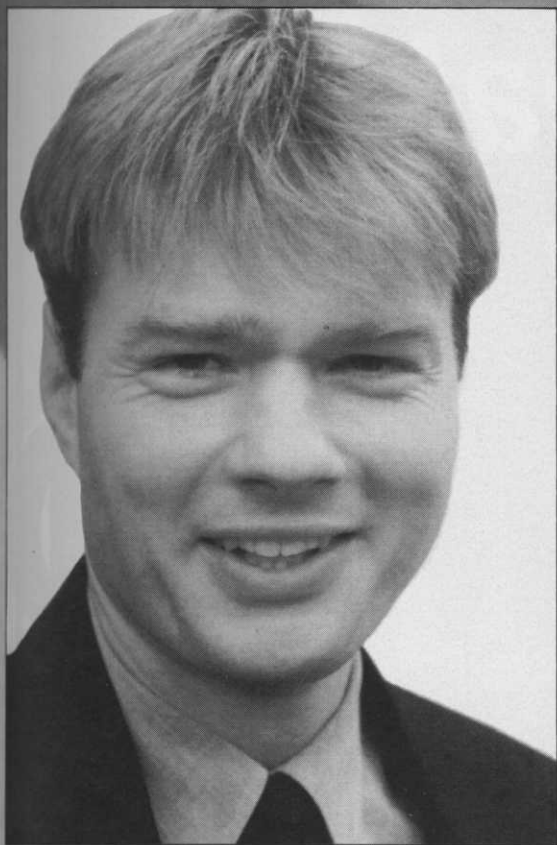
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**ARNE VAN AMERONGEN** discovers how the developing German greenkeeping industry is taking its lead from the United States, in preference to following the traditions of 'real' golf

designed and of greater variety, whilst fairways are generally somewhat narrower. The resulting effect presents a natural appearance, emphasising the architecture of the course: skill is rewarded and wayward shots are punished. There is much greater emphasis on developing the fine, perennial grass species for golf and their needs in all areas of the golf course. Cultural practices are designed to work hand in hand with nature – not against it, as is so often the case in Germany.

Particular attention is paid to physical, rather than chemical, requirements, with aeration in its various forms a top priority in maintaining and improving soil structure. Compost top-dressing materials are of a high quality and contain 70-80% sand. Root-zone mixtures for construction purposes, for instance at Carnoustie, are processed from silt and clay free fen soil and local beach sand in a ratio of 25%-75%.

Scottish greenkeepers show a 'greater awareness of soil life and daily turf conditions with a view to assessed needs. For example, I have witnessed much greater concern regarding efficient plant water usage, rather than just straightforward 'turn on the taps' application. All playing surfaces are maintained as dry as possible anyway and firmness allied to correct resilience in greens is always a paramount aim. Fertiliser inputs are low and of nitrogen only and herbicide use is limited. Control of the weed grass *Poa annua* is a high priority and every aspect of maintenance is geared toward giving the competitive edge to more desirable species. Turf resilience is sought by way of cultivating fine grasses, not ball receptiveness, and colour is irrelevant.

In Scotland then, the art of greenkeeping is very much to the fore, based on good old-fashioned common sense and long standing traditions, both of which have been adapted and intensified to meet modern demands. This natural approach to course maintenance is in direct contrast to the artificial German approach. I think it is the only way to produce fine fescue dominated turf, the ultimate in quality for the game of golf.

I would thoroughly recommend a stay in Scotland to all aspiring young European greenkeepers, working under an experienced course manager such as Carnoustie's John Philp. The experience to be gained regarding the practical aspects of fine turf maintenance and production in the vast turf nursery areas, not to mention the reconstruction work on greens, tees and bunkers, is invaluable. Be prepared to learn and work hard because, like most things in life, you only get out what you put in.

■ The author, Dutchman Arne Van Amerongen, spent several years working as a course manager in Europe, specifically in Germany. He trained at a BIGGA approved college in Great Britain and was nominated for the Toro/PGA European Tour Young Greenkeeper of the Year in 1990. He is currently employed at Carnoustie Golf Links whilst studying for an HNC in Golf Course Management.

though this money thing is something which I am led to believe is not uncommon in Scotland as well!

Regular spring and summer applications of NPK fertilisers, allied to overwatering (to stop the ball on greens, never mind the putting quality), autumn fertilisers often high in phosphates, lack of regular and appropriate aeration and the use of poor quality compost top-dressings are not uncommon practices on German golf courses, regardless of soil types and with inevitable results (not to mention costs!).

*Poa annua* is by far the most dominant grass species, particularly on greens, even on very young greens originally sown out to *Agrostis Palustris*. Here again the American influence is strongly evident in both northern and southern parts of the country, although some courses have started out with *festuca rubra/agrostis tenuis* seed mixtures on greens only to succumb to *Poa annua* infestation. Ryegrass fairways are commonplace and various unsuitable seed mixtures have been used on teeing grounds.

Greenkeeper education in Germany is in its infancy and is consequently well behind the training available at colleges in Scotland. With no established golfing heritage and with little recognition of the original concepts of the game, many ill-conceived developments have resulted.

I have seen it happen – the president or owner of a golf club will suddenly decide that the course needs some water hazards (which he saw whilst on holiday in the USA), perhaps a windmill or two, or flower beds around the tees! This public park concept has little in common with golf in the real sense. In light of this and other circumstances I consider golfer education in Germany to be even more critical than greenkeeper education if real progress is to be made in the future development of quality golf courses.

The golf courses of Scotland exhibit much greater character. Rough areas are not mown, bunkers are deeper, better