

The European golf development market is not what you think

By DR. FALK BILLION

Five years ago, as the 1990s began, the Old World seemed to be a sleeping one in terms of golf course development. While in the New World, the National Golf Foundation was promoting nationwide targets like "one new golf course per day", nothing the like had been heard from across the Atlantic ocean. Traveling golfers still told the same old story about the same classic courses all over the British Isles and parts of the continent, and just some of the American golf course architects discussed the design of new courses in European regions.

This impression is wrong! In the four years beginning in 1990, no less than 1,111 new golf courses have opened all over Europe. This is a growth of nearly 32 percent compared to 1990. In the '90s, Europe has witnessed the opening of 278 new golf courses per year (which is not quite one new course per day, but in any case equals three quarters of a course per day). In respect to golf course developments, England takes the lead with 242 new courses, followed by France with 177, Sweden with 142 and Germany with 109 new golf courses over the last four years.

This rapid golf course development clearly is concen-

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trated in the leading industrial nations of Western Europe. The Mediterranean sunshine belt does have an important share,

too, with 129 new courses in Italy, Spain and Portugal. The countries of Eastern Europe, on the other hand (Croatia, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia and Slovenia), have 28 golf courses

altogether, 17 of which (60 percent) opened during the last four years.

Western Europe — with 20 countries and a population of around 376 million — now boasts 4,600 golf courses, whereas the six countries of Eastern Europe — with 214 million people — account for 28. All over Western Europe, golf clubs count around 2.2 million member players, a number which equals only 0.6 percent of

the total population. Club golfers amount to some 4 percent of the population in Scotland, Ireland and Sweden, with some remarkable percentages between 1 and 2 percent in England, Wales, Denmark and Iceland.

Public golf is widely spread only over the British Isles, with around 1.5 million non-club-member players reported to make use of municipal and pay-as-you-play-facilities in Great Britain. Public golf has how

been taking an increasing share in Sweden and France, too, as well as in the Netherlands. France has seen rapid growth of courses in the late '80s and early '90's, due to a government financed program of public (municipal) facilities.

More than 90 percent of Europe's older courses, however, still are member-owned facilities, mostly run by non-profit clubs and often ruled by voluntary club committees. Professional management, in the sense of profit making, is largely found on new golf

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Obituaries

Bill Wooten, 61

Bill Wooten, whom many in Florida considered "Mr. Club Car," died of a heart attack on Feb. 22. He was 61.

After eight years of service with Textron's golf car division, Mr. Wooten joined the new management team at Club Car in 1978 and served a key role in building Club Car's early presence in Florida.

"Bill did so much for Club Car in his 16 years here," said George Inman, Club Car chairman and chief executive officer. "His professionalism and dedication to his customers set a standard for a lot of the younger people here... and were an inspiration to us all. We'll miss him."

Mr. Wooten was born in 1932 in Norfolk, Va. he is survived by his wife of 15 years, Jean, three children and two step children.

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