

Everybody's talking junior golf

When I first set sail for my trip around the golfing world — itinerary for which I've detailed in previous columns — I was dead sure I'd return with a file full of trend stories to vividly detail the "state of the industry" in the countries of Europe and Asia. What I found was quit surprising.



Michael Levans, editor

At Fairways '98 in Munich and Golf Asia in Singapore, two top conference/trade shows for the global market, the underlying theme was junior golf and how to attract more kids to the game.

I was almost certain that the talk in Munich would be about the solid growth of golf in Germany, the proposed "mini boom" coming in Greece or the fallout of Textron's purchase of Ransomes. Instead, the cocktail party chat I was able to ease into revolved around the need for Europe to move away from the pricey signature course and into the affordable, sustainable project.

Sound familiar? Getting sick of hearing it?

The consensus at Golf Asia was that the wild economic roller coaster ride will obviously calm in two to four years, leaving golf to ease its way back into the consciences of developers and players after a temporary hiatus. If one overriding message emanated from the Golf Asia conference it was that once economic tensions have eased, golf will come back stronger and smarter — and hopefully with a slew of kids ready to fill new junior golf programs.

Day one of the conference, which featured a country-by-country analysis of the golf market in Asia, started to sound like a broken record.

A.S. Khamis, managing director of ASK Golf Management Sdn Bhd, is about to open and manage Malaysia's first public golf course. Scheduled to open at that end of May, the course will be located in the Klang Valley near the International Airport in Kuala Lumpur and will host Malaysia's first full-time golf academy.

The key to golf's future in Indonesia, said Bob Horan, general manager at Klub Golf Bagor Raya, is aggressive marketing and the development of youth golfers. Peter Goh, general manager of Laguna National Golf & Country Club in Singapore echoed Horan's sentiments, commenting that Singapore needs to improve its infrastructure for facilities that can further stimulate growth, including driving ranges and public courses. Singapore will also have to capitalize on the recent growth of women players.

I was ready for a country-by-country gloom-and-doom report, but what I heard was cautious optimism and positive plans for building golf for Asia's future.

I wanted to forward a few thank-yous to our Hawaiian friends at Turtle Bay Golf Course, Kahuku, Koolau Golf Course, Kaneohe, and the Sheraton Makaha Resort & CC, Makaha, for their hospitality while GCN Publisher Charlie von Brecht and I were on Oahu taking a much-needed break. As you may know, Koolau has been rated the hardest course in the United States. While stunning, that "hardest" rating needs to be reconsidered.

Time to stop global whining!

Stop Global Whining!

Warming? No. Whining! We've heard enough. Enough of what, you ask? I've got a list a scroll long, but I'll keep it to a choice few.

Listen, if you think your personal circumstances are bad, look around. Look at Ranchos San Marcos, a brand spanking new golf course where superintendent Scott Nair watched, helpless, as the Santa Ynex River went berserk, changed course and washed away his 3rd green and fairway. Or look at Pebble Beach's Mark Michaud, who walked out onto the course one day to find the access road for golf carts and maintenance vehicles to the 15th tee washed away, along with about 20 feet of subsurface. Or look at the many superintendents in Maine where the Ice Storm of the Century snapped, cracked and broke gazillions of trees, leaving a carnage that reminded one of London after the air raids.



Mark Leslie, managing editor

Now do you want to Whine?

OK. Then look at the superintendents in Florida who have lost their jobs — not trees, but livelihoods — because they could not control the weather. They couldn't command the clouds to part and let the sun shine on their turfgrass so that it would grow. And an executive committee here, or an owner there, determined the dead grass was the superintendent's fault.

A reporter of mine once was a paraplegic. While in college, he had fallen from a tree, and since then had used two crutches to get around. Yet he always was pleasant beyond belief. I was close to him and so thought one day that I could ask him how he remained in such high spirits. "Whenever I get down," he said, "I think of the person who is a quadriplegic."

So, now will you please Stop Global Whining?

Here's a short list of who else I want to stop Whining:

- The Richmond, Va., city officials who put off the Richmond First Tee Foundation (which was donating the \$2 million to build a kids' course) until it had to move onward with neighboring Chesterfield County — and then got angry that the Foundation didn't wait around for them. You folks will be so-o lucky if the First Tee folks do come back and build a second course with you.

- The PGA Tour officials lamenting, and appealing, the court's ruling in the Casey Martin case. Hey, the guy's a great golfer who can't walk. How many handicapped people will ever have the talent to earn a spot on the Tour? One in a million? A billion? Show some heart and let him ride.

- Sierra Clubites, who disparage professional golf course superintendents, color the truth and outright lie to advance their agenda. You folks are as bad as Al Gore.

- Michael Eisner, who can keep his New Age grunge about Mother Earth, Father Sun and the Nerd Queen in his own closet, thank you. Strike on, people!

- The Global Warmheads, who haven't got a clue. Show me the science, will you? No, you won't, because it doesn't exist. And yet you've deceived the majority of the world into thinking global warming is a proven fact. Last Oct. 27 anchorman Peter Jennings claimed, "The overwhelming majority or scientists now agree climate change is being caused by man."

Oh? Did you think to ask the experts in the field? Sixty-eight percent of state climatologists feel global warming is **not** occurring. Again, I say, show me the science.

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Letters.....

Thank you for Mark Leslie's very perceptive commentary in the March issue. Based on many recent articles in other publications, one might think that, all of a sudden, and over the protestations of golf's plutocrats, golf is "opening up to women and minorities."

Anybody who believes that has probably not spent much time at their local, family-owned public golf course. And, after all, most rounds of golf in the United States are played at public facilities, and have been for many years.

Here in Ohio, and in much of the country, a nine-hole ticket is

available for little more than the price of a movie ticket. I operate an affordable daily-fee public course, where \$3 gets you three holes of golf on our practice course, a kid can play nine holes for \$8 or less, and just \$15 buys 18 holes on either of two regulation courses.

At our first tee, and at the first tee of family-owned public courses everywhere, golf is affordable and accessible, without discrimination. Also, we are actively involved in sponsoring youth golf programs. We give away many rounds of golf and many dollars each year to grow the game and to bring new people

into golf, including "non-traditional" players.

Still, as you point out, privately owned public courses need to be profitable to keep golf affordable. "The good of the game" requires course operators to be able to pay their workers and maintain their facilities. That means charging a fair price for a decent product, and doing our best to keep new golfers in the game and experienced golfers coming back more often.

Sincerely,
Chuck Bennell
General Manager
Bob-O-Link Golf Course
North Canton, Ohio

With an appeal to those who are responsible for TV golf commentary, please listen!

Anyone who watches TV golf has heard Johnny Miller and other commentators say, "This putt is going 'down grain.'" I am not sure the TV audience understands what this means. The word "grain," as used by TV analysts, is grossly overused and misunderstood by the golfing public.

Having spent my professional life studying turfgrasses, with a Ph.D. in turfgrass breeding, I have worked many hours collecting, observing, breeding and

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Hurley letter

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researching various aspects of grasses specially selected for use on golf course putting greens. Additionally, I have attended more than 100 professional tour events, caddied on the pro tour in the late 1960s, and worked on maintenance staffs in preparation for major championships.

Frankly, what you hear on TV about "up grain," "down grain," "grain growing east to west," "grain growing towards Indio," and other statements are oversimplified and, in most cases, misleading. What TV watchers need to hear is more, "up hill," "down hill," "side hill," and less "grain," "grain," "grain" from the commentators.

Let's look at the facts about how turfgrasses grow. Some people may have noticed on putting greens, especially on older courses, distinct patches of grasses, most ranging in size from 3 to 5 feet in diameter, displaying different colors and textures. These segregate patches of grass may produce an orientation of leaves and stems in a certain horizontal direction that we call "grain." This "grain" may influence the direction of a putt, especially as the ball slows down near the cup. However, this "grain" most typically grows in random directions when not unduly influenced by a steep slope, water drainage patterns, a strong wind blowing constantly in one direction, or continued mowing in the same direction.

The main point to be made is that on relatively flat putting surfaces on older golf courses, without the aforementioned influences, grasses typically grow in random directions. TV golf commentators use the word "grain" for all descriptions of how the ball may be influenced. They do not relate that an older putting green is typically made up of many patches of grass, possibly hundreds on one green, that may show some of this "grain," growing in small patches, and growing in all possible random directions. TV analysts do not factor that golf course superintendents routinely use brushes, and other devices on putting greens designed to stand leaf blades and stems upright so that this random grain can be minimized or totally eliminated.

It should be pointed out that the myths about "grain" constantly talked about by TV commentators are contrary to what turfgrass professionals know. I have discussed the subject of "grain" with other turfgrass experts and golf course superintendents, and they all agree that grain typically is found growing in random directions on putting greens.

Additionally, with more than 400 newly constructed golf courses being built in the United States each year, most new courses in cool-season climates are selecting the newly bred bentgrasses for putting greens. This "state-of-the-art" creeping bentgrass was developed to grow upright and does not produce grain.

When the winter pro tour hits Florida in February and March, golf courses have dormant Bermudagrass putting greens that are typically winter overseeded using a grass called *poa trivialis*.

My advice to the TV commentators is to find a better word for whatever they are trying to express, like "up hill" or "down hill." This would be more correct in many situations and would be easier to listen to. Thank you.

Richard Hurley, Ph.D.
East Stroudsburg, PA

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