

Time to give Europe a look

I promise not to yammer on about the Textron/Ransomes deal again in this column until something else actually happens.

I'll quickly bring you up to date and move along.

As most of you know by now, Textron has taken the British mower company under its wing (see cover story) and early plans are to keep the brand names in the spotlight. According to Carl Burtner, new president of Textron's golf and turf group, redundant products will be trimmed and Jacobsen and Ransomes technologies will be pieced together. We'll report more as news comes in.



Michael Levans,
editor

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We've been receiving a number of calls in the editorial office about the situation in Asia. Our contacts tell us that virtually every current Asian development, with the exception of Southern China (see Asian Notebook, page 12), has been put on hold indefinitely.

Course designers are cutting back on staff (see cover story on Gary Player Enterprises and the Q&A with Ross Watson on page 45) but keeping a foot in the door. Watson, an Australian architect who has recently seen a few of his projects stalled, has winnowed his Malaysian staff of six down to one. That person will man the phone.

There is no firm prediction at this stage in the game as to how or when the Asian market will get back on its feet — yet most industry players are certain that it will come back stronger, smarter, better.

My prediction is that development deals will abound, international management companies will grow, player development programs will slowly arise, construction costs will be kept to reasonable levels, clubhouse development will become more modest and there will be less dependence on real-estate development and more emphasis on the stand-alone, public course. Did I mention a move toward better site selection? Does this sound familiar?

In the meantime, tourism is picking up due to devaluation of the currency. It could be that the leisure market, the market that many are blaming for the current calamity, will be just the thing to put the region back on its feet.

While we wait out an Asian recovery it may be time to give Europe a look. On page 3, Dr. Falk Billion, a German golf course management consultant and one of our top European contacts, gives us a country-by-country look at the current European golf course market. Billion's piece, along with Andy Overbeck's notebook on the Chinese market, are required reading this month.

Robin Hood attitude takes hold

Those in golf have long said it is a noble sport played by noble men and women — honorable, great-minded people. In what other sport would a competitor make a judgment against himself upon discovering he had unknowingly violated a rule of the game? Where else do the best amateurs (A.K.A. Bobby Jones) turn aside from the promising wealth of the professional ranks? Where else do participants honor and defer to tradition to the extent that golfers do?



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

While courts, lawyers and the general public squabbled about Casey Martin's suit against the PGA Tour — often damning the sport's hierarchy at every chance — many involved in the industry itself were looking forward in great anticipation to donating their time, talents and money to help youths and minorities around the country join the community of golfers.

It has to be heartening to see course architects, builders, developers — and just plain golf lovers — jump at the opportunity to help those who wouldn't otherwise be able to play this sport-of-a-lifetime.

Brent Wadsworth, president of Wadsworth Golf Construction Co., has established the Wadsworth Golf Foundation to get inner-city youths off the streets and into a sport that can change their outlook on life. (See story page 49)

In Boise, Idaho, developer HansGeorg "Hans" Borbonus is planning a Robin Hood Executive Course as part of his 54-hole Cloverdale Golf project, expecting to "rob from the rich (the North and South courses) and give to the poor (the Robin Hood course), thus subsidizing green fees "to any junior who wants to play." (See story page 49)

The Minority Golf Association of America is developing a facility in Miami to train minority teaching professionals, develop special programs and activities to support allied organizations such as the PGA, and train aspiring minority golfers. The academy plans to house 30 to 35 people.

The National Association of Junior Golfers (NAJG) has been uniting corporations with junior golf programs and organizations across the country, serving as the network for junior golf and corporate marketing efforts. (See story page 51)

The United States Golf Association, PGA and LPGA, among others, are supporting junior golf projects from coast to coast.

Witness the First Tee Program founded by the World Golf Foundation. Organized just last November, it plans to have 100 courses in the program in two years, making golf available to minority and junior golfers.

Many architects — including Lester George, Mike Hurdzan, J. Michael Poellot and others — are ready to offer their services to First Tee-type projects

The American Society of Golf Course Architects has already given its first-ever President's Grant to the Georgia State Golf Foundation for its Hook a Kid on Golf program. The \$5,000 grant will underwrite activities and equipment for underprivileged youths this summer.

Honorable? Noble? Great-minded? I think we can find little argument here. And we congratulate all those who are adding their time and fortunes to the cause.

...

In the meantime, can some people go overboard in their zealous-

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ASIAN NOTEBOOK: CHINA

Chinese golf course market remains on steady rise

By ANDREW OVERBECK

SHANGHAI, China — Amidst all of the economic turmoil in Asia, China has quietly emerged as a steady and reliable market for the golf course industry. While golf course investment in the rest of Asia is grinding to a halt, China's golf market continues to grow.

In the past two months I have had the opportunity to

Andrew Overbeck is currently on a Watson Fellowship studying golf course development in Asia and will be regularly contributing to GCN. He will be visiting existing golf courses and those under construction in Thailand, China, and Vietnam.

visit some of these new projects and to assess the strength of the local markets.

China has attracted a diverse group of investors, mostly from countries that have sizable overseas Chinese populations. The single largest group of investors is from Hong Kong — with Malaysians, Singaporeans, and even local Chinese firms entering the arena. There is a massive rush for these investors to have the prestige of having the biggest, the best, and the first of anything.

Therefore, projects are immense in scale, diverse in location, and have outlandish features. However, the bottom line remains that in order to be successful, the developers must take

into account the ability of the local market to sustain the growth.

Each new project has taken a different approach, relying on their perceived project strengths.

The strongest growth corridor is in Southern China, in the Guangzhou, Zhuhai, and Shenzhen triangle. Here, they benefit from a comparatively stronger and richer local Chinese population, an influx of Asian investors and consumers, and a higher level of support from the local government.

After all, this is where the golf boom in China began.

Chung Shan Hot Springs Golf Club (1984) and the Shenzhen Golf Club (1985) were the first clubs to open in China since the

1949 Communist Revolution and they still peg their marketing schemes on this fact. Since the middle of the 80s, the golf market in this area has exploded: new courses continue to emerge and the diversity of the investors has moved past the usual Hong Kong money flow.

The Agile Holdings Golf and Country Club in Zhongshan, China, is a case in point.

This is the largest golf project to be undertaken by a sole Chinese investor. As with many Asian conglomerates, the company is family owned — the five Chen Brothers have been active in the housing development business for many years. In fact, they practically built the entire town of

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GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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Subscription Information

Golf Course News, P.O. Box 3047

Langhorne, PA 19047

215-788-7112

United Publications, Inc.

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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-mind design increases comfort with tilt steering and adjustable seat. For more information, contact 612-888-8801.

CIRCLE #212

Jacobsen unveils Aero King 30

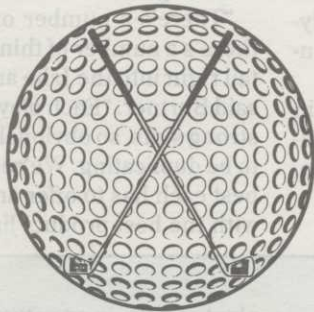
Jacobsen has introduced its new Aero King 30 greens aerator. The new Aero King 30 is powered by an 18-hp Briggs & Stratton Vanguard and offers a 30-inch coring width and a true, 4-inch coring depth. Depending on factors such as soil type, moisture content, past aeration practices and type of tine used, 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.

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CIRCLE #164

Leslie comment

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ness? In his keynote remarks at the International Golf Course Conference and Show in Anaheim, Tour golfer Peter Jacobsen declared that people who operate golf courses should be doing so solely for the betterment of golf. He, in fact, chastised management companies for not having that aim as their key reason for existence. Disregard any thoughts of profit margin.

Jacobsen was speaking to several thousand golf course superintendents, their spouses and others in the industry. And he received whopping applause for that remark.

Excuse me, but "Da!"

Listen, "the betterment of the game" is a wonderful concept, an applause-able concept. If the movers in the industry do not have the game at heart, golf will be done harm to. But to put it alone in everyone's reasons for existence is to achieve the very opposite: put the game in jeopardy.

No organization or business can operate at deficit margins and survive long. Even the First Tee courses will be planned to eventually operate on their own.

How close did Arnold Palmer come to being a golf course builder rather than a professional golfer?

In his pre-taped remarks in accepting the Golf Course Builders Association of America's (GCBA) Don Rossi Humanitarian Award, Palmer told of the time when he was having problems with his game and was having a good time operating a bulldozer.

He said it gave him pause to consider a career. However... "Having spent a little time on a bulldozer, and knowing how much I enjoyed it, and sort of having a little problem with playing golf. It was golf or the bulldozer... well, playing golf won out."

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:



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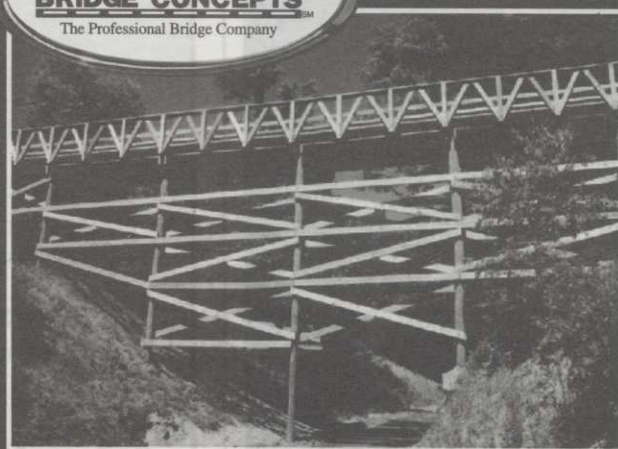
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