

# Many New Courses in America

By  
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Since it is reckoned to cost something around £130,000 to build a new golf course in America nowadays — and that doesn't begin to cover the cost of the clubhouse and other buildings — it is really remarkable how great is the flood of new courses all the time over there.

Over here only the first faint signs of a real expansion in the numbers of courses are making themselves felt. Still, any expansion at all is good for the prospects for greenkeeping as a way of life; so maybe the trend is worth watching, with an eye to its possible ultimate effects.

One wholly good thing about the way golf has developed in America is the vastly more liberal availability of the game to all sections of the community. Pretty well any sizeable town has its municipal golf courses, and indeed by now just about half the courses in America are open to the public on roughly the same basis — if nothing like as cheaply — as our tiny minority of public courses over here.

The reason for the discrepancy between the ordinary man's opportunities for golf in these islands of private clubs, and in America, seems to be simply that far more people in America are prepared, and can afford, to pay a bit more for their golf. There, over a third of all new courses are being built not by the Municipalities or private club themselves, but by speculative builders, "real estate developers" as they call them there; and the reasons for building these new courses seem to be as much commercial as recreational.

## Package Deal

Often there's a sort of package deal with the Municipality. The Municipality specifies the type of course it wants and how it's to be run, and sometimes puts up the cost of the land. The "Real Estate" man buys the rest, builds the course with municipal support and encouragement, and relies for his profits largely upon the value of the houses he builds around it. Those actually adjoining the course fetch a substantially higher price than those which don't.

The whole thing is worked out on a very thorough assessment of how many people live, and are likely to live in future, within an area up to 20 miles from the chosen spot. (Americans look on a 15 mile drive much as we look on a three mile one.) The developers take a pretty close look, too, at the prospects of any other "Daily Fee" courses within range. They also analyse local average income per head, and how fast prosperity is growing in the area.

Sometimes developers miscalculate, and new courses fail. But in a land where the population has increased by a third since the last war, the general situation is on their side.

## Investments

If things look encouraging, they reckon to lay out over £30,000 on about 200 acres of land, over £50,000 on building the course, over £15,000 on a course-watering system, and around £7,000 each on a course architect and on course equipment. Financial backing may come from banks, insurance companies, or partly from Federal and State development agencies.

It is, in fact, all very much a reflection of the general American attitude to things: finding ways of expanding the demands of ordinary people for the ordinary things of life. As one writer puts it: "Any real estate developer needs the golf course to promote area traffic. The completed golf course creates an area of stability and an atmosphere of vibrance which is considered vital to the home-selling industry."

It isn't, in fact, all done for the love of golf, or even for the sake of giving more people a chance to play it!

Be that as it may, the resulting expansion in golf is certainly doing the greenkeeping profession over there nothing but good. The University of Massachusetts now offers scholarships to "High School" golfers planning to take up turf management as a career; and everywhere the chances for the ambitious young "Course Superintendent" are the wider for the general situation.

Meanwhile the pure demand for golf there presses to such an extent that the experiment of floodlighting whole courses, first tried out 40 years ago and abandoned, has been resuscitated. Tall Pines, a private club near Philadelphia, started it in autumn of 1963. Louisquisset, a public course on Rhode Island, followed — on the general theory that although only 50 per cent of American courses are open to the public in general, over three-quarters of American golfers play on them. The

lighting system used is a 1,000-watt mercury floodlight developed by General Electric. It gives lighting about five times the strength of ordinary American street lighting for tees and greens, and about half that brightness through the green. These two courses both found that special nightplay green fees more than covered the costs on setting up and running the lights; and other courses have been following in their wake.

### Way Ahead !

It all looks a long way ahead of anything we have yet — or perhaps want — over here. By no means all our public courses are full up during weekdays, especially in winter. Would more people want to play in the evening after work if courses were floodlit for them?

Not for a year or two yet perhaps. After all, we're only just persuading the average municipal council that it's worth while even to think about providing a public course at all.

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