

THE GOLF COURSE

A MONTHLY BULLETIN DEVOTED TO THE DISCUSSION OF MODERN METHODS AS APPLIED TO GOLF COURSE CONSTRUCTION AND UPKEEP

Our Old Course

By OBSERVER

BEFORE talking of latter-day pilgrimages in this series of mine or giving my observations of modern courses let me turn to the links provided by my home club twenty years ago. That course was not as good as a few, but it was far better than many. Let us concede that it was an average one and typical of American courses of that period. It consisted of nine holes, which I shall describe briefly. Certainly \$3,000 a year was devoted to its maintenance and improvement and this amount of money was considered abundant. Indeed it was all our organization could afford, for if I remember correctly the annual dues were \$40.00.

We flattered ourselves by believing that our putting greens were well turfed. Now I realize, after putting on really good greens, that ours were exceedingly crude and covered only with grass. In every instance they were featureless and not one stood up to the shot. Our teeing grounds were

tiny, box-like formations and the few bunkers resembled graves.

Our first hole could be driven with a mid-iron today, but then with the gutta-percha ball we slammed away with our beech drivers from the knob of one hill to that of another. Then another hillside teeing ground for Number Two, followed by a nondescript, half-blind approach to another hilltop.

The third really was our best hole, but I doubt if we appreciated it then. Today it would be a drive with an iron. Then it was a capital two shot hole, but nearly everyone required three to get there. Number Four was quite blind from the teeing ground, and although a creek crossed the front of the green, its terrors were trivial because everyone banged lustily away into a hillside which flanked the green and which caught all shots and obligingly rolled the ball back to the green. It may be remarked that this same hillside served to drain the surrounding highland on to the green itself, which al-

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ceedingly poor, it is advisable to incorporate into the compost artificial grass manure, using 2 ounces of the latter to every superficial square yard.

After applying the compost, rake and cross rake it into the turf, until it has almost disappeared, then seed in the usual manner.

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ways was a spot where weeds held high revel.

To the fifth teeing ground we had to climb a short, but steep hillside for the privilege of driving to the next, then down the hill again and up another. The drive was quite blind and it made but little difference where one drove for the green opened up to any approach from any plate. The sixth drive also was blind and if the player was unfortunate enough to hit out anything much longer than a full mid-iron the ball rolled down a gully and was rather sure always to find a poisonous, hanging lie. Then up the hill again to the green. Briefly, Number Six was a two mid-iron hole, but two shots of any description were likely to get it unless the drive had been particularly good. Number Seven was blind as a bat, too,—a drive and a short approach with slopes carrying all surface water to the green where flourished nearly as many weeds as on the fourth. Number Eight was another hole which could be gained by two shots of any description and barring a public road, over which we drove, there were no hazards. The Ninth today would be a half-iron, but with a pronounced hill on the left and in the rear we were accustomed to go after it with the wood with no

fear of going too far on account of the hill, which carried all surface wash and weed seeds to the green exactly as in the two other instances already mentioned. In brief, the builders of courses in those days, always some professional player, delighted to stick the greens in basins, or if a hilltop was selected a whale-back formation usually figured. I well remember how our course was laid out, almost over night. As a matter of fact it took one whole afternoon with the green committee with their arms filled with stakes, running breathlessly after the pro, who from time to time would stop and direct the driving of a stake for a teeing ground or a green. No thought was given to the extent of the fairways for it was an unheard of thing in those days to deviate from the straight and wide path.

As my thoughts turn to that old course of ours I have to smile for actually on occasions it fostered fond hopes in my breast. One day I played around with a professional, who endeavored to give me a handicap of half a stroke a hole. It happened that he was not putting any too well and I ran down three or four very long ones, which naturally I attributed to a deft touch and the superior quality of the green. I was hitting my drive straight, about 160 yards or so, and keeping out of trouble for there was none to get into, unless one made a miserable fozzle. My opponent was out-driving me, but that made but little difference for if he had only a mashie approach the wide open greens allowed me to be there with him with a mid-iron. On the ninth hole he played a beautifully controlled iron to the green, but I was with him after slapping a full drive into the hillside, knowing perfectly well that it

would roll back to the green. After the last hole had been played I was amazed to find myself on even terms with him without a handicap and at once I became exalted and for days the thoughts of this marvelous feat persisted in buzzing through my head prompting me to travel far in search of new fields to conquer.

Had I not held the renowned Mac-Mashie to an even game? But it never once occurred to me that a misfit course had brought me to his level, rather than my own skill. Bitter experience was to teach me this in after years and when courses began to improve, in great humility I began to see things in a different light.

Now the course which I have described is no more. The encroachments of a large city demanded that it be given up as a playground and cellars were dug where we first started to work with our niblicks. But the type was common enough in those days and a surprisingly large number of similar types exist today. And, unthinkable as it may be, some courses actually are being built today along the same lines. In the old days such construction was excusable, for golf was a comparative child in America then and green committees knew no more than players generally. But in these enlightened times it makes the true golfer gnash his teeth to observe the planning and building of such monstrosities and then listen to the all-satisfied, complacent observation or advertisement: "We have the best course in the country!"

What rot! The best courses of the country are as numerous as the grandfather's clocks which were unloaded from the Mayflower.

Since becoming a keen observer, I take delight in playing over as many strange courses as possible. Last year I visited a certain town, almost a city it was, but I shall not tell you where, and I give you my word that our old course would have put it to shame. Quite recently the committee had built some mounds and I nearly laughed my head off when I saw them. They strongly reminded me of a display in a confectioner's window and to make matters worse they had been built not less than thirty yards from the place where real mound work should have been attempted. Where the modern golf constructor may puzzle over the question of a few feet in his placement of hazards, or obstructions, thirty yards surely must bring a smile to the face of even a phlegmatic observer.

So much for the courses of yesterday. Let them rest in peace! Next month I shall endeavor to give you some observations, which have been noted after playing around some of the best known courses of the present day.

IT would be an excellent idea if at every tournament the club would erect a small tent close by the home green and then appoint a committee of three to occupy it in relays. As an act of mercy each should be stone deaf. Their only duty would consist of sitting there patiently, with countenance expressing extreme sympathy, while the players who desired to review their matches told of their tribulations. At the finish of the narrative they should simply say, "Tough luck," and administer the chloroform.