

Million Rounds Yearly, Aim of New York Public Golf

By JOHN M. BRENNAN

When New York City is mentioned, one quite naturally visualizes skyscrapers, the Great White Way, Radio City, ocean liners moored at streamlined piers, the Statue of Liberty, Central Park and other wonders. Few, indeed, are the out-of-towners who are familiar with the tremendous growth of golf within the world's greatest metropolis.

Yes, golf within the city is making records every year. In fact, Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, the man responsible for the growth of the Royal and Ancient sport in New York City, envisions Gothamites playing more than a million rounds within a year or two.

The cost of golf in New York City has increased this year but the patrons continue to patronize the 10 courses located in four of the five boroughs comprising the magic city. For that reason, Commissioner Moses takes more than a casual glance at the attendance figures filed in his Central Park headquarters daily by the supervisors of the courses in Brooklyn, Queens, Bronx and Richmond. In spite of the higher tariff, the attendance during the spring has exceeded the corresponding period of 1948.

Moses expects to hit 1,000,000 rounds annually when the 27-hole course in Marine Park, Brooklyn, adjoining International Airport, is completed sometime next year. Last year, the city chain attracted the astounding aggregate of 685,423 rounds compared to 667,170 rounds the year before. A number of inclement weekends cut into the 1948 attendance figures. The city courses are not open all year around, like the New York State and adjacent county layouts, but open around April 1st and close December 1st.

Considering the short season, the city courses are among the busiest of the world. Dyker Beach probably set a world's record back in 1941, when favored with good weather, 102,756 rounds were tabulated. That's "saturation" golf for the entire season, with five and six-hour waits even on week days.

Players O.K. Fee Raise

The average patron of the New York municipal links, realizing the cost of labor, materials needed to maintain courses, etc., have increased steadily, took the news of

the permit and green fee hike in stride. Few complaints were uttered.

Harold McManus, who is supervisor of the 10 city courses, stressed the fact that the city did not raise fees for six years, during which maintenance cost had risen 50 per cent. McManus pointed out that the cost of a round to the city has risen from 32 cents in 1941 to 45 cents in 1947. And, the figure was even higher last year.

Commissioner Moses has assured the city course players that all of the increased revenue will go back into maintenance and improvement. He cited the increased cost of such items as arsenate of lead, which now costs the city nearly 30 cents per pound compared to 13 cents back in 1939, power mowers, tractors and other requisites.

Each of the city courses is equipped with clubhouse, cafeteria, pro shop, caddy house, maintenance building, parking field and the other accessories necessary and supplemental to a pleasant round of golf.

When a person purchases a permit which used to cost \$5 and now costs \$10, he automatically becomes a member of all 10 courses. It used to be that there was no further charge, but a few years back it became necessary for the city to assess players an additional dime on week days and a quarter on holidays and weekends. Those rates have been tilted to a quarter for week days and 50 cents for holidays and weekends. For non-permit holders, the daily fee is a dollar instead of 75 cents and \$1.25 for holidays and weekends instead of a dollar.

Attendance Figures New York's 10 City Courses

	1948	1947
Dyker Beach	95,049	95,780
Clearview	80,820	78,960
Kissena Park	77,994	76,124
Mosholu	71,071	68,485
Pelham	70,044	66,074
Van Cortlandt	68,660	68,410
Forest Park	60,282	55,437
La Tourette	60,022	58,527
Silver Lake	59,801	57,385
Split Rock	41,680	41,988
Totals	685,423	667,170

In spite of the moderate increased costs, golf is served up pretty reasonably to the city dweller when one considers the fees paid for private golf at courses within mashie shots of municipal courses.

N. Y. Management Plan

Commissioner Moses, who, when he took office a score of years ago, began the gigantic task of improving and augmenting the chain of city courses has succeeded in setting up a magnificent system. Management under the Moses scheme is centralized in a supervisor at each course, who works under McManus, the man responsible for the control of the 10 courses.

Actual selection of the supervisors may be worthy of brief review. The Civil Service Commission, in charge of all city personnel procurement, at the request of the Parks Department, held an open, competitive examination consisting of four basic parts:

- 1—A requirement that candidates possess at least three years previous experience in an executive capacity in park work, public or private.
- 2—A written test.
- 3—An oral examination.
- 4—A detailed investigation of experience, education and other qualifications.

Successful candidates were certified by the Civil Service Commission as qualified and the Parks Department assigned them to locations after another oral interview. The responsibility on these men is heavy, Commissioner Moses insists, since they are in complete charge of maintenance as well as operation, accountable for public relations as well as turf culture, collection of fees, and, in fact, for all that goes toward the proper functioning of the golf course.

Commissioner Moses is of the opinion that increased usage of municipal courses has complicated the operating problem rather than simplified it, bringing with it the necessity for increased maintenance, increased topdressing, more frequent cup changing and spiking and, finally, making it doubtful whether high quality greens can be kept under the punishing traffic of greatly increased play.

Heavier Play; Heavier Costs

It is only natural, the commissioner pointed out, that when the play of a golf course passed 40 to 50 thousand a season, the cost of increased maintenance exceeds the income brought by increased play.

Back in 1933 New York City municipal courses played fewer than 300,000 rounds, compared to 574,891 rounds in 1940 and the 685,423 last season. Increased popularity of the sport, plus the construction of increased facilities paved the way to the higher figures. In 1934, Commissioner

Moses built the Kissena Park course in Flushing and Split Rock in the Bronx, adjoining Pelham, was added a year later. All the other courses were completely remodeled, lengthened and renovated.

While the city courses were increasing in number, private courses were diminishing. Extravagance during the boom of the '20s led to the demise of a number of private clubs. Banks took over several private courses. High land and other taxes have not favored construction and maintenance of lavish clubhouses and magnificent courses for small membership clubs.

"Real estate subdivisions stand on the site of many former private courses, but apparently this trend has stopped," observed Commissioner Moses. "However, this cannot be interpreted as an obituary notice for the private golf course, for which, unquestionably, a place will always remain.

"The state park system has some of the finest golf layouts in the country. These are located conveniently to municipal golfers on Long Island, Westchester and New Jersey. Those who can travel a short distance outside the city have found these courses more desirable because they are not so overcrowded.

"Private golf courses, must, however, be acclaimed for setting the stage and establishing the high standards for municipal golf to follow, both from the standpoint of meticulous maintenance and precise operation. Much of the superior research responsible for the perfection of putting greens originated with, or resulted from, mandates of green committees of private clubs."

Problems of Heavy Traffic

New York City courses have been experimenting with varieties of velvet bent, and both Raritan and Emerald bents are being tested under heavy play. Liberal quantities of fertilizer, seed, fungicides and insecticides are being used and irrigation systems have been installed with the result that municipal courses no longer present a neglected and woebegone appearance of the pre-Moses era.

Commissioner Moses feels that with the opening of the new Marine course of 27 holes, the congestion at Forest Park, Dyker Beach, Kissena Park and Clearview, second busiest of the chain, will be relieved considerably.

"We are not dealing with the ordinary traffic associated with golf courses, but six of our courses do better than 70,000 rounds with favorable weather," said Commissioner Moses. "The implications of 70,000 rounds may be explored with relation to the ultimate capacity of a course. A

golf course is not like a sieve through which an unlimited number of golfers may be screened. This capacity must be accurately measured by anyone interested in pursuing the matter further by reference to the speed of golfers leaving the first tee in foursomes, it being conceded that by grouping players in this manner the greatest number will tee off.

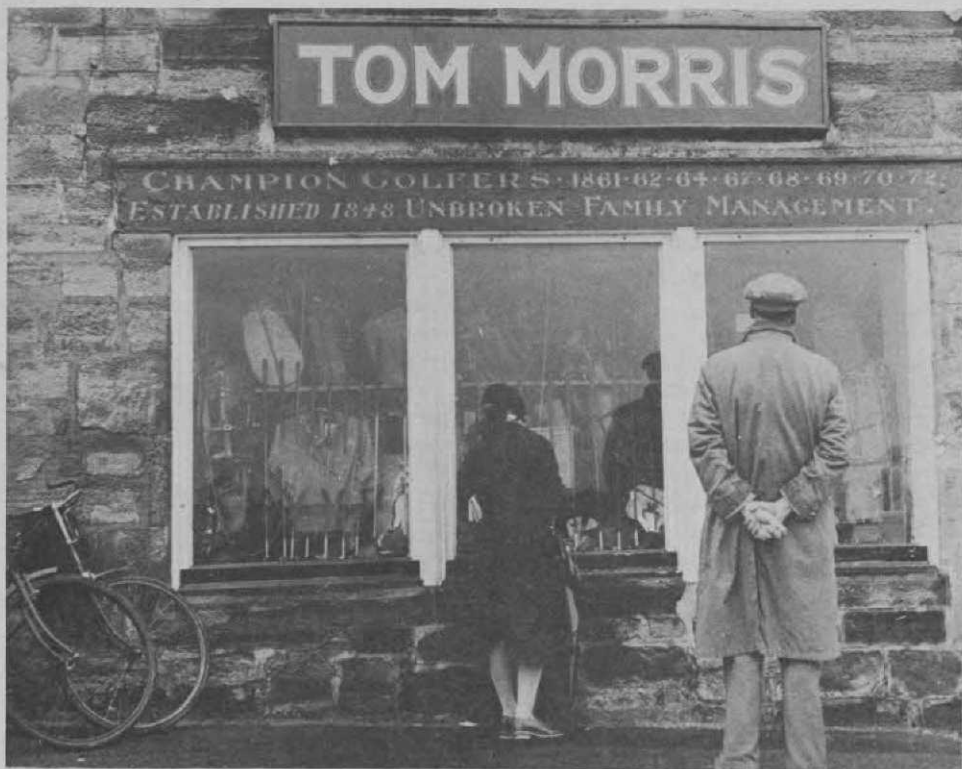
"Rules of safety require that a four-some drive off, walk to the ball, play a second shot and proceed out of distance before the subsequent foursome may drive. It will therefore be found that one four-some every five to seven minutes (depending on the speed and ability of the individual players) is the best that can be done. It must be taken into consideration that many municipal players are beginners and a large number of players lacking skill. Thus, it has been found that 11 foursomes, or 44 golfers to the hour, is just about capacity of a course. By figuring on daylight hours, inclement weather and other limiting factors, the mathematician will find that 70,000 rounds is very close to capacity for the average course."

It has often been said that the city went out of bounds when it went into the golf course business, competing with private enterprise, but Commissioner Moses insists such is not the case. "At most, we have expanded public functions and facilities where they need to be expanded to meet the requirements of the community," declared Moses.

Within the city limits the cost of land is so high that there is no possibility of acquiring new courses, unless some scheme is devised to purchase existing private courses which may come onto the market through some sort of municipal authority authorized to issue bonds and to operate on revenues, like the Bethpage State Park Authority.

There is so much work for the Parks Department to do in congested parts of New York City that it is impossible to schedule new golf construction. The city, however, is studying the possibility of additional pitch-and-putt courses such as the one at Riis Park in Far Rockaway which has proved so popular during recent years.

THE OLDEST "PRO SHOP" IN THE WORLD



The oldest "pro shop" in the world is that of St. Andrews which outgrew its small manufacturing and selling and changed with the times to get into big business.