

## REGIONAL REPORT

# Golf in the Northwest: close ties with Mother Nature

by Sheridan Much

The role of golf in the Northwest portion of the nation is somewhat different than it is in other areas. While golf fills many leisure hours for nearly a million players, it is not exactly a way of life.

Northwest Americans are blessed with ample outdoor recreation, ranging from water sports on Puget Sound to hunting, camping, fishing, and other fair weather activities in scores of mountain ranges and valleys rippling westward from the Rockies.

While golf and year-around golfing weather are attractions for thousands of Sun Belt natives and immigrants, growth of the game in the Northwest reflects genuine popularity despite golfing off-seasons ranging from 60 to 150 days or more each year. Western Washington and Oregon boast year-around golf seasons, as do some areas of Colorado, but hardy winter golfers risk drenchings in the former and frostbite in the latter. Really decent golfing weather typically runs from March through November in the Pacific Northwest and from April through October in the upper Rockies, where altitude is the most important variable.

A 10-year tracking of golf development in the region as it is defined by the National Golf Foundation shows facility growth somewhat ahead of population expansion. Golf courses have increased 26.5 percent since 1968, compared to an 18.6 percent population increase.

Washington added 45 courses in that period, an increase of 26 percent, and Idaho added 20, a gain of 36 percent. Busier than both, particularly in recent years, was Colorado, recently added to the Foundation's designated

Northwest territory. The Centennial State saw a 37 percent growth in 10 years as 40 new golf facilities came into being.

The entire area provides excellent opportunity for public golf. Ratios of public courses to population are generally more favorable than in the country as a whole, ranging from one for every 25,800 persons in Idaho to one for each 41,100 in Colorado. Ratios reflect 18-hole equivalent public courses.

An interesting contrast in the nature of public courses is pointed up in the several states. Municipalities and other government agencies supply about 41 percent of the public golf in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado — and if you throw in Utah, the percentage goes up to 48. The Pacific Northwest, on the other hand, has found private entrepreneurs willing to supply the major share of open-to-the-public facilities, leaving public agencies to account for only 21 percent of the facility count.

A recent trend toward leasing of municipal courses to private operators, thus placing them in the daily fee category for practical purposes, further reduces this percentage. The City of Seattle, for example, has leased out two of its three municipal courses. Partial lease arrangements are also in effect at an 18-hole city course and a 36-hole county-owned golf complex in Portland.

## Effects of weather

Weather was a major factor in further facility development in the Northwest over the past year. Construction delays — occasioned first by drought conditions in 1976-77, then sometimes compounded by a much wetter than usual 1977-78 — upset the timetables of numerous projects either under construction or on the drawing board.

Colorado, which saw a record-breaking drought in the mountains followed by record-breaking snowfall the next winter, was by far the most active of the region's states in development. Two new regulation courses were opened, along with three mid-length facilities and an addition to still another regulation course.

Elsewhere in 1978, Oregon,

Washington, Northern California, Utah, and Wyoming opened but one facility each.

A surge of openings in 1979, however, will return the Northwest to its status as the most dynamic golfing area of the nation outside the Sun Belt. Colorado currently lists 11 and Northern California 10 golf courses in some stage of construction. Idaho files show six, Montana and Washington four each, Oregon three, and Wyoming two. Many of these are completely new facilities, while others are additions to existing golf courses.

The "prospect" file, in which the National Golf Foundation maintains a continuing inventory of planned golf courses, is equally encouraging in the Northwest with a total of 31 potential projects.

Real estate developments involving golf courses represent the single most significant factor in planned expansion of the facility count in this area. That promises a greater availability of public golf since most of these projects at least begin as open-to-the-public courses.

After the 1976-77 drought and super-saturation of 1977-78, western golf was visited with a new problem in the winter of 1978-79: severe cold. Golf courses in the Pacific Northwest which normally experience some play in winter, varying only with the amount of precipitation, were totally shut down for days on end.

Many western Oregon courses experienced between 15 and 30 days without play because of snow, frozen turf, and ice storms. In western Washington, where snow was heavier and lingered longer, many courses were open only 15 days or less between December 1, 1978, and the end of January. Eastern Washington was bitter cold, with temperatures plunging to 25 degrees below zero and snow covering golf courses in Spokane from Thanksgiving Day through the end of February.

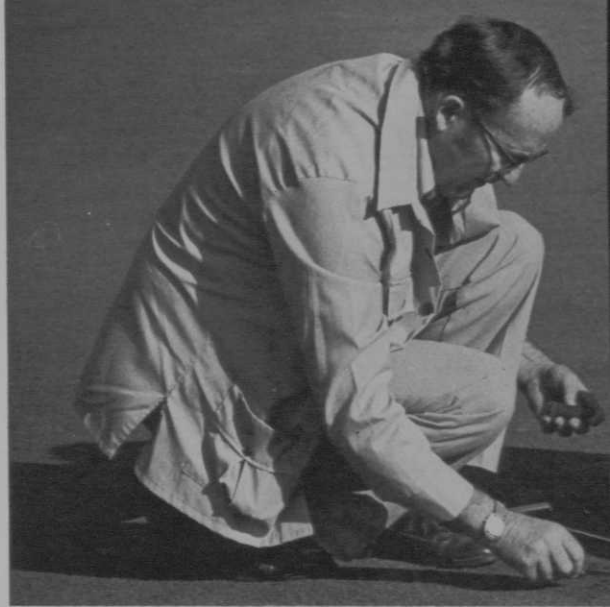
In Fort Collins, Colo., where the average December produces from 1,000 to 1,500 rounds of golf at Collindale Municipal Golf Course, not a single round was recorded last December. The same was true at most courses along the burgeoning eastern



A former sports-writer, Sheridan "Joe" Much is the National Golf Foundation's senior field director. He has covered most of the western states at various times since 1968 from his Oregon base.



Richard Malpass (right), superintendent at Riverside Country Club in Portland, said courses in his area were hit worst by a severe ice storm that swept through Oregon last winter. Photos above show birch and evergreen trees on the Riverside course damaged by the storm.



slope of the Rockies in Colorado.

Golfers in the Pacific Northwest have grown accustomed to enjoying "two good weeks in February." Almost annually those two good weeks provide dry, balmy weather and a greening of the countryside in a sort of preview of spring. Several more weeks of more wintry weather may follow, but those two good weeks of February are almost guaranteed.

Instead, February this year was one of the wettest on record and the two good weeks were delayed until March. As usual, they brought out golfers in droves, probably enough to rescue the first quarter of the year as a "normal" period of golfing activity in the Northwest.

#### Maintenance problems

For golf course superintendents the preview of spring was particularly welcome. Many were still trying to heal the wounds of winter, including desiccation of greens, widespread debris from tree limbs shattered by icing, and myriad problems with irrigation systems which had been installed in a manner to reflect milder conditions.

Dick Malpass, past president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, reported severe damage at his Riverside Country Club course in Portland.

"The coldest November on record, second coldest December, and coldest January since 1891, along with a severe ice storm, were really tough on turf in the Northwest," he said.

"The Portland area was particularly hard hit as the ice storm cut power to over 100,000 homes and businesses. Freezing winds blowing down the Columbia River Gorge caused severe desiccation of many golf courses."

Malpass said courses situated near the river, such as his and Columbia-Edgewater Country Club, were the worst hit. Cleanup work caused by downed limbs and trees was an 8-week spring project causing up to \$50,-

000 in expense at each course. The most punishing damage occurred among specimen trees such as flowering plum and weeping willow. Birch, poplar, pines, and cottonwood trees also sustained heavy damage.

Winter is a more familiar visitor in the Spokane area, but a 90-day snow cover was not. Fortunately, golf courses survived remarkably well, according to Erv Korff, golf manager for the City of Spokane.

"We came out of winter in excellent condition," Korff marveled, "and opened two of our three courses on permanent greens the second week in March. Golf play for the month is well up from 1978."

Snow cover lasted for 60 days or more in the Treasure Valley of Idaho, leaving Boise area golfers chomping at the bit. And when a fast melt occurred in early March, golf courses sustained some flooding.

"But that was a sort of 'nice problem' for a change," said Jerry Breaux, pro-superintendent at Eagle Hills Golf Course near Boise. "We still remember the recent drought conditions."

Eagle Hills green fees went up to \$6.75 on weekends for 1979, the highest in the area, but that had been no deterrent to golfers in the early season. Longer than usual inactivity had left them with a ravenous appetite for golf.

Snow was also heavier at higher elevations of the intermountain region through Montana, Eastern Idaho, and Wyoming, where golf courses were still digging out later in the spring. Early indications, however, were that most had wintered well.

If there is a single common concern in golf course development and maintenance in the entire Northwest area, it is water. But water problems are far from uniform. In that densely populated and heavily golfed region west of the Cascade Mountains of Washington and Oregon and between the Sierra Nevadas and the Pacific Coast in Northern California, water is generally abundant. Drainage is the

problem here, both for developers of new courses and operators of existing facilities. Much of the golf course construction activity in the Pacific Northwest in recent years has involved the remodeling of older courses, often with drainage improvement as the focus. Conversion to more predictable automatic irrigation systems has also been popular.

East of the Rain Belt and in the teeming Bay Area of California, western golf is seriously concerned with water availability. Drought conditions of 1976-77 pointed up the problem in Northern California when even such storied links as Pebble Beach on the Monterey Peninsula went ominously brown. Today all golf operators in the region are concerned not only with availability of water but also with its spiralling costs.

Howard Capps, owner of Chimney Rock Golf Club, an 18-hole daily fee course in the scenic wine country near Napa, Calif., recently moved to solve his water problems. He contracted with the small nearby community of Yountville for use of treated effluent. The agreement solved both the city's dispersal problem and Capps' water shortage. Both were following a pattern set several years ago in areas where recycled wastewater use for irrigation is necessary.

It doesn't take a drought in the intermountain west to remind golf operators of the importance of water. Water conservancy has been a way of life in this region for years and wastewater has become an increasingly important source of golf course irrigation.

Water is only one of the resource management problems faced by Northwest superintendents and managers today. Management of human and energy resources have become equally critical, according to Dick Malpass.

"We have a continuing labor problem," he said, "as our help is siphoned off into other industries."

Union labor is still relatively



# Myers

FIBERGLASS TURF SPRAYERS



TL10 and 40 Series



VTL10 Series

Myers fairway and general turf maintenance sprayers offer non-corro-

sive fiberglass construction throughout. Agitator assembly is stainless steel. Wide choice of optional running gear. PTO or engine drive. 100, 200 and 300 gallon tanks. 10 and 25 GPM. Write for our catalog.

**Myers**  
*TurfLine*

**F. E. MYERS CO.** DIVISION OF **McNEIL CORPORATION**  
400 ORANGE STREET, ASHLAND, OH 44805

Circle 109 on free information card

scarce through the Northwest, although it has become the rule in many Northern California locations. Restrictions imposed by union contracts, where they exist, have contributed to expanding maintenance budgets and, in some cases, less intense maintenance practices.

A recent survey of maintenance costs in Oregon and Washington showed budgets at 18-hole courses ranging from \$96,000 to well over \$200,000. Many daily fee courses, however, still manage to keep turf mowed and growing with budgets as tight as \$40,000.

Superintendents' salaries ranged upward to \$30,000 annually at first rate private clubs, but here again daily fee owners were finding turf management help available for as little as \$13,000. Many, of course, serve as their own "superintendents" and hire foremen to direct their crews, often only part-timers. The average for superintendents who responded to the NGF survey was \$20,600 and the median about the same.

Year-around help in addition to the superintendent varied from one to 12 persons on courses of 18 holes or more in the region. The average reported was 4.6 fulltime employees, including assistant superintendents, mechanics, foremen and laborers. All reported additional seasonal help.

Malpass said superintendents' concern with energy resources is double-edged. Not only would fuel restrictions diminish intensity of maintenance, but it would also threaten golf play and normal revenue. Because distances between golf courses in the Northwest are generally greater than in more populated areas of America, golf could be one of the first sacrifices of Northwesterners forced to conserve fuel.

On the other hand, Malpass said, when and if Americans are forced to seek recreation closer to home, golf could become even more popular.

"That's more reason why golf courses should get their fair share for maintenance and operation in a fuel shortage," he suggested.

Superintendents of the region are also more concerned than ever over a growing list of EPA-restricted materials with which they have fought turfgrass pests for years. This and increasing qualifications being imposed for licensing of pesticide applicators add to administrative problems for superintendents.

Fortunately, *Poa annua* control and usually light infestations of *Fusarium nivale* (pink snow mold) are the only major turfgrass problems to be dealt with under normal conditions. Much of the research and experimentation

# tacki-mac®

... a new golf grip so successful it's bound to be imitated!



Look for our "Grip Size/Selector" in your pro's golf shop. Check your correct grip size and test Tacki-Mac's great feel at the same time!

**tacki-mac®**

TACKI-MAC GRIPS, INC.

21500 Osborne St., Canoga Park, CA 91304 (213) 341-9661

The original "tacky" one, with over ten years of research and development. You must feel it to believe it—the grip that grips you!

Washable, colorfast, non-absorbent material dries instantly with wipe of towel. Never hardens, always tacky.



Patent Pending



**Another pro  
for the course!**

**Get your  
charging game  
up to par with the**

**Lestronic II  
golf car  
battery charger**

From Lester Electrical, here's "the battery charger with a brain" for your golf car fleet. The Lestronic II charger completely eliminates over and undercharging of any battery...actually extends battery life and reduces maintenance by precisely charging every time.

The Lestronic II includes many quality features of the original Lestronic, at substantially reduced cost. Exact charging is assured because Lestronics know when to quit. The patented electronic timer on the Lestronic II shuts off when the battery is precisely charged.

Ask for these models...

Model 9470 — 36 Volts D.C., 25 Amp., 115 Volts A.C.

Model 9475 — 36 Volts D.C., 40 Amp., 115 Volts A.C.

Write or phone for complete information.

**Lester ELECTRICAL OF NEBRASKA, INC.,**

Dept. GB-5, 625 West A St.  
Lincoln, NE 68522 • 402-477-8988

Circle 120 on free information card

**"Satoh hugs the hillside like a  
mountain goat.  
And that satisfies me."**

Front tire: 9.5L-10  
Rear tire: 21.5L-16.1



Satoh satisfaction starts with the Stallion Ground Hugger's dependable, smooth-running 38hp water-cooled Diesel engine. With nine forward speeds (three reverse) and dual-speed live PTO (540 and 1,000 rpm), the cost-efficient Stallion Ground Hugger is ideal for hilly terrain uses such as municipal park maintenance and golf

course grooming.

And its standard power steering gives you effortless maneuverability.

Let Satoh satisfy your tractor requirements like a pro. It satisfies mine.

**Satoh.  
Satisfaction!**

Get it at your **SATOH** tractor dealer.  
P.O. Box 5020, New York, N.Y. 10002

Circle 113 on free information card

carried on by agronomist Dr. Roy Goss and plant pathologist C.J. Gould at the Western Washington Research and Extension Center in Puyallup are devoted to the control of these. In general, turf managers of the area are almost equally divided between those resigned to living with *Poa* and those still battling it.

The normal fertilization programs in the Northwest consist of a light application in early spring, a heavier application in April or May and another in September or October to carry turf through winter. Greens and tees are accorded frequent light applications by most superintendents along the Pacific Coast, reflecting year-around playing conditions. Aerification is considered mandatory by most in early spring with top-dressing programs to set greens up for heavy summer play.

Many superintendents in the region have adopted variations of the Madison program of frequent light sanding of greens, sometimes with fertilization and fungicidal applications included.

**Summary**

The Pacific coastal region is noted for its lush, green courses, often carved from heavy stands of evergreens and spread over rolling hills drained by swift-moving streams and dotted with natural ponds. Until relatively recently, golf course architects eschewed the addition of unnatural hazards, such as sand bunkers in profusion, on Northwest courses. That sort of sophistication has been introduced, however, in the past two decades and today Northwest golfers are as apt to find themselves in a soggy sand trap as under a Douglas fir.

Through the mountain regions, where bluegrass fairways prop the ball into inviting lies and Penncross greens flourish without heavy *Poa* annual competition, golf is enjoyed in perhaps its most spectacular environment. Green mountains or red rock formations silhouetted against brilliant blue skies provide the backdrop for golf shots which just naturally fly further in the brisk, thin air.

Golf was only a rumor in this nation when Horace Greeley issued his famous advice to young men. He could hardly have dreamed that this remarkable pastime would add immeasurable flavor to life in his beloved West. But, beyond doubt, it has and it continues to be one of the attractions in the continued westward shift of the American population. □