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Olympia Fields

Its reaction to the play of the champions

By Robert E. Power

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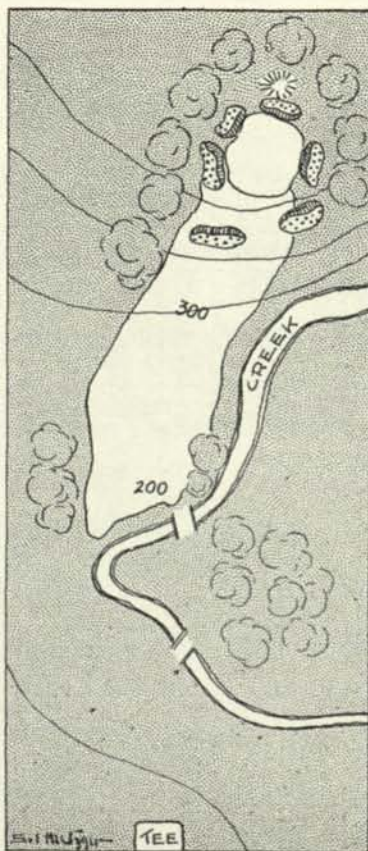
OLYMPIA FIELDS—a flat prairie-like golf course, thirty-five miles southwest of Chicago! That's how I pictured it in my mind. The only thing in the picture that was right was the distance—everything else was wrong.

When John C. Dee of the Mower Company kindly picked me up and drove me out Thursday morning, June 21, I was ready to see a big place but not a picturesque one. Imagine my feelings when we turned off the main highway into a graveled private road that wound through groves of magnificent oaks, across little wooded valleys with gurgling brooks and finally out upon a gorgeous eminence, landscaped with trees and shrubs with the great stone clubhouse dominating the picture. Close by was the 18th green flanked in the back with a beautiful grove of old trees, while far to the north stretched the paralleling fairways of the 1st, 9th, 10th and 18th holes. Over to the west was the Illinois Central electric rapid transit rightaway so I knew that most of the golf course must be back in the woods and valleys we had just driven through.

And it was. After playing the second shot on Number 3

you enter the forest and you do not emerge until you play your second shot on Number 7. Again you enter the woods at Number 11 green and you come out

Worthington



THE 17th HOLE WHERE ROLAND HANCOCK LOST THE CHAMPIONSHIP. He took five shots to hole out from the right hand rough about opposite the word creek



FRED KRUGER
Olympia's efficient greenkeeper

at Number 18 tee.

I did not go to Chicago to see who was the best golfer in the world. Of course I saw him and all the other also rans. But I wanted to see and tell my greenkeeper readers to what extent the physical condition of the course and its care and preparation affected the play of the champions. Because after all the acid test of the greenkeeper's work is the play of such experts as Farrell, Jones, Hagen, Deigel, MacDonald Smith, Armour and a host of others. They play the ball as they find it. Every lie in the fairway, the rough, and in the bunkers is studied carefully. When they hit a shot to the green it stays where it is hit, providing the green is right. And they certainly stayed on those vegetative bent greens at Olympia Fields.

Pitch Shots Hold Greens

WE HAVE all seen vegetative bent greens in the past four years that had so much

turf that the ball would not bite. Instead it would bounce and roll, sometimes into trouble. But Fred Kruger's greens at Olympia Fields held every shot even to the longest iron and brassies. For instance I saw Bobby Jones, after an ordinary drive on the four hundred and thirty-three yards, Number 14-hole hit a long, low iron shot with a hook on it and it did not roll more than ten feet. All through the three days I watched them and I never saw a ball go over that should have stayed on. On the short holes particularly I saw many mashie and mashie niblick shots that actually jumped backwards.

The result of this condition was to give the players confidence in going for the pin which all the good ones did. On the other hand I noticed several contestants not used to such finely prepared greens who played their approach shots short thinking they would get closer to the pin and many of them ran into traps and rough.

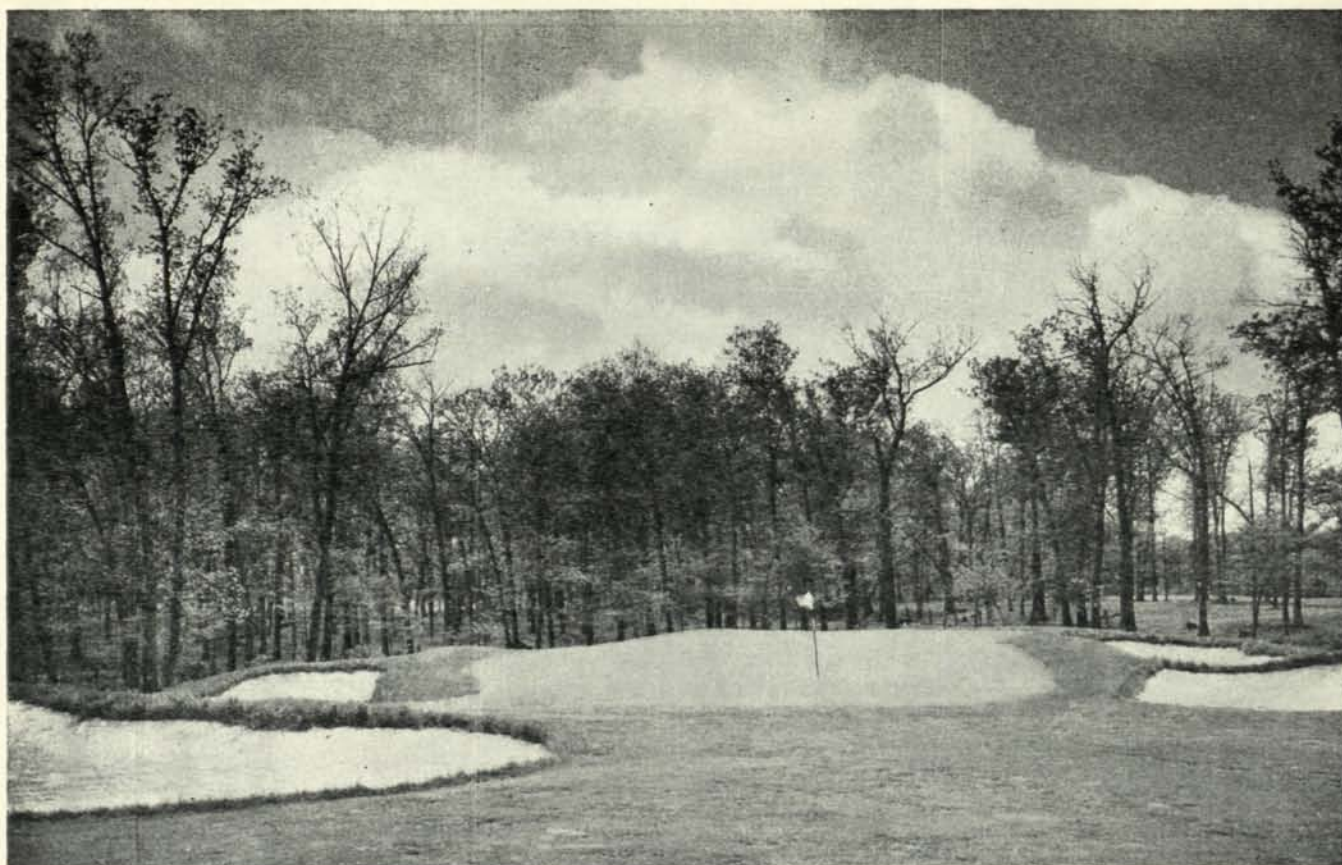
I wish some of these so-called golf course architects who think they have to slope every green on a two-shot hole in order to hold the ball, could have watched the play in the 32nd

National Open Golf Championship of the United States at Olympia Fields. I wish also that antagonists of creeping bent greens who say they won't hold a pitch shot could have sat at 6 or 13 or 16 and witnessed the way the boys who know how, banged their spades and mashie niblicks smack up to the pin. Emmett French hit a ball on the 153 yard 16th that actually struck beyond the cup and bounced back a foot nearer the hole. On the contrary Hagen on his third round Saturday got timid and careful and played his pitch shots to the front edge of the greens. They stayed right there leaving him a long putt to get near the hole. Had he gone boldly for the pin I think he might have won the championship because that's just what Farrell did when he made his 71.

As to the actual putting condition of the Olympia greens I am not so enthusiastic. I have seen better greens and I have seen worse ones. I think they improved each day but the fact that they were young and got scuffed up with the spiked shoes that every player wore, made it difficult for the ball to always hold the line. Once or twice I saw a side slope putt



No. 3—A fine two-shotter, 420 yards long. The second shot to this green was about the hardest on the course. Many of the best players including Hagen took sixes on this hole



No. 4—398 yards long is typical of many of Olympia's drive and pitch holes. Although the green is comparatively level it held the shots very well



No. 14—433 yards was a graveyard for many hopes. The fairway narrows at the end of a long drive while the second shot uphill is longer than it looks



No. 15—555 yards—the longest hole on the course. A narrow tree-bordered fairway bending to the right puts a peculiar hazard on the long shot. As far as we know no one made this green in two

which looked good until it got near the hole when a blade or two of grass would deflect it enough to miss the center of the cup. That's the problem for every greenkeeper to think about when there is a whole day's play, and where so much is at stake. Your greens may be perfect in the morning but how are you going to keep them that way till nightfall? Perhaps I am crazy but I thought many times as I saw good putts go astray, that the man at the green who forks up the divots could every now and then when there is a gap of two or three minutes, examine the area around the cup and smooth up any marks left by the spikes of the players who had gone before.

Olympia Has Flossmoor Bent

THE grass at Olympia is a fine, curly, deep green, close-matted Metropolitan, shall we say—or Washington, or what have you—bent. Locally it is known as the Flossmoor bent because it was planted from stolons from the Flossmoor Nurseries near Chicago. It was absolutely free of clover or weeds, though the clover grew quite luxuriantly on the aprons right up to the putting surface. It looked to me from the color and the way the pitch shots held as though it had lots of fine topdressing and sulphate.

One would expect the Olympia creeping bent greens to be very fast, but in my opinion they were about medium—certainly nothing like Oakmont last year which were periously fast yet true as a billiard table—nor were they quite

as fast as Scioto in 1926. It rained very hard Friday afternoon and there were intermittent showers on Saturday which may have made the greens slower than usual, but in spite of the incessant tramping they stood up well and I think were better on Saturday than any day of the tournament. This fact showed up in the play of Johnny Farrell, the champion, who could not get his putts to go down with any regularity on Thursday or Friday and was noticeably wobbly around the cup. But on Saturday it was an entirely different story and his putts went down with monotonous regularity.

Clover Causes Close Lies

THROUGH the green there were many close lies owing to the presence of clover in the fairways. This is due I was told, to the fact that Olympia Fields is in a clover belt and furthermore the cold, dry spring held back the growth of the fescue and poa grasses. Even so, it seems as though this abundant clover growth might be checked by scientific fertilization in order to get a neutral reaction in the soil. My guess is that the soil which is dark and loamy is too "sweet" though that is a matter for turf chemists to test out and decide.

On some of the long holes such as 1, 9, 15 and 18 it was often a wood club for the second shot and I saw many of these that were low and off the line because the lies were close and snaggy.

The roughs were purposely long and heavy

especially in places like the valley on Number 3 and near the ditch on 9 and 18. The committee intended to penalize a player who was off the line with his tee shot and they succeeded very effectually. Scioto did the same thing in 1926 but it was the universal opinion that Olympia Fields was much harder to play out of. This heavy rough on the right of Number 17 probably cost young Roland Hancock the championship. His long tee shot landed there and he was three shots getting on the green which was slightly over one hundred yards away. Undoubtedly the shouting gallery and the fact that he had a difficult shot to make unnerved him because he looked up on the shot and did not get out. With one shot wasted he could still win easily but the strain was too much for the unseasoned lad and he blew up completely.

NO ONE can say for sure what effect the condition of the rough had upon deciding the championship. From my personal observation I think it was quite a factor. I watched Farrell off and on for three days and he was uniformly straight and long off the tee, whereas Bobby Jones, who played with Farrell on Thursday and Friday, almost wore himself out whacking out those marvelous recovery shots you read about, from the tall and uncut. I believe I heard more "if" stories about the rough than any championship I ever attended.

Bunkers in Fine Shape

FINALLY the bunkers. Though raked in the approved harrow style they were not difficult due to fairly easy slopes and abundance

(Concluded on Page 32)



No. 16—153 yards, a really famous hole. It was here that Bobby Jones took five on his last round. The bunker at the right is very deep

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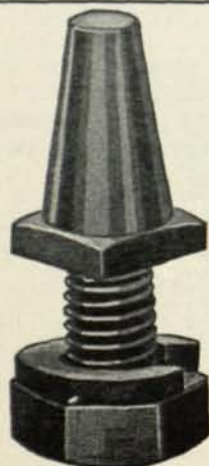
Olympia Fields

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of sand. Those about the greens were far enough away to permit a confident shot out and at no time did I see any really bad bunker play. Great credit is due the greenkeeping crew for keeping the bunkers in such fine shape.

On many of the holes in the woods with menacing creeks and tree-bordered fairways few bunkers were needed. For instance on Number 12, three hundred and eighty yards long, there isn't an artificial hazard from the tee to the green. But I saw one good player take a nine so you can imagine how much trouble Nature bestowed on that hole.

All in all Olympia Fields is a testing championship course from the back tees. Give it three or four years to age up and to attain those little refinements that one sees on the older courses in the east and it will rank with anything in this country both from a scenic and a playing standpoint.



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Mid-West Greenkeepers Meet

THE Mid-West Greenkeepers Association held its first outdoor meeting of the season of 1928 July 9 at Beverly Country Club.

About 35 greenkeepers were guests of Matt Bezeck, greenkeeper of Beverly Country Club, who was highly complimented upon the condition of his course. The opinion was expressed that it is one of the leading courses in the district both in lay-out and condition. A survey of the links was found quite interesting and enjoyable.

After a luncheon served through the generosity of the Beverly Country Club, the business meeting was called to order by President John MacGregor. The question of accepting new members was discussed. It was decided that all applications should have the signatures of two members in good standing and should be approved by the membership committee.

Demonstration Day at Sunset Valley Golf Club was discussed and Secretary Edward B. Dearie was requested to write letters of thanks to the members of the committee on arrangements which consisted of Ed. M. Laing of Sunset Valley Golf Club; Peter Stewart, Lake Shore Country Club; Fred Sherwood, Northmoor Country Club; and Alex Pirie, Old Elm Country Club.

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