

Browns & Greens

Golf courses as we recognize them today are a far cry from how the game of golf was played in the early 1900s. Golf courses were laid out with a mathematical zeal that had bunkers off of the tees between 60-80 yards that would have been an imposing hazard for most golfers that had a hard time getting the ball off the ground. Another set of bunkers would be laid out at 40-60 yards in from of the green and approach shots had to be played over them. Then we get to the green, or “brown” in most cases, that would be anywhere from 15-100 feet in diameter and consisted of sand.

As the game of golf was growing, golf courses were built on leased property and laid out over a very short period of time. A home nearby would be secured or a modest clubhouse built and they had a golf club. There was irrigation on a very rudimentary level found at some of the more established clubs, but for the most part sand greens were used. Golf had not taken a firm hold, and until it did, some clubs were reluctant to run up the expenses on something that could be a passing fad.

From what I have read there were two types of sand greens that were played on in the United States. Back East, the greens were made of a clay soil base that had a layer of sand placed over the top. Dependent on the club and its golfers, they would either spread out a thin layer of sand for the better golfers, or a thicker layer for average golfers. Interesting that even then there was some consideration for better players by making the greens less receptive to shots and increased speed.

In the Western states the sand greens were subject to being dryer and issues with the sand blowing away. To remedy this, the greens were built on a bed of gravel and a layer of sand that had an oil substance added to keep it in place. Aetna Springs Golf Course for example, still has some remnants of their sand greens scattered

around the course. Due to the oil and sands exposure to the elements the old greens have the consistency of an old asphalt road. The original San Rafael Golf Club (1898) was one of the first 18 hole courses in Northern California and was located near the now famous Marin County Civic Center. Their sand greens were 50 feet in diameter and the home green was 100 feet in diameter.

Closer to 1900, grass greens were starting to taking shape at The



San Francisco Golf Club at the Presidio and at Del Monte. There is an annual golfing guide that was published for the period of 1916-1931 that covered all of the refinements of the given clubs. In looking at the 1926 edition, one would think that by the 1920s most courses would have had grass greens, but the number is actually closer to only 50%. Of the courses that were still sand most were outside of high population areas.

Photo Quiz

Can you name this hole?

Send your photo quiz answer to *Thru the Green* Editor, Brian Netzt, CGCS and win complimentary registration for the January 9 GCSANC Annual Meeting at the Course at Wente Vineyards!

LAST ISSUE'S ANSWER

The photo from the last issue was of the 4th hole at the Presidio.

