

# Future Golf removes boredom from range

BY MARK LESLIE

Imagine. You're at Augusta National Golf Club. The par 3, 155-yard 12th hole, to be exact. The swirling winds, water and sand facing you belie the fact it is a truly difficult hole...

Wait a minute. You haven't driven more than 10 miles from your Chicago home. You are probably 1,000th on the list of hopefuls to ever join the fabled Augusta club. Plus, you're indoors.

You see, you are actually at Future World, the fulfillment of a dream of avid golfer Thomas Ruth.

Ruth's imagination was working overtime on the practice range one day. The Barrington, Ill., attorney didn't have time during his lunch hour to play a round of golf. And he was "getting pretty bored just banging balls." So he played his home course in his imagination, and now we can all play our courses in our imagination — at Ruth's Future Golf.

Located in Crystal Lake, Ill., outside Chicago, Future Golf is a complete practice facility. Its 10,000-square-foot building contains sand traps and two large greens. It has 10 tee areas looking out onto a "course" that features six "target" greens, complete with sand traps and pins. Greens range from 25 to 275 yards from the tees.

Keeping a hole at his home course in mind, the golfer drives toward one of the greens. He then gauges the remaining distance to the green and hits his second shot to whatever green is the correct distance away.

If the golfer hits into a trap, he just moves to one of the two sand traps within the building and chips to a green. Once on the green, he putts on one of the indoor greens. One green is "tough, very slick and undulating" while the second is moderately difficult, Ruth said.

"We've had an unbelievable reception. Everybody likes it," said Ruth.

Ruth said Future Golf has won the hearts of many beginning golfers.

"Nobody is in front of you. There's nobody behind. And you don't lose any balls," he said. "It's also fun because people come in with their kids. A kid can play a par 3 course and



The view from Future Golf's tee area.

Dad can play a championship course. They tee off together and putt together. So you get the best of both worlds."

More disabled people are coming to Future Golf because "it's the only place they can go," he added.

Time is a major factor on his side, Ruth feels.

"Golf takes an awful long time and I, for one, just didn't have the time to play a full round of golf," he said.

Relating how he once visualized playing his home course, Stonehenge Golf Course in Barrington, he said: "I'd play the course in my imagination. Then I'd go up to the clubhouse and have a sandwich and putt out on the practice green, and I'd putt 18 holes.

"I found out I could get 18 holes of golf in an hour and a half and have lunch, too."

Ruth said few people practice "because it's a chore. Sometimes I like this better than playing golf, because your bad shots don't bother you and things like that."

Ruth's partners in Future Golf are Stonehenge General Manager Dean Nissen and the deceased Charles Maddox Jr. Maddox's father, Charles Sr., a longtime golf course architect and owner of Stonehenge, designed the target course.

As for the facility:

- The target greens are built of sand mixed with a chemical that melts snow and remains soft so that balls don't bounce. When winter hits, a snowplow can clean off the perimeter of the greens.

## Pittsburgh borough planning year-round practice facility

A new driving range and golf training facility that will allow area golfers to practice their games year round is planned in Pittsburgh's Jefferson Borough.

Pittsburgh architect Alan Jesse Cuteri said construction of The Practice "T" Country Club will begin in mid-August.

For the \$2.4-million project, Cuteri has designed a driving range with 140 tees. Twenty tees will be heated for winter use. There will also be a 10-hole pitch-and-putt area, complete with sand bunkers.

An indoor practice area and golf training center will be features of an 11,000-square-foot building that will be erected on the site. The building also will include a pro shop, a 75-seat restaurant, banquet facilities for up to 100 people and offices. Babysitting services will be offered at the facility and locker rooms and showers will be added at a later date.

The Practice "T" Country Club will be open

- The indoor greens have a sand base and artificial grass that needs only an occasional brushing to keep their nap.

- Lights on the outdoor range allow 24-hour play.

- The tee areas in the private enclosures have close-cropped and rough artificial turf so that balls can be teed up or hit from the turf as a golfer would on a regular course.

- High-capacity heating allows golfers to play in sub-zero weather with sweaters.

- Groups as large as 50, playing in fivesomes, can hold tournaments. Ruth said the lone problem in tournaments is judging the distance to the pin after the drive. "You get out on the 200-yard hole and it's hard to judge the distance... As for putting, we just have a pattern of putts and everyone putts the same — two long, two short, two uphill, two downhill and a side hill perhaps."

Profit is the only obstacle for Future Golf. Ruth feels now that some misconceptions have been discovered, Future Golf is on its way to being in the black.

Ruth said the partners opened the facility in the fall of 1988 as a private club with the mistaken belief that they had to get people to return more than once "to get comfortable with the concept. It takes a little imagination, you know. But we were wrong. We found that people get right into it."

Discovering that play dropped considerably in the summertime, they changed Future Golf to semi-private status last January, accepting the \$50-per-year family memberships

to the public, but memberships also will be sold.

"Obviously, The Practice 'T' Country Club will not be a run-of-the-mill driving range or pitch-and-putt course," Cuteri said. "We are creating a country club atmosphere where serious golfers can have the facilities and amenities they need to hone their skills. It also will be a place where beginners can learn the game with professional instruction, under virtually ideal conditions."

The Practice "T" is patterned after a similar facility in Atlanta, Cuteri said. It will occupy a 50-acre site.

The driving range is scheduled to open in September. The remainder of the complex is expected to open next January or February.

Owner of the facility is The Practice "T" Country Club, Inc. Raymond Sprites is president of the corporation and John Kocak is treasurer.

## ON THE GREEN

basically just to control tee times in the winter. Ruth reported summer play has since increased by at least 50 percent.

"The advantage of membership is that you can book tee times. During the winter, we're booked on weekends until 4 p.m.," he said.

Ruth said his group plans to franchise Future Golfs "as soon as we get profitable."

He said the cost to play is \$6 for nine holes and \$10 for 18 holes for members. There is a \$2 surcharge for non-members during the winter months. In comparison, he said greens fees at area golf courses are \$15 and up on weekdays and \$18 and up on weekends.

During winter, golfers can practice for \$6 per half hour and \$10 per hour.

A manager, assistant manager and two-man maintenance crew are the only employees necessary to run the facility.

Now look! You defied that wind and nailed your career drive. The ball is within two feet of the pin. Now drop that birdie putt.

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