

AMERICAN AND OLD COUNTRY COURSE Design and Condition

COMPARISONS FAVOR U. S. RESULTS

By BOBBY CRUICKSHANK*

SINCE my return to Scotland for a holiday, and, incidentally, to make a try for the Open Championship, for which I never before competed, I have heard a good deal of discussion regarding the relative qualities of British and American golf links. The question, apparently, has been sharply raised by the discussions over the necessity or otherwise of the formation of a research committee into greenkeeping methods. In America, where I have been for eight years, there has been a scientific research committee long established, which has proved of inestimable value to the greenkeepers on the other side of the Atlantic. Fifteen years ago, there were scattered throughout the United States a few hundred golf courses. The word "greenkeeper" was not generally known. About seventy per cent of the courses were under the direct supervision of professionals, most of whom had received their training in the British Isles. In most cases the methods to which they had been accustomed proved very unsuccessful owing to the climate and soils of the United States being different from those of their native land. They were, to a large extent, handicapped because very little knowledge was to be obtained from the United States government agricultural experts on the best methods to pursue. Not more than ten per cent of these professionals would have been qualified as the greenkeeper of today. In those early days, although America was fortunate in being able to import good grass seed from foreign countries for use on their golf courses, they were lacking in knowledge of the proper care of turf. After the war golf in the United States began to make rapid strides, new courses multiplied so fast that it was impossible to secure enough men well versed in greenkeeping. The result was that men were drawn from farming and gardening, but it was soon observed that their methods of farming and gardening were not successful with turf on golf courses. Each in his own way en-

deavored to find other methods, and with so many working along different lines America gradually commenced to get information which tended to produce better turf. Following this came the institution of central authority and an enormous development in the skill of the golf course architects.

Change in Course Management

Since the World War golf courses have sprung up by leaps and bounds and from a few hundred fifteen years ago they now number over 4,000. Out of the vast number of men selected to take charge of these courses, America has been able to produce a large number of successful men who are today well versed in greenkeeping. In the past few years greenkeeping has been placed in the position in which it properly belongs. While fifteen years ago seventy-five per cent of the golf courses were taken care of by professionals, today over eighty per cent are in charge of greenkeepers.

It requires from three to five years to produce turf that will stand the wear and tear of the players, and to a certain extent it also requires the same amount of time for a pupil to acquire sufficient knowledge to make him rightfully known as a greenkeeper. Officials of new courses should take this into consideration. I am of the opinion that the time is not far distant when the officials of a proposed new course who decide to hire a golf architect will, at the same time, hire an experienced greenkeeper who will be under the supervision of the officials during the building of the course, and divorced entirely from the architect.

American Conditions Better

I am not, I trust, as a Scotsman returned from America, in any way seeking to stress what has been done and is being done on the other side of the Atlantic, and I am merely stating my views in reserved terms, and, I earnestly hope, in a helpful spirit, but I wish to stress that there are in America golf course architects who have the capacity to think out on the big idea and construct golf links on a bold scheme. Over

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there they may not possess the historic ground, the links around which there is the glamor and the romance of tradition, but I do not hesitate to assert—and again I wish to be emphatic that I am making these observations for any good I may do to my native land—that American inland courses are ahead of those in Great Britain in general condition. Not that the inland courses here are poor, but the vagaries of the weather militate against clubs keeping them continually up to a consistent level of perfection. The Americans counter the intense summer heat with a plentiful supply of water on both fairways and greens. Members pay heavy annual subscriptions, and accordingly American clubs have greater financial resources when it comes to club upkeep. Much money is spent in laying water pipes over an entire course, but this is the only way to defeat the strong rays of the sun and the summer heat.

Generally speaking, the soil tends to the growth of clover on many American inland fairways. A number of workers are continually employed eradicating these weeds, with the result that you find, even during the hottest summer months, fairways superior to those in Britain. So seriously does the American golfing enthusiast take his pastime that he is prepared to pay, and pay dearly, to get the best out of his course.

American Courses Tighter

Then again, the American fairways are much narrower than over here. I consider the British inland fairways are too wide! Rather that these did not give so much latitude to the erratic player but that they be lessened in breadth and improved in general condition.

There must be in inland courses on both sides of the Atlantic a more or less similarity in the condition of the bunkers. All are artificial, with probably the American sand a little heavier than that over here. British bunker trappings are, however, much too limited. All the American courses are tightly trapped, and with the narrow fairways, the slightest mistake pays the requisite penalty. Only on very few of the inland British courses is the system of bunkers adequate enough to test the abilities of first-class players. The British standard of amateur play in approaching the greens cannot equal the Americans until we get our home greens much more closely guarded.

The greens in America are smaller than on this side. They are also slower, and

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although the clover growth is occasionally a pest, it is dealt with before it effects a firm hold. The slowness of American greens, even in summer months, has allowed American players to gain supreme confidence in the art of putting. There are so many young players between the ages of 15 and 20 in the States at the present time gaining this confidence, that Americans are likely to retain this valuable asset in competitive golf. One cannot but instance the recent case of the American youth of 17 who met Johnny Farrell in a tournament after the latter won the American Open championship. Confidence in his own ability to sink his putts gave the youth a one-hole victory.

British Seaside Turf Supreme

If America leads the way in inland courses, Great Britain stands supreme in the matter of condition of her seaside links. The contour of all seaside courses is very much alike, and the condition of fairways and greens lead to players finding a greater run on their ball than on an inland course. Although the Pacific coast has some very good courses, I do not think they are nearly such exacting tests of golf as the two famous seaside courses, Lido Course and the National links, both near New York. But even the latter two have a long way to go to attain the perfection of St. Andrews, Sandwich, Prestwick and Muirfield. The fairways at the foremost of our British seaside courses are never likely to be surpassed in condition. They are consistently good, and no American golfer ever returns to the States without commenting on their excellence. There is little to comment on in regard to seaside hazards. The traps are as deadly on this side of the Atlantic as on the coasts of the western hemisphere.

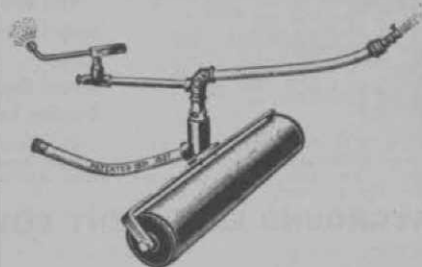
Seldom does one find the condition of even a single green on a course on the American coast reach the standard of perfection of those in Britain. There is a general absence of weeds on our seaside greens, and with water laid on, most players would receive full justice for their putting efforts. The Americans would be pleased to transplant many of our seaside greens on to the other side.

Mid-west Outdoor

Demonstration

Mid-west Greenkeepers association will stage their outdoor equipment demonstration at Sunset Valley Golf Club, Highland Park, Ill., Sept. 9.

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