

Southern California Greenkeepers Key-up Courses for Tourneys

By ARTHUR LANGTON

THE time has nearly arrived when all the big guns of the golfing world descend upon Los Angeles in a storm to acquire some of the glittering awards and incidental glory available in the Southern California mid-winter tournaments which will be well under way in the next few weeks. It might almost be said to have arrived already, inasmuch as the national women's championship tourney has just been played over the turf of the Los Angeles C. C.

Local greenkeepers may be seen in prayerful attitudes, hoping that their greens will stay good if they have been in fair condition throughout the summer, or that they will improve if they have not. Chairmen of green-committees demand that their courses be in tip-top shape at this time of the year, because they know that tourists are all potential club members. Another reason for having their courses kept especially immaculate is the desire to show off to easterners and demonstrate what westerners can do in the way of perfecting a golf course.

A greenkeeper in the southwest was being congratulated recently because his course had been awarded one of the biggest of the section's tournaments. But this greenkeeper was a thoughtful chap and was very frank with his well-wishers. "Don't congratulate me; rather, have pity on me," he said. "Think of the crowd of self-appointed critics who will be poking their noses all over my course. Think of the prize money at stake; if anything on the course goes wrong I will be blamed, even if it is not my fault. And have you forgotten that the tournament will be held in the middle of the rainy season? Think of what will happen to my tees, fairways, and greens if a rain comes and the crowd tramples on them."

Tourneys No Joy to Greenkeeper

A tournament is a serious affair to the greenkeeper, and under the stress of the occasion misfortune has a nasty habit of arriving. As one man facetiously put it, "If only man can think, how does an at-

tack of brown-patch know that there is to be an important tournament tomorrow?" However, a partial explanation may be offered in regard to this all-too-frequent phenomenon. Southern California greenkeepers in trying to make their courses look their best in preparation for a big affair, pile on the high powered chemical fertilizers in the attempt to inject some life into grasses which ought to be hibernating. As a result the artificially stimulated plants fall easy prey to any prevalent ailment, particularly brown-patch.

So much has this been true in the past that wise greenkeepers do very little more than polish the rough edges in preparing for a short period of heavy play. A typical example of what is being done in the way of preparation for tourneys is exemplified by what Robert S. Greenfield, greenkeeper at Wilshire C. C., is doing to his course to get it in shape for the Los Angeles Open, which will be played there during the coming season. For the most part he is allowing his greens to follow their natural trends and is sticking closely to his regular schedule of feeding, remembering that it is poor policy to change horses in the middle of a stream. He has spiked all his greens and brushed into them a stiff dressing of pure white beach sand imported 400 miles from Del Monte (Cal.) for the occasion.

Handling Crowds

Greenfield is busying himself chiefly with preparations for accommodating the crowds incident to the playing of the matches. He has laid down some substantial pathways where they will do the most good, and expects to build an extra bridge at a strategic point over one of the gulleys on the course. The bridges, which are already in use at Wilshire, are of a form which might be profitably copied by any course in the country. They are built on the principle of an arch and have a stout hand rail following the contour of the bridge. Their form and construction eliminate the necessity of centrally located piers, which are the ugly characteristics

of too many bridges and causeways erected on golf courses.

While on the subject of Wilshire C. C., the history of this course is of rather unusual interest. In the first place, the land that it now occupies comprises one of the most valuable areas occupied by a golf course anywhere in the world. The ground over which rolling fairways and green grass are now laid out, less than 15 years ago was occupied by a forest of oil wells. But Los Angeles, in the height of its phenomenal growth a few years ago began to move out towards the Pacific, and the oil field lay in the path of progress; therefore, the derricks were torn down, although the wells were still producing. It was here that the Wilshire Club was laid out, to be surrounded as time went on with magnificent apartment houses and the residences of wealthy Angelenos. Now, as one plays the course, he cannot help but be constantly reminded that he is surrounded with wealth, and if one looks in the proper places he will find evidences of where it is underfoot. On one or two spots on the course oil tar, in spite of all that can be done, keeps oozing up through the ground. Within a short distance of the club are the famous La Brea oil pits, wherein have been preserved the finest collection of the bones of prehistoric monsters ever discovered.

Preparing for Prize Play

But getting back to the matter of tournament preparation, in general methods throughout California are the same. About two months before the crucial date a favorable section of each green is chosen and reserved for the hole to be used on the day of the match. The grass in this reserved section is given every opportunity to develop so that there will be a healthy mat of turf to withstand the wear and tear of heavy play.

Next, the traps are paid particular attention, and all holes are filled and every suspicion of weed is eliminated. The remainder of the procedure, as has been suggested, is one of manicuring and polishing, which may be nothing more nor less than a holdover from the old days when the only claim western greenkeepers had to golfing distinction was the one expressed in the words, "Well, we keep our courses trimmed as well as do the easterners." Therefore, weeds are trimmed, hedges are kept free from incumbrances, and there must be nothing more about the course to increase the difficulties of play-

ing than is prescribed in the rules and regulations.

Handling crowds is one of those jobs outside the greenkeeper's nominal path of duty, yet it is one which is nearly always assigned to him. At Del Monte last year during the playing of the United States amateur championship a new scheme was tried out in that staves instead of ropes were used by the marshals in the attempt to keep the crowds of milling spectators off the greens and out of the line of play. The innovation was not much of a success, however, because people kept breaking through the lines unless the guards kept very close together. But in order for them to do so would have required too many men. Something which did seem of practical value was the use of a chalk "deadline" which surrounded every green. The marshals made it evident very early in the tournament that only over their dead bodies would spectators be allowed to pass beyond the chalk marks. Soon even the gallery learned that it was not supposed to pass over the designated point and rarely gave trouble on that particular account thereafter.

It always seems to be a good idea in the west for marshals to wear some form of identification, a hat, a ribbon, or a badge.

Check on Boundaries

Experience has taught greenkeepers of the Pacific southwest to check up on their boundary posts immediately before the playing of a tournament to see that they are in alignment and all accounted for. Some take the extra precaution of drawing chalk lines from post to post to indicate the exact boundary, especially where there is liable to be a dispute, as on a rolling ground where the contour is confusing. This added touch has saved many disputes and a lot of hard feeling among the contestants. It also saves the greenkeeper possible embarrassment because more than one has found himself appointed the final arbiter in the making of an important decision as to just where the boundaries do run.

The last thing done of course before the matches start is the placing of the holes. If there are any qualifying rounds, it is generally the custom in California to place the holes in an easily accessible position during the first day of play. Then as the tourney progresses holes are placed in more difficult places day by day, until on the day of the finals eighteen tests of real putting skill confront the player.