

# Twelve Month Play Only One of Sunkist District's Problems

By ARTHUR LANGTON

THE Southern California coastal plain is that section of the state bordered on the north by the Sierra Madre mountains, on the south by the Mexican border, on the west by the Pacific ocean, and on the east by a range of mountains and a desert. Los Angeles is located at the northern end of the coast line and San Diego is at the southern extremity. Peculiarly enough this strip of land, which includes about 11,000 square miles, is the only plain of any significance in the whole of California not separated from the Pacific by one or more ranges of mountains. This geographical fact makes for climatic and growing conditions such as are found nowhere else in California or the United States, and also creates some unique greenkeeping problems.

The scanty moisture blown in from the ocean during the winter and spring months is stopped from being deposited anywhere but on the plain by the mountains which guard it. Standing on any of the mile-high peaks in these ranges one can look toward the ocean and see fertile orchard lands dotted with prosperous communities. The ocean breezes bring moisture and make the climate comfortable at all times of the year.

Turning around one can see something entirely different, a vast area of dry, hot waste, barren of vegetation except such desert growths as cactus, sage, and greasewood. Snakes and lizards make their home there, but all else are kept away by the heat and the lack of moisture.

Thus it may be demonstrated forcefully that these mountains are connected vitally with conditions in Southern California. But also in another sense are they responsible for the phenomenal development of the territory: the soils, which will support almost every kind of plant life, are basically a decomposition of the granite which once made the mountains greater than they are today. This granite has been decomposed by atmospheric condi-

tions and then washed down into the valleys below by the seasonal rains.

## Course Betterment Is Theme

Because of the balmy climate, the fertile soil, and the people who came to the district to live, it was only natural that many fine golf courses should be built, which they were to an inordinate degree characteristic of the state. This was until a few years ago when the saturation point for the prevailing conditions was suddenly reached and passed, with the result that several clubs met financial disaster. Within the last few years the growth of courses has been along the line of improving or enlarging those already established rather than in the construction of new ones.

After the orgy of construction, Southern California golf officials set about the very serious work of improving their courses with the admirable aim in view of making them the finest in America. The ground was examined where turf growth was not satisfactory and faults were corrected. In many cases deep-well and pump systems were substituted for rather unreliable community water supplies, a highly necessary procedure because water officials were apt to cut the amount of water allowed to golf courses toward the end of the six-month dry season. The introduction of bents and high powered fertilizers made for better greens, but also caused a lot of grief until local greenkeepers began to learn how to obtain better results. The period of probation for bent grasses was one of wild experimentation which has not died away entirely, although investigation is following more uniform lines than it did formerly.

Gradually some truly magnificent courses in this district began to evolve which were at least on the same plane of perfection as their eastern counterparts. More and more visitors were attracted by them and all efforts were bent successfully upon improving them. Players of note from all

parts were attracted by the famous mid-winter tournaments with their offer of glittering prizes.

A close approach to golfing perfection was achieved in spite of the fact that California philanthropy was involved. Here an explanation is required: the richer people of California, the golfing class, are unusually loath to part with their money for any reason whatsoever. It is a phenomenon inexplicable but recognized by solicitors for charity organizations and community projects of any kind, and by treasurers of golf courses. It is not my purpose to attempt an explanation; suffice it to say that wages of greenkeepers in the West were, and are, less than those of Eastern greenkeepers, and they most certainly deserve an increase. Furthermore, California golfers are in the habit of demanding more. On the coastal plain area they expect 355 days of perfect playing conditions. On the other ten days they grudgingly allow rain to fall. Players in the state have become so used to their daily round of golf that on many courses greens are not taken out of play while being topdressed or repaired in any way.

### Rely on Mechanical Methods

From reports it would seem also that Eastern courses employ more men than do those of the West; that is, on a basis of men per job. Eastern courses do not have four, five, or six men devoting their time exclusively to irrigating fairways. It may be because of the paucity of employes that local clubs rely upon machinery to do much of the work. A Southern California greenkeeper visiting a large Eastern course was surprised to find that six men were employed in the topdressing of a green. He was astounded to learn that this gang was satisfied to complete two and one-half greens a day. It was the Easterners' turn to be astonished when they learned that the Westerner was accustomed to topdressing all of his 18 greens in not more than three and sometimes in two days with a gang of three men.

But this is a digression. Getting back to the courses of the Southern California coastal plain, from the players' standpoint they are of three varieties or classes. In the first class are the courses of private clubs with money enough to build and maintain them as championship layouts. On them perfection of fairway, tee, and green is taken for granted; bunkers are kept flawless; rough is carefully cultivated and trimmed; hedges have a mili-

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\* \* \*

There is one unnecessary and aggravating premium exacted on some courses that might well be dispensed with . . . a premium that often causes the entire investment in the game to be questioned.

\* \* \*

This premium is represented in golf balls . . . and there's a few million of them . . . that have to be left behind on the course because they happen to lie in a temporarily undiscovered position.

\* \* \*

They belong to these golfers just as much as their bags or their clubs . . . but the minute they remain "at large" unmarked, ownership becomes easy to transfer and the game goes on, and so do the balls.

\* \* \*

The large majority of these undiscovered (by the player) balls become part and parcel of another game that has very little in common with a sport as clean as golf . . . the gyp ball business.

\* \* \*

Thousands of dollars are represented in this continuous interchange of unmarked balls which might otherwise be expended for the purchase of new and legitimate equipment in which the pro would enjoy a larger share of profit.

\* \* \*

Contrast this picture with other courses where Fulname Marking is the rule of the club and the Fulname System of Golf Ball Control is in force . . . courses where pros are happy and players get more pleasure out of the playing and an adequate return on their investment. Think it over.

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tary appearance; and no detail is overlooked. Riviera, Wilshire, Los Angeles, Flintridge, Bel-Air are some of the clubs which come in this category.

In the second class are a large number of courses which present excellent playing conditions, but which lack the polish of the uppermost class.

Just golf courses constitute the third class, and its number is comprised of clubs gone to seed financially, some public and municipal layouts, and courses supported by small communities. While the quality of these courses is not of the finest, there is a tremendous amount of golf played upon them, and the greenkeeper of each, restricted in expenditure, has a year-long struggle to keep the balls rolling.

As has been indicated, this territory's greatest problem is to keep its more than 80 courses fit to play upon every month in the year. This necessitates the application of large amounts of water which in itself is the greatest concern of the greenkeeper. There are no natural rivers or lakes in this area from which water may be obtained; clubs must buy it from communities or get it from their own wells and pumping equipment. It is not unusual for a club to buy more than \$7,000

worth of water each year. One club received a bill for \$1,400 for water supplied in the month of July of this year. On the other hand, those clubs which want their own plant must pay for pumps, tanks, a deep well, and a monthly power bill which may amount to about \$200.

When and how much to irrigate are two knotty questions that must be solved by the Southern California greenkeeper. Courses near the mountains usually are built upon granitic soil which, though fertile, is very rocky and gravelly and will not retain surface moisture. Water can be poured on these layouts all night and half an hour after it is turned off not a sign of it will be found anywhere. Nearer the coast and in the valleys and lowlands the opposite condition is experienced. Here courses have very finely grained soil, sometimes adobe, which will not allow water to penetrate, thus necessitating the use of tiles and drains. One course has had to resort to digging open ditches through the fairways as the only means of removing surplus water. Yet if a large quantity were not applied the ground would set like concrete and the grass would wither. Some of these courses have found that lime is very beneficial because it gives the soil a more granular texture, thus allowing the water to penetrate.

When to water has caused much loss of sleep on the part of Southern California greenkeepers. Fairways, of course, are watered during the night, but greens present a different proposition. It has not yet been demonstrated to the complete satisfaction of Western greenkeepers that there is or is not a connection between the time of watering and the growth of brown-patch. Some greenkeepers water their greens only in the early morning when the ground is cool; others water during the night and the early evening. So far there has not been a comparison of methods and results to arrive at any definite conclusion, and all greens seem to be subject to the scourge in a greater or lesser degree.

A grass which constitutes a universal problem in this territory is Bermuda, popularly known as "devil grass." It is harsh and stringy and only constant surveillance will keep it out of greens. Most fairways are of this grass exclusively because it cannot be eliminated and because it provides a good mat for the ball. Its worst points are its coarseness and winter looks.

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