

All Is Not Gold That Glitters in Chicago Fee Course Field

SOME OF THE owners of established fee courses in the Chicago district give Bronx cheers to the loose statement that fee golf courses are depression-proof enterprises. They aren't in Chicago where the fee and public course situation is built up sufficiently to handle any increase in play over the next two years at least.

No other metropolitan district has Chicago's 105 total of golfing establishments where the per round payment prevails. Although the Chicago district territory takes in the area from Racine on the north to Gary on the south and the Fox river valley on the west, these 105 courses make the picking plenty tough for each individual establishment. The situation has been aggravated this year by the play some of the private courses are making for tournament business.

Five fee courses constructed during the last two years are in receiver's hands, and three formerly private clubs of recent vintage are being operated on a semi-public basis. In the latter cases the clubs discounted their financial futures too heavily with extravagant establishments. In the former instances, the owners went in on a shoestring and it broke under a hard pull. The fellows tried to finance a course on second mortgage money when the financing on second mortgages was easy. They bought at the peak of prices and forgot that it took a season for a course to get into condition for play. They also forgot that it cost some advertising and promotion money to offset the head start of the earlier operators. Probably the handicap more serious than that of lack of cash and abundant competition was the attempt to substitute hope for knowledge in the operation of the course.

Fee course owners are being put on the spot in the Chicago district by price cutting. GOLFDOM's investigation showed that the average cost per round for course maintenance alone is \$1.13 at the private clubs in the district. Although the fee course maintenance expenses are decidedly lower than those of the private courses, the other expenses make it nip and tuck for the course to make money at

\$1.50 a round, in view of play limited by competition of other available fee and public courses. Public course costs are low because no charge is made against the plant for the property or for taxes, the latter item being one that makes all Chicago district property owners groggy now.

Standards of architecture and the condition of the representative Chicago district fee courses unquestionably is highest in the country, frequently rating on a par with good private clubs. Owners are wondering how long this status can be maintained, with newcomers blindly cutting the prices. Some of the sharp slashes have been made by receivers for new fee courses that couldn't make the grade. Receivers figure the courses are no good now for truck gardening and any fee income is better than nothing. That situation is being cleared by the courses slumping so in condition that the players are no longer tempted by the bargain prices.

Some cut from prices two years ago was justified and found profitable, as unemployment and the five day week still leaves folks with money to spend for fee golf. But they watch their dimes.

In at least one instance the threat of visit from a crew of convincers was used in an effort to persuade a member of the Chicago Daily Fee Course Owners' association from putting into effect a reduced twilight rate. A mysterious telephone call to the owner went: "Say, what t'ell youse guys tryin' to do, get all de business on the sout' side? Lay offen dat cut, or else see!" Bang, went the talker's receiver. To date it has been the only bang connected with the case.

Sometimes We Think Frank May Be Too Frank

"BOTH WERE staggering slightly, as though under the influence of liquor, and Frank Osterheld, the watchman, explained later that he thought they were club members."—*New York Times*, Sept. 8, in reporting night burglary of a Long Island country club.