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Survey Shows 34 Million Rounds of Public Play in 1931

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DETAILED statistics are available on the number of golfers belonging to private clubs, the amount of golf they play and the amount of money they spend in pursuit of the game. But, figures applying to private clubs cannot be used for public course play as the golfing habits of the two groups are very different.

To investigate certain phases of the subject, GOLFDOM mailed a questionnaire in mid-March of this year to the owner or man in charge of every daily-fee and municipal golf course in the United States. Approximately 1,200 questionnaires were mailed. This report is based on returns from the mailing, representing 18.5% of the public courses in the country. The returns were split as follows:

	In U. S.	Quest. Ret'd	Per cent
Municipal 18-hole....	300	60	20
9-hole....	243	36	15
Daily-Fee 18-hole.....	332	78	23
9-hole.....	368	54	15
Total Municipal	543	96	17.5
Total Daily-Fee	700	132	19
Total Public Courses	1,243	228	18.5

Results of the survey are given in Table 1 and is, to the best of GOLFDOM'S knowledge, the first time such statistics have been made available.

Method of Charging Fees

The returns indicate that municipal courses strongly favor charging by the

Public courses in the U. S. last season were patronized by at least 1,138,000 different players, who played 34,300,000 rounds of golf. These figures and many others of equal interest, obtained from a recent GOLFDOM survey of public course play, are discussed below.

round, while daily-fee layouts prefer to collect a single fee from the player and, permit him to play as many rounds as he pleases that day. Proportions are:

	Charge by round	Charge by day
Municipal courses ...	59.0%	41.0%
Daily-fee courses	36.5%	63.5%

Permitting the golfer to pay on whichever basis he prefers, either by the round or by the day, is allowed on 16% of the fee courses, but on only 6% of the municipal links. The bother of keeping track of who has played earlier in the day and therefore is not to be charged on subsequent rounds accounts in part for this difference—daily fee courses are willing to take the trouble, since they have a real interest in increasing patronage; while municipal courses frequently have all the patronage they want.

Average Fee by Round

Municipal courses don't raise greatly the rates on week-end over rates for week-day

play. The average difference is three cents between week-day and Sunday play. This is an increase of only 5.6% at 18-hole courses and of only 5.9% at 9-hole courses. Saturday and Sunday rates average the same.

On the contrary it appears quite customary at daily-fee courses to boost rates on week-ends. In the case of 18-hole layouts it costs the player 26% more than the week-day figure to play on Saturday, and 40% more to play on Sunday. The boost at 9-hole fee courses is 10% and 16% respectively over the 9-hole municipal scale.

Charges on 18-hole fee courses are only 11% higher than at municipal courses on week-days. On Saturdays it costs 33% more to play the fee courses and on Sun-

days 47% more. Apparently the desire of fee course owners to attract play from the municipal links on week-days when their own courses are operating far below capacity accounts for the fee course charge being so close to the rate asked at municipal links. Week-ends bring peak play to fee courses; hence the bigger boost in rates on those days.

Making the same comparison on 9-hole layouts it appears that less attention is paid by fee courses to municipal competition. Fee course day rates are 47%, Saturday rates 53% and Sunday rates 57% above municipal charges.

An interesting check on the accuracy of the figures given in this study for average fees by rounds at public courses is ob-

TABLE 1.—SUMMARY OF GOLFDOM'S PUBLIC GOLF COURSE STUDY

	Munic.		Daily Fee	
	18-hole	9-hole	18-hole	9-hole
No. of returns	60	36	78	54
Charge by round	33	21	24	11
Charge by day	24	12	43	33
Charge both ways	3	3	11	10
Average fee by round—				
Week days	\$.54	\$.34	\$.60	\$.50
Saturdays .....	.57	.36	.76	.55
Sundays .....	.57	.37	.84	.58
Average fee by day—				
Week days	\$.72	\$.50	\$.93	\$.86
Saturdays .....	.78	.52	1.27	.94
Sundays .....	.90	.67	1.41	1.01
Av. no. days course open	284	236	234	197
Rds. played in '31.....	72,533	23,924	24,715	8,153
Rds. per day	256	101	106	41
No. players in '31.....	6,123	3,312	3,239	2,248
No. men players	5,078	2,659	2,777	1,763
No. women players	1,045	653	462	485
Rds. per player	12	12	7	3
Per cent selling—				
Golf balls	88%	97%	96%	100%
Golf clubs	72	86	93	76
Golf bags	70	75	87	74
Golf tees	83	94	92	98
Haberdashery	55	14	31	13
Per cent hiring pro	83%	58%	83%	61%
Av. no. lessons	401	340	323	199
Type of food service—				
Sandwiches	53%	36%	18%	39%
Lunches	7	5	26	11
Complete menu	12	5	42	15
None	18	54	14	35
Av. gross income	\$41,063	\$ 7,730	\$17,120	\$ 4,521
Year's results—				
Made money	71%	60%	42%	41%
Broke even	20	22	27	37
Took loss	9	18	31	22

Note: Above figures based on 228 of the 253 returns, 25 of the original number having been eliminated because (1) course was not in operation during 1931, or (2) figures submitted were obviously incorrect.

TABLE 2.—RATES CHARGED AT MUNICIPAL AND DAILY-FEE COURSES

	Lowest rate reported		Highest rate reported		Commonest rate reported	
	Rd.	Day	Rd.	Day	Rd.	Day
Municipal 18-hole						
Week days	\$.00	\$.00	\$1.00	\$1.00	\$.50	\$.50
Saturdays .....	.00	.00	1.00	3.00	.50	.50
Sundays .....	.00	.00	1.50	3.00	.50	1.00
Municipal 9-hole						
Week days .....	.00	.00	.50	1.25	.25	.50
Saturdays .....	.00	.00	.75	1.25	.25	.50
Sundays .....	.00	.00	.75	1.25	.50	1.00
Daily-fee 18-hole						
Week days .....	.20	.50	1.00	2.00	.50	1.00
Saturdays .....	.25	.50	1.50	3.00	.50	1.00
Sundays .....	.25	.50	2.00	3.00	.75	1.50
Daily-fee 9-hole						
Week days .....	.25	.50	1.00	2.00	.50	1.00
Saturdays .....	.25	.50	1.50	2.00	.50	1.00
Sundays .....	.25	.50	2.00	2.00	.50	1.00

tained by dividing the average gross income by the average number of rounds played in 1931. These averages were independently arrived at, inasmuch as many of the returns from which these figures were obtained gave the number of rounds without telling the gross income of the course, while many others reported on their gross income without giving GOLF-DOM figures on the number of rounds played last year.

Dividing the gross income by rounds played the following figures are obtained as the average income per round:

Municipal courses 18-hole.....	57c
Municipal courses 9-hole.....	32c
Daily-fee courses 18-hole.....	69c
Daily-fee courses 9-hole.....	55c

Comparison of these figures with the average fees by round given in the summary (Table 1) is extremely indicative of the accuracy of this present study.

Average Fee by Day

No particular comments are necessary on figures given in this section of the summary except to call attention again to the practice of municipal courses not to raise their rates greatly on week-ends over week-day levels and of fee courses to boost their scale considerably on days when heavy play can reasonably be expected.

Number of Days Course Open

Eighteen-hole municipal courses are available for play 20% longer than municipal 9-hole links and daily-fee 18-hole links and 45% longer than the 9-hole fee layouts. 9-hole municipal courses and 18-hole daily-fee courses are open approximately the

same length of time, the averages reading 236 and 234 days respectively. This is 12% over the average for the 9-hole fee courses. The shorter season for 9-hole courses is due in no small degree to the relatively large proportion of these layouts in resort communities where the active golfing season is confined almost entirely within the months when the resort facilities of the region are operating.

Rounds Played in 1931

GOLF-DOM admits considerable surprise at the size of the average on the number of rounds of golf played on the municipal courses of the country both 18-hole and 9-hole and its estimates, based on the best information then available and published in its surveys of the current and prior years, were considerably under the picture indicated by this later study. Since, as mentioned above, dividing the reported income by the reported rounds played gives believable income per round, there is every reason to believe that these averages may be accepted as very close to the truth. If such is the case, the number of rounds of public golf played during 1931 were as follows:

	Rounds
Municipal 18-hole courses..	21,759,900
Municipal 9-hole courses..	5,813,500
Daily-fee 18-hole courses....	8,205,400
Daily-fee 9-hole courses....	3,000,300

After dividing by two the figures given above for 9-hole courses (to adjust the totals to represent 18-hole rounds) the number of 18-hole rounds in 1931 for municipal courses was 24,666,500 and for fee courses 9,705,500—a grand total of 34,372,000 rounds

of golf over the public golf courses of the country last season.

Rounds per Day

The greater number of rounds per day reported by the 18-hole courses both municipal and fee as compared with their 9-hole brothers is apparently due to the better quality of golf offered by the larger courses. According to GOLFDOM's 1931-32 Survey, average course maintenance cost on 18-hole courses is in the neighborhood of \$15,700 as compared with \$2,800 in the case of 9-hole courses. These averages include the private clubs in the country and while the spread between maintenance figures on 9 and 18-hole public courses is probably not as great as the national average just given, which includes private clubs, there is undoubtedly at least three times as much money spent on maintenance of 18-hole public courses as is spent on 9-hole public courses. This better "manicuring" of the full length links is probably the major factor in accounting for over two and a half times as many rounds on 18-hole municipal courses as on the 9-hole layouts and over five times as many rounds on the 18-hole fee courses as on the 9-hole pay-play layouts.

Another factor affecting the comparative volume of play on 18 and 9-hole courses is geographical. Nearly all 18-hole layouts are in or near large cities with a denser golfing population, while 9-hole establishments are much more liable to be found in the smaller towns.

Number of Players

Golfers rarely confine their annual play to one golf course. This is particularly true of the public links player, who does not have the financial interest and ties of friendship to attract him to a single course, as the private club golfer does to his own course. Consequently, multiplying the average number of players as reported in this research for the various types of public

course by the number of such courses in the U. S. will give a figure too large to represent the total of public course players. However it will form a foundation upon which to estimate the size of this army. The figures are given in Table 3.

In the total of 4,544,328 there is of course much duplication. There is no information available on the extent of this, but if the average public course golfer plays four different courses a season, this would give a total of 1,138,000 public course players in the U. S. If three courses per golfer appeals to the reader as a fairer figure, the number of public course golfers is in the neighborhood of 1,515,000. The actual number probably lies somewhere between the two totals.

Per Cent Hiring Pro

It is GOLFDOM's opinion that the percentages of courses hiring professionals as given in the summary is too high. It is quite probable that a number of these public courses have awarded the concession to sell golf supplies to an individual and have called him a "pro" when filling in GOLFDOM's questionnaire. Many of these men would hardly rate the designation of golf professional under a strict definition of the title and it is GOLFDOM's opinion that the percentages as given are at least twice too high.

Another evidence that many of these men should not be considered professionals was found in the considerable number of returns whereon it was indicated that the course "had a pro" but he "gave no lessons."

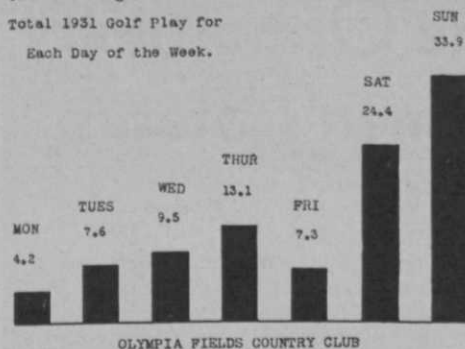
Type of Food Service

It is interesting to note that 82% of the 18-hole municipal courses provide food facilities of one type or another, while only 46% of the 9-hole municipal courses do so. Similarly, for daily-fee courses, 86% of the 18-hole layouts are prepared to take care

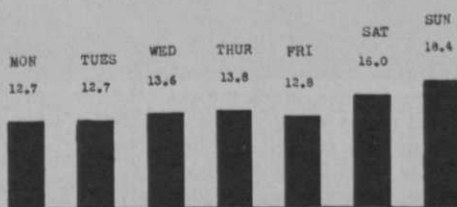
TABLE 3—NUMBER OF PUBLIC COURSE PLAYERS
(No Allowance for Duplication)

	No. courses in U. S.	Average No. men	Total No. of men	Average No. women	Total No. of women	Total No. players
Munic. 18-hole	300	5,078	1,523,400	1,045	313,500	1,836,900
9-hole	243	2,659	646,137	653	158,679	804,816
Total Munic. courses.....	543	.....	2,169,537	.....	472,179	2,641,716
Fee 18-hole	332	2,777	921,964	462	153,384	1,075,348
9-hole	368	1,763	648,784	485	178,480	827,264
Total fee courses.....	700	.....	1,570,748	.....	331,864	1,902,612
Total both	1,243	.....	3,740,285	.....	804,043	4,544,328

Chart Showing Percent of
Total 1931 Golf Play for
Each Day of the Week.



OLYMPIA FIELDS COUNTRY CLUB



JACKSON PARK MUNICIPAL COURSE

of the golfers' appetites, while provision is made at 65% of the 9-hole courses.

In comparing 18-hole municipal facilities with 18-hole daily-fee facilities, notice that the simplest type of food service—sandwiches, pie and coffee—is by far the more popular at the 18-hole municipals, while a complete restaurant menu is far in the lead at 18-hole fee establishments. This is indicative of the effort made by the fee course owners to give patrons whenever possible the same conveniences and comforts a private club would offer.

Average Gross Income

The \$41,000 average income of municipal 18-hole courses is approximately two and a half times the average income of 18-hole daily-fee courses. This would seem somewhat out of line were it not for the fact that municipal layouts through the season are used from early morning until late at night every day in the week while the volume of play at daily-fee courses is more irregular.

Municipal courses operate near capacity seven days a week; while very few fee courses are able to even approach capacity except on week-ends and holidays. The

chart here comparing the average daily play at Olympia Fields C. C. in Chicago (a private club) with the average daily play at the Jackson Park (Chicago) municipal course will illustrate graphically the difference in the amount of play between a municipal course and a private course. The profile for a typical 18-hole daily-fee course would be very similar to the Olympia Fields profile.

Year's Results

Private golf clubs may well envy the record of municipal golf courses. This study discloses that 91% of the 18-hole courses and 82% of the 9-hole courses operate without a loss. Similar figures for the daily fee courses, of 69% of 18-hole courses and 78% for 9-hole courses, also average better than the private clubs, of which it is generally estimated, not over 50% break even or show a profit.

Combining the municipal and daily fee courses of the country 82% operated at a profit or broke even during 1931.

Utah Club's Members Can Pay Dues by Labor on Course

DIRECTORS of the Duchesne (Utah) C. C. are combating membership losses this season by permitting any member who is so inclined to work out his dues by laboring on the course. This offer is also extended to golfers who otherwise could not afford to belong to the club.

The policy is a good one for small clubs where the total annual fees are under \$15. Figuring this donated labor to be worth \$1.00 an hour this would mean 15 hours of maintenance work, about all any club might reasonably expect from a prospective member, irrespective of his finances.

The Duchesne club also opened its course to non-members without charge until May 1. Beginners were loaned sets of clubs and were piloted around the course by members. This, too, was a good promotion stunt.

CHICK PORTER, Cincinnati sports writer, comments on Queen City golf club situation: "Assessments which have been levied by local clubs have not been made to meet deficits suffered in 1931 or 1932, but were result of small deficits during the past 6 or 7 years and the money raised merely put the clubs in better financial condition than at any previous time."