

SUCCESS FROM SCRATCH

Back when the depression first hit, Val M. Brooks of Okoboji, Ia., had committed himself to build a golf course. This is the story of how he fought all obstacles to bring into operating perfection one of the outstanding new layouts of the middle-west

ONE of the outstanding jobs of golf business promotion that is now bringing back big returns to those who have put time, money, and plenty of hard work into building up a golf club, is the case of the Brooks Country Club at Okoboji, Iowa. Val M. Brooks, manager, and co-owner with H. A. Ross of Des Moines, has built this semi-private course, located in the heart of the section's lake district, from a club that got off to a slow, stumbling start to one of the finest 18-hole layouts in the state. Brooks also hopped onto the ideas of Golf Promotion early enough so that he is now realizing some of the hoped-for benefits of the PROMotion plan of introducing the game to a greater number of people.

Garfield Harker, Brooks' pro, began giving free lessons in the local high schools about four years ago, and this, along with giving free lessons to caddies and members on certain nights, has developed golf enthusiasm to the point where today there's plenty of black ink on the right side of Brooks' ledger and a club roster of 250. Numerous bulletins and direct mailings to the membership to keep all informed on doings about the club or to announce some future event have proved very effective in maintaining interest throughout the season and in bringing the club to the attention of pos-

sible new members. Members are also informed whenever there is a special showing of golf equipment in the club's pro-shop.

GOLFDOM presents the following account of the Brooks Country Club, its method of doing business and successful promotion of the game, in Brooks' own words:

It was back in 1930 that we recognized the golf possibilities in a certain 150 acres of farmland, a cornfield at the time, which all agreed would make an ideal location for a golf course; ideal because it lay in the very heart of Iowa's lake region. After checking municipal golf courses in Des Moines, Sioux City and Omaha we were convinced that the game of golf would be a sound investment; it seemed to be a growing game and we felt golf was unequalled in health and recreational value. We had owners of municipal courses pay us a visit to check the location and to get their ideas on what volume of business they thought we might realize after we had really developed a championship golf course. They all seemed sold on



The practice green is located directly in front of the clubhouse.

the possibilities of our lake region setup.

The next step was to engage the services of a well-known golf architect, Warren Dickenson of Des Moines, Iowa, to check the land to see if it would be suitable for a golf course. After spending a few days making a complete survey, he informed us that the contour of this land was more suitable for a golf course than any of the 83 golf courses he had designed in five Midwestern states. We then exercised our option and purchased the land. About 6 weeks after purchasing the property the Depression really hit with a bang and the bottom seemed to drop out of everything.

Went Ahead Anyway

We'd already made an announcement on the building of a championship 18-hole golf course, so decided to go ahead with the project even though the future was not very bright. We engaged the services of men competent in their line to outline our needs in the way of water systems, equipment, etc. We tried to profit by mistakes of other courses and did not attempt to take any short cuts in the way of developing the course. We were convinced it would be false economy to try to save too much here and there as this would un-

Industrial Commission of Wisconsin, in its bulletin on Child Labor Law, says, concerning "minor golf caddies":

(1) Any minor on a golf course for the purpose of caddying for or while caddying for a person permitted to play golf on such course shall be deemed an employe of the golf club or other person, partnership, association or corporation, including the state and any municipal corporation or other political subdivision thereof, operating such golf course.

(2) The commission shall have power, jurisdiction and authority to investigate, determine and fix by general or special order reasonable regulations relative to the employment of boys under eighteen years of age as caddies on golf courses.

doubtedly lead to more difficult problems later on.

We did not put all our greens into bent immediately; we put all eighteen into bluegrass, and then started to transform them into bent greens the first fall that we were open. We have tried to build our greens properly with good drainage and proper foundations. With our limited budget, we were unable to convert more than two greens a year into bent; but all were made the finest possible and we should have fine greens for years to come. The course has now developed into wonderful turf and we feel it really has possibilities of becoming recognized as a truly championship course.

The main thought in the whole program has been to create a golf course that would bring the greatest amount of enjoyment to all classes of golfers. We feel that 90% of all golfers today do not shoot under 90 consistently. That 90%, naturally, represents 90% of our revenue. We have not tried to make this course "too tough" or to make a course with hazards that would more or less create many a lost ball trap. We have tried to place our hazards in places where they are more of a hazard to the long shooter than for the average golfer. We were favored with the advantage of having land that was ideal for a golf course and we have simply tried to bring out the best possibilities of this property.

Course Designed to Give Pleasure

Our greens have been designed to fit each hole of a course measuring 6,410 yards, representing complete outside and inside nines. There are no two holes alike either as to length or design, yet all are good golf holes. We have but two blind holes for the average golfer, and the two greens open up easily for a long hitter who can put two good wood shots together. Our players always have a nice target to shoot at and are never penalized for having a bad or unplayable lie after having executed good wood shots. There is not a steep hill on our course, yet it is not flat land. It is mostly land with nice gentle rolls. As stated before, what we have done has been with the thought of adding to the enjoyment of the game of golf for the average golfer.

We opened our course on July 1, 1932. In the spring of 1933 we visited sixteen surrounding towns on a sort of good-will program. We issued guest tickets in these communities which entitled bearers to one day's free play during that season. This



Aerial view of the Brooks CC layout. The course is nicely rolling, not nearly as flat as it appears here.

enabled us to become acquainted with the golfers in the surrounding country and to try to get their good-will. We did not follow this up with any kind of sales program but tried to make them feel that they were most welcome to play our course at all times. We did the same thing the following two seasons and found that a few of these tickets were being turned in occasionally. Golf was absolutely a dead issue in practically all of these towns. We did not have any local members until 1934 when a few of the regular players took out memberships. Today we have about 250 members from 16 surrounding towns, the farthest town being 42 miles distant from our golf course.

Free Lessons

Build for Future

We had our pro, Garfield Harker, give free lessons in the local high schools about four years ago. This year we gave free lessons to club members four nights a week during the whole month of May. We are now giving free golf lessons to over 40 caddies, who may someday be part of our membership. We are working on the theory that if we can improve the games of our members, it means that they will derive more enjoyment out of their golf; and will naturally be more pepped-up over the game, as well as more enthusiastic over our particular course. We find that this enthusiasm is very contagious and in many cases means new members for us.

It has been our experience that there is a natural barrier to the game of golf for a lot of people because they have not been approached or welcomed to learn about it. We have done everything we can to break down that barrier and to sell them on the idea that, even though they may be past middle-age, they will derive much enjoyment out of the game; and that we will gladly teach them how to play and do everything we can to improve their game. It has been a pleasant surprise to us to find that there were so many middle-aged people interested in learning to play. We find that they get equally as much enjoyment out of golf as anyone possibly could.

The summer players are mostly city people who have, of course, learned to play before coming up to our lake region. We try to keep the course in the best condition possible, and to give them a course that they can enjoy to the utmost. Our summer season is confined to a very short but active season of about ten weeks. The continued building up of local membership will enable us to keep the course in championship form and also to obtain enough revenue to take care of much of our overhead. There is no clash whatsoever between our summer and local players.

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Officials of the Winchester (Ky.) CC are on the warpath. It seems some unfeeling trespassers have been driving automobiles over the club's fairways at night, with considerable damage to the turf.

Chicago Park District awarded a contract recently to the A. L. Buckland Co. to fish all the lost balls from water holes on park courses. Company guarantees the Park District 1,000 balls a week for use at its practice driving course. The company gets to keep any balls it recovers over the first 1,000.

Summer players play almost entirely between the hours of 8:30 a. m. and 5 o'clock in the afternoon; while local players play either early in the morning or in the latter part of the afternoon and on Sundays. Our local membership has lengthened the season from ten weeks, so to speak, to a five month season.

This year we have put into operation a program we think is very sound as regards the Brooks' course. It is a long range setup that we feel will supply us with future members. We are keeping the clubhouse open until midnight every night during the summer season, so that our members can come and bring their guests and friends, play cards on the screened porches and dance in the lounge.

Clubhouse Is Adequate

Our new modern designed clubhouse, while not elaborate, is quite adequate to meet all members' needs. A large dining room is kept open constantly and our meal service is considered excellent. An open stone fireplace in the main lobby is surrounded by lounge chairs for the comfort of guests. Balls, clubs, haberdashery and other golfing equipment are sold from space just to the right of the lobby. The Brooks CC also boasts one of the finest practice putting greens in the district.

We have a badminton court on the clubhouse lawn which is lighted at night, as well as the 9-hole practice green which is also flooded with lights for night use. There is no charge, of course, for these facilities. We are installing a night driving range on our golf course, are using the best of equipment, and we anticipate good results in a financial way. We also look upon it as being very helpful in creating future golfers for our course. In addition a tennis court that will be lighted at night is being constructed. There will, of course, be a charge on the night driving range and on the tennis court.

We are initiating a "guest star" program this year that we think will have good results. We will have Horton Smith and Jimmy Thomson through the courtesy

of A. G. Spalding Co., and as our guests for a few days, if not a week's time, Patty Berg of Minneapolis and Johnny Goodman of Omaha. We also are trying to obtain at least two nationally-known big time pros for one week each. An exhibition by Walter Hagen and Joe Kirkwood, as well as having Marian Miley of Lexington, Ky., for a week's time are other possibilities. There will be no gallery charge for any of these exhibitions.

It is our thought that, after giving members one month's free instruction, if we are able to bring in guest stars so they can see these stars in action, it will prove to them that the instruction they have been given during the month of May has been correct. By having a chance to see all of these stars play, it will not only increase our members' interest in golf, but will also improve their games, which as stated before, will result in added golf enjoyment."

Green Section Bulletin—Spring issue of the USGA Green Section "Bulletin" is in new form, an attractive 12-page booklet in which some of the subjects treated are: Service of the Green Section, Effect of Watering on Brown-patch, Spread of the Japanese Beetle, Use of Arsenate of Lead, and numerous practical Questions and Answers.

Dr. John Monteith, jr., technical head of the Green Section, did his customary competent job in compiling the publication. Green Section service continues to increase in value and represents to most clubs a decided profit on the \$30 annual investment in USGA membership.

Details regarding receipt of the Green Section Bulletin may be secured from Frank M. Hardt, chairman, USGA Green Section, 135 S. Broad st., Philadelphia.

Booklet Tells British Work—British Board of Greenkeeping Research has issued a 12-page booklet on its "establishment, aims and achievements," to be circulated among golf club members. The book presents convincing evidence of the value of the Board's services. Fourteen items of the Board's achievements are detailed. In the brief history given early in the booklet, credit is given to American pioneering in turf culture research.

The British Board held its annual greenkeepers' conference and equipment demonstration at St. Ives Research station, June 16.