

# College Golf Indoors

By Mel Larson



Shown (left) using the rubber-matted, double backdrop nets of the Gopher gym, are Roy Spillman, state high school golf titleholder in 1938, and Virginia Riley, a promising freshman coed from St. Cloud, Minnesota. Neil Croonquist (right), Minnesota No. 1 varsity man for the past two years and student president of the National Collegiate Golf Assn., sharpens his putting on the smooth putting carpets in the Minnesota golf gym.

Watching him is Stan Larson, popular young pro at the Minnesota course.

SIX hundred golfers enjoying their golf in the middle of 20 below weather—that's what's happening at the University of Minnesota where an indoor golf school is now going strong in its sixth year. Up in Minneapolis where wind and cold hardly make the winters conducive to golf or even talk of golf, the Gopher athletic department has developed an indoor driving and putting gym second to no college in the Midwest.

The germ behind the gym hatched 6 years ago when Golf Coach W. R. Smith, who also doubles as Intramural Director, got the idea. He bought one net, got another from the girls' gym, and from that little start built it up until it now has five nets plus a 6-hole putting course.

The room used, which is 120' x 30', is located under the concrete bowl that holds as many as 63,000 football fans on Saturday afternoons during the football season. Because it is enclosed, with only small windows, it serves all the better the "winter golf bugs," for they now

can hit the balls as hard as they want without fear of disturbing anyone.

Setting up the gym was not costly. There are 5 nets, all with double backstops (an added canvas sheet behind the regular drop). Overhead is a meshed net to protect the ceiling windows from shots wrongly hit. Placing the nets adjacent to each other at the two ends of the gym saved an extra bit of in-between canvas.

For the first year or two Smith used a cocoa mat as "turf," much the same as doormats in some sections of the country. These, however, proved unsatisfactory due to the heavy use, and so last year mats made of rubber such as used in car tires, were purchased. Now even after the daily beating they took last year, plus the first poundings of 1940, they're still in good shape and usable for an indefinite period.

As on the cocoa mats, tees can be placed in the new mats when the students want to practice drives. But now there are no loose pieces of string and rope messing



While on a trip to Mexico during early January, L. B. Icelly, president, Wilson Sporting Goods Co., got down to Acapulco, a tropical Pacific coast harbor famous for its fishing and scenery. The result of that jaunt to Acapulco is shown here—the largest hammer-head shark ever caught in Pacific waters. The huge fish was caught by a fishing party which included Icelly, Al Espinosa and his wife, and Harry Wright, president of the Mexico City CC and of the Mexico Golf Assn.

up the nets. The main disadvantage comes when hitting iron shots; the stiff rubber forms a fairly hard "turf" on which to hit through, so a tendency to hit iron shots clean might develop. But as most students practice only for a half hour or so, the wrists generally can stand it very well.

Another advantage, and probably the biggest one, is the fact that the foundation on which the hitter stands is the same as the one from which the shot is hit. With the old mats a rubber-topped board was used to put the golfer even with the mat, and only too often the board or the mat would slide away at impact. This naturally hindered improvement in foot-work.

The 6-hole putting course is the same thing that you could have in your own living room. The carpets vary in length from 15 to 45 feet, rubber holes are placed at or near the ends, with wood supports to keep the ball from straying too far. An inch-thick padding, stiff, firm, and made of a brown, matted cloth fur-

nishes a good base without making the carpet a mass of footprints. Green carpet, about one-half inch thick, is placed over this brown base.

In addition to the nets and carpets, the gym, under the active supervision of Pro Stan Larson, instructor at the University's 18-hole course, seeks to develop the sort of "homey" atmosphere you like to find around any golf course. Pictures of leading pros and amateurs dot the walls, instruction charts are placed at convenient spots, and all golf magazines are put within easy reach. So when on a Saturday afternoon you have to wait an hour or so for a net the time can be profitably spent.

Gopher school authorities are pleased with the way the gym is going. They recognize the big carryover value of the sport, and are seeking to interest more and more students in the game. Here's partly what they do:

#### Three Sessions Weekly

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10:30 a. m. until 12:30 p. m. the gym is used by the Sports Orientation classes, each one getting some personal instruction from Larson. On Tuesdays and Thursdays there is a class for coeds conducted on the same order. There are not as many as the 200 in the men's class, but the women's group is bigger than last year.

Then there is the golf class offered in the Extension school. It meets nights, and after a few preliminary lectures by Smith, each enrollee spends 6 half-hour periods in the nets, and under the direct supervision of one of the Twin City's leading professionals. When the students move outside, the instruction continues, but then instruction is given more in groups, and by exhibitions.

In addition to these formal classes, any student can stop up while the gym is open (daily from 10:30 to 5:30) and hit balls for a dime a half hour. Clubs, balls and tees are furnished, and if the book-wear student wants help, Larson will give it to him.

An innovation this year is the season rate. For \$1.00 students can play from the time the gym opened, January 4, until the snow is gone and the golf course opens. This has boomed the number using the gym, with more money taken in so far this year than almost all of last year.

Faculty members pay the 10 cent rate

for half hours, but shell out \$2.00 for the season privilege. Alumni get the same rate as the faculty, but pay 20 cents per half hour when not on the season rate.

Along with serving as a center for the average golfer to straighten out a few kinks, the gym is the molding place of the varsity golf team. This year Coach Smith has a squad of 25 linksmen on his potential team, and they practice at least twice a week. As the team never goes South for spring practice, the indoor drills are doubly important, especially in the early matches in mid-April.

Pleased, too, are the athletic bosses over the increase in the number of coeds taking advantage of the gym's facilities. Egged on by the presence of Patty Berg, 1938 National Women's titleholder, on the campus, more and more girls have been using the nets. Some are just starting; others, like Margaret Barry of St. Paul, have made their mark in Midwest circles and look likely to challenge Patty and Bea Barrett in their roles as rulers of Minnesota women's golf.

So golf on the Gopher campus is a popular "winter" sport, and the golf gym is the center of all of that popularity. If it's 20 above or 20 below, nets are usually at a premium, with the first thaw the sign for a general converging on the place.

## Let Mailman Help Hike Shop Sales Volume

**B**ILL MACKENZIE, pro at the Dallas (Tex.) CC, got busy last year and by two excellently timed, cleverly worded mailing pieces to his members, helped himself to a great big chunk of extra business—and profits.

Early last season Bill mailed a card to the membership telling that beginning April 18, two special classes of golf instruction for children would be held under his personal supervision. The classes were for boys and girls under 16, and the course was to consist of 6 class lessons of one hour each. He opened with 37 boys and 15 girls. He ended up his lessons July 15th with a class of 57 boys and 35 girls. Bill devoted 24 hours of his time to developing new golfers gratis, but much to his agree-

able surprise, he was repaid two-fold by purchases of new equipment by these kids who otherwise would have had no inclination to buy.

MacKenzie's second bid for business, bringing even greater returns than the first, came at a time of year when his members weren't much in the habit of buying new equipment. Late in November Bill got out a mailing piece to his members, asking if he could not help them with their Christmas gift problem. He pointed out that as the golf professional of their club, he had the opportunity and privilege of being personally acquainted with the needs in golfing equipment of most of the members—and that any help or information he could give them was their's for the asking. The piece was gotten out on attractive stock, was printed both sides, and included prices on all equipment in the shop. The result: the folder sold \$1,200 worth of merchandise, and gave Bill some extra dough in the pocket when ordinarily sales would be moving slow.

## Pros to Have Short Course at U. of Minnesota

**O**NE of the first in what is expected to be a series of pro educational clinics about the country, will be held at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, April 8-9. The clinic is under the sponsorship of the Minnesota PGA section, who have been assured by university officials, notably Frank McCormick, athletic director, of the cooperation and of the full use of the athletic department facilities.

Two full days of lectures and demonstrations on pro duties will feature pro merchandising, caddie training, how to evolve the most efficient club handicapping system, instruction methods, tournament procedure, and getting the most out of the physical makeup of the pupil; i. e., how to fit instruction to a particular pupil's needs. Instruction will also be given in golf architecture, greenkeeping methods, and rules interpretation.

The educational committee for the clinic is composed of Len Mattson, chairman, Jock Hendry, Herb Snow, Lester Bolstad, and Wally Mund. At the banquet which will conclude the session, Frank McCormick will be the principal speaker.