

Old Oakland Revitalized by General Management

Like so many golfing organizations founded before the turn of the century staid Oakland GC, located a brassie shot from Long Island Sound and 10 miles east of the majestic Empire State Building, discovered that pursuing traditional and conventional ideas was a sad mistake.

It was back in 1942 when Oakland made the discovery and as a result the club today is probably unique in American bunkerland. Getting back to early 1942, when the club was approaching its Golden Anniversary the members elected one of New York's business leaders, Thomas W. MacLeod, VP of Stern's, as president with the understanding that the antiquated method of doing things around the club would give way to more modern procedure.

Given complete authority, the progressive MacLeod immediately decided that Oakland, in order to be streamlined and transformed into a magnificent golf club, would have to have a general manager. The man best qualified for the post, in the

By John M. Brennan

opinion of the department store executive, was Martin Lyons, a man with an extensive and excellent background in the business, having served at a number of top-flight clubs in the Metropolitan area.

When Lyons moved in at Oakland in May of 1942 the club was in sound financial condition (the club has never had a mortgage and had at that time a sinking fund of \$100,000) but almost every other factor was in urgent need of rehabilitation to provide the facilities members had a right to expect.

The course was in only fair shape. The club had had a half dozen managers within a few years. The bookkeeping was done at the treasurer's office in Pine street, Manhattan, and most of the orders were given by remote control from Wall street. The clubhouse was in mediocre condition, especially the kitchen which was operating with obsolete equipment.



Oakland GC clubhouse, showing extensive putting green, one of the largest in the east. Near men is bronze statue of Walter J. Travis on pedestal.



Oakland's development depicted in photos on lounge wall. Original contract to build clubhouse in 1896 and photo of first clubhouse and original stock certificate are in middle group. At lower left are photos reminding members of war days when horse-drawn wagons were used to convey members. Other shots are clubhouse destroyed by fire and interior shots.

When Lyons took over with instructions to refurbish and revamp "everything" he did not make the mistake of trying to rush things. Marty, when he assumed the job at Oakland felt that he would have things in ship shape by the time the Golden Anniversary was reached in 1946, but, of course, the war necessarily changed his plans.

Modernizes the Plant

However, a miracle has been performed at Oakland by the dynamic Lyons, who, in his capacity as general manager, has not only modernized the old clubhouse and course for operating efficiency but has given them a facelifting as well.

An inspection of the course, now one of the finest in the east, shows Oakland's complete new watering system. In giving his attention to the course, Lyons instituted many improvements including double tees, planting more trees and shrubs around the 130-acre tract, improving and enlarging the greens and developing splendid fairways.

For years, until Lyons came to Oakland, the pro shop was located near the 10th tee, but Marty shifted the pro shop, presided over by Elec Ednie, to new quarters constructed in the west section of the clubhouse, near the first tee.

The old pro shop was streamlined and transformed into a combination refreshment stand for the players reaching the back nine and as a caddie shelter.

The quaint lounge room, exquisitely decorated and furnished, was given greater usefulness when Marty removed a small door and gave the room more sweep with an attractive archway. New iron stairways were built up to the ladies' quarters. All these improvements were in keeping with the English motif.

When Lyons took over Oakland had no bar. He has constructed a solid mahogany bar and built a cocktail lounge in part of the lockerroom, one of the best equipped in the east.

The office, which used to be a cubby hole with room for a couple of employees and a telephone, is now modernized with private quarters for Marty and his able assistant, Joe Burke, a war hero. In order to build the manager's office it was necessary to break through a 36-inch wall.

Lyons figuratively tossed a bomb into the kitchen. It is now completely done over with the latest in refrigeration, ranges and other equipment. In addition, the clubhouse has been completely redecorated, with the inside in brighter pastels.

Oakland, which always had a roster that looks like a section from Who's Who of America, currently has no mortgage, continues to have a sinking fund of more than \$100,000 and has an imposing waiting list. The limit on members is 275 and with 50 women players.

Oakland has never operated in red ink despite the fact that the place was allowed to run down during the depression years for lack of constructive and aggressive management.

Oakland used to bar women, both from its clubhouse and course, but when some of the old members passed on to greener fairways and a modern crop of members assumed control the distaff side began digging divots on the hallowed soil on which Walter J. Travis, immortal of the early years of golf, learned to play the game while living at the old Niantic club in nearby Flushing. The women have more than a toehold on things at Oakland during these days thanks to some encouragement from Lyons and others at the helm. A dozen social parties a season are held at the clubhouse where such events used to be banned.

Says General Management Is Best

We met MacLeod the other day at Oakland and he was loud in his praise of Lyons' accomplishments. "This general manager idea is the salvation for many golf clubs," MacLeod said. "The setup of having manager, course superintendent and professional each conducting and reporting uncoordinated activities to committee heads, then to club directors is a waste of effort, a cause of unnecessary misunderstanding and the cause of a time lag that is extravagant and serious in operation of a short-season business. Golf clubs should be operated along the lines of a big department store, or any other big business, with one man directing and responsible for the whole operation. We, at Oakland, have found the general management

plan is logical and works out for the best interests of the club."

Lyons got his start in golf when William K. Vanderbilt, then the power at Wheatley Hills GC, named him manager of the East Williston spot in 1919 when only 26 years of age. He is also convinced that the general manager idea is sound and practical.

"The only trouble with the scheme, though, is that some men, when given more or less dictatorial power over the whole golf club might become too hard on the help and develop a large cranium that might become offensive to members," declared Lyons in summing up the golfing picture. "But, as we have found out here at Oakland, the general manager idea has worked out well. A man in occupying such a position must be human, especially in the treatment of his help. He must use logic, at all times work for the best interests of the club and be quick to see that his associates in serving the members are satisfactorily rewarded for their able work. He's got to develop a great team spirit in his aides."

Lyons believes that no club should have part-time employees working on golf courses. "A man can't work conscientiously and effectively when he knows that as soon as cold weather sets in he will be told that he is through until the following spring," observed Lyons. "At Oakland, we have our greens force on an all-year-around basis. When cold weather sets in, the men turn to overhauling machinery in our heated barns, or work on refurbishing the clubhouse. As a result, we have a contented and efficient force."

Team-mates Stay With Lyons

There is no turnover of help at Oakland. When a man gets on Lyons' staff, he invariably sticks for many years. His head waiter, Gino Luon, has been with him for 22 years. The chef, Armand Mathieu, has 12 years with Marty. Joe Burke, his assistant and Vincent Carazza, assistant head waiter, are 10-year men. All of his present employees have been with him more than five years.

Lyons has made a radical improvement



Interior of Oakland barns, showing double doors to permit passage of tractors and units.

in Oakland's course equipment barns, which have wide double doors which enable tractors with their full units to enter and exit without having to take time out to remove the units. All of Oakland's tractors, trucks and other equipment are under cover, indoors, at all times when not in the field. Lyons introduced special barns for fertilizers and concrete vaults for his seed. He and course supt. Cedric Tumber claim to have the perfect golfing layout at Oakland.

Oakland was lucky in acquiring such a progressive and experienced man back in 1942. During the war, as during prohibition when he rejected any proposal to dispense illegal liquor, Lyons managed to carry through Oakland's ship without the aid of any black market meats. "We did without beef for two years and the members were apparently satisfied."

The ban on gasoline for pleasure driving hit Oakland, like most golf clubs, but the ubiquitous Lyons solved the dilemma by purchasing a pair of horses and a pair of wagons of the Gay 90's type from a Central Park stable. Members were given rides from the nearby LIRR to the club and returned to the station after their day at the club.

Opened Gedney Farms

After serving at Wheatley Hills from 1919 to 1922, Lyons was induced by magnate Howard Willets to launch the Gedney

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Extensive barns of Oakland are heated in winter and are most modern. Superintendent's house is back of tree to left. Fire hose is ready in box under tree.

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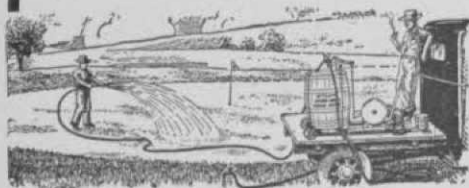
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OLD OAKLAND

(Continued from page 21)

Farms GC at White Plains and two years later he had transformed the former estate of Mrs. Park of Park & Tilford at Rye into a golfing rendezvous.

Swank Wykagyl summoned the efficient Lyons in 1925. After working at the club for a year in an advisory capacity he took over as manager to coordinate the many departments and supervised the construction of a \$70,000 swimming pool, the first built by a golf club in the Metropolitan area. During the winters of 1929 and 1930, he was associated with the Venita Hotel at Palm Beach, where most of the patrons were Westchester and Long Island residents.

He helped found the Castle Beach club at Atlantic Beach in 1934, but returned to golf at St. Albans GC in 1937. He remained at St. Albans until it was taken over by the Navy for a hospital in 1942. Then came the highly successful experiment as general manager at Oakland.

The original Oakland clubhouse, built in 1896 by John J. Barry, cost \$1,585 and was a two-story frame building measuring 18 by 36 feet. A larger clubhouse was built in 1916, but destroyed by fire in 1922. The present structure is entirely fire-proof.

Leo P. Dorsey is the present head of the club, having succeeded MacLeod two years ago. Other officers are: VP, Eugene P. Mullaney; Treas., Howard A. Pratt; Sec., John A. King and Captain William A. Scully. Walter J. Travis was the first captain at Oakland.

Since Lyons, MacLeod and Dorsey have been running things at Oakland, no outside tournaments have been permitted. "No

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member of Oakland shall ever be embarrassed at the first tee by having to wait for some outsiders to engage in a tournament," pointed out Lyons. "Our club is essentially for members—and for them only."

Some nationally known figures who have been members at Oakland include Alfred E. Smith, Nathan L. Miller, Morgan J. O'Brien, Bishop Thomas Molloy of Brooklyn Diocese, John Proctor Clark, Carrington G. Arnold, Jules S. Bache, George H. Baker, Bernard M. Baruch, George Gordon Battle, Alfred S. Bourne, Nicholas Murray Butler, Daniel F. Cohalan, J. Vipond Davies, Charles G. Meyer, James D. Pell, William B. Parsons, George J. Ryan, Charles M. Schwab, J. P. Morgan, Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., Homer F. Swift, Henry A. Wilmersding, Charles T. Wilson and William H. Woodin.



CLUB CUTS HANDICAP

Jack Frost of Wilson's examines clubs specially designed by pro Mel Hemphill, Forest Lake CC, Columbia, S.C., for Tommy Howell, U. of S.C. law student. Young Howell, who lost part of his right arm in an automobile accident, was playing pretty fair golf. Mel figured out a brace to be strapped to Tommy's right shoulder and a universal joint which simulates wrist action. He got Supt. Mike Behrendt and Asst. Supt. Joe Wolfe of Wilson's to make clubs of special weight, balance, and design for use with the mechanical arm. Howell's now shooting consistently in the high 70s.

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