



Tee line of the new Golf Driving Range at the Univ. of Minnesota adjoining the university golf course which, according to Les Bolstad, Golf Coach, provides the ideal facility for class and group instruction. A marked increase is reported in the number of students playing golf who have gotten their start on the practice tee.

The University of Minnesota Opens A Driving Range

By OTIS DYPWICK

When Frank G. McCormick retires on June 30 from his duties as director of the department of physical education and athletics at the University of Minnesota he will leave as a monument to his regime the finest athletic plant possessed by any university or college in the world.

One of the most recent additions to these tremendous facilities to be conceived and constructed under McCormick's direction is a golf driving range. It adjoins the beautiful University of Minnesota 18 hole golf course just north of the cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis and about two miles from the main campus in Minneapolis.

In getting the true picture of the entire project—planning, construction, purposes, operation, upkeep, management, finances, problems, advantages, and significance to the student body and teaching progress—it is necessary to present the views, reactions, and comments of the four men most directly involved with the driving range.

They are Frank McCormick; Dave MacMillan, manager; Les Bolstad, golf professional, coach, and class instructor; and Marshall Ryman, business manager of athletics.

I'd like to be able to inject at this early point assurance that the driving range venture has been nothing but smooth sailing—a joy and pleasure to all involved. But this wouldn't be a true picture.

Let me hasten to assure you, however, that as the first full season of operation approaches, the sour notes of frustration and error are becoming more and more a memory.

The presence of this worthy and popular facility can be credited to Frank McCormick's conviction that an educational institution owes EACH STUDENT on its rolls recreational opportunities within his or her field of interests and physical and time limitations.

In McCormick's own words: "Our pri-

major purpose is to make available to a maximum number of students the chance to acquire skills which will open up recreational opportunities to be enjoyed far beyond the time of graduation from college."

Golf Students Increase

Then, more specifically, he points out: "Lack of or limitations in the fundamental skills of golf have kept thousands of people from participating in this sport beyond a certain age, for in the absence of a reasonable degree of skill, their self-consciousness makes them reticent and destroys their desire or motivation. We already see a marked increase in the number of students playing golf, particularly the girls who have gotten their start on the practice tee."

In conclusion, McCormick adds: "This driving tee and range is all part of an integrated plan to encourage participation by students and alumni in the game of golf."

Les Bolstad whose testimony is next to be considered smiles broadly and glows with enthusiasm at mention of the golf driving range.

"Here is the perfect answer to instruction for large groups and classes," says Les. "Now that we have adequate space, the door is now open for us to teach more university students than was ever before possible, and under ideal conditions. A range such as ours gives tremendous impetus to learning and to subsequent participation."

Continues Bolstad, "There is one fact that we must face—large-scale use of the

tees by classes of students does have a limiting effect on the revenue. However, this is not particularly serious with us as long as the University can come out in the black on the over-all operation."

In regard to the actual teaching of the fundamental mechanics of the golf swing, Les has this to say: "You cannot by teaching the 'big swing' and talking pattern alone make a practical golfer. This is only the entering wedge. The practical method is to go back to the short swing. Take for example, the case of the large preponderance of beginners who slice. We get these people out on the driving tee and concentrate on the short swing while straightening them out. He (or she) gains necessary confidence upon seeing the ball going out straight, even though for short distances. Then we go on to the 'big swing'."

Next to be interrogated in getting the over-all picture of the Minnesota golf project is Dave MacMillan who since retirement as head basketball coach at the University has been instructing classes in physical education. With completion of the driving range, Dave who is well versed in golf (and also a witty gent highly adept at meeting the public) was named active manager.

Boon to Week-end Golfer

Says Dave, starting right out in an enthusiastic vein, "What a boon for the week-end golfer who comprises a large segment of the total number of participants in this game! Now he can get out under the lights as many times a week as he wants. At the



The small clubhouse at the Univ. of Minnesota Driving Range has been designed to control all player traffic to and from the tees and original plans have been altered to provide parking space directly back of the tee line for spectators and guests who accompany players.

same time, he can concentrate on improving his game—something the person who is confined to week-end rounds can't or won't do."

Enlarging upon Frank McCormick's comments, Dave continues: "It's a great factor in encouraging the rank beginner,—the individual who is reticent to go out on the course and start from scratch. A large share of our students come from communities in which there are no golf facilities whatsoever. They welcome this opportunity to try the game. Then there are students with heavy class schedules who haven't time to play an 18-hole round of golf. The range makes it possible for them to come out in the late afternoon or evening, and to thus keep up their interest.

"We find many girls who are new at the game turning up in groups which usually include one or more experienced golfer. She gets the other girls started. In a group like this, they lose their self-consciousness and concentrate on learning. In the beginning, the ratio of men to women using the range was about 3 to 1, but we could see the gap closing week by week."

Dave feels that the morning trade should be cultivated and encouraged more vigorously. The announced opening hour of the University golf range was at 12 noon, although it did fluctuate somewhat. To increase the usefulness and revenue-producing potential of these facilities he suggests a 9 or 10 a.m. opening so that more women could get out. Dave believes that special inducements such as group lessons and special events will build up worthwhile attendance.

Patronage Restricted

It is in the business management aspects of the driving range operation that most of the "bugs" and headaches of launching and directing such an enterprise come to light. It is Marshall (Marsh) Ryman as business manager of athletics at the University of Minnesota who handles matters of finance, personnel, maintenance, equipment, and policy.

"Taking considerations in their chronological order," begins Ryman, "we go back first to the selection of a site. The ideal situation is a plot of level ground, with good over-all drainage, that is adjacent to a thoroughfare carrying largely leisure traffic—not people hurrying between two points. We had a good many casual passers-by drop in at the beginning, but operators of privately-owned tees complained about competition from a non-tax-paying source and brought so much pressure to bear that we now confine our patronage to students, employees, faculty members, families of these groups, and alumni. Naturally this has greatly restricted our revenue, but not disastrously so."

Continues the Minnesota business manager, "The rolling nature of our property plus the rocky soil caused us a good many headaches. We have found that in order to operate at top efficiency you must depend on your ball-picking. The many pockets and depressions in our land greatly reduced the effectiveness of the machine. Further-



The driving range makes it possible for students with heavy class schedules who haven't time for a nine or 18-hole round of golf to keep up their interest in the game with practice in the late afternoon or evening.

more, water and mud in these small catch-basins after rainfalls or even moderate sprinkling created a ball-gathering problem. Stones which kept working their way to the surface caught in the mechanism of the ball picker and caused a breakdown. I feel that a reasonably flat surface well sodded or planted with grass is important to help keep down costly man hours."

Fencing Range Good Investment

Ryman finds that a tight control on golf balls is essential. Disappearance of golf balls costing from 25 to 30 cents each through theft and loss accounts for a major operating cost. It is imperative that a detailed ball inventory be kept, listing balls on hand and loss factors. It was found that unless all balls were cleared from the range right after the 10 p.m. close-down, rather than the next morning, loss from theft was particularly heavy. Ryman is convinced that a high fence around the range is a good investment. Minnesota has not installed one—yet. "Aiming" the tees so that balls will not be hit outside the range where they cannot be retrieved by machine is another "must."

A definite maintenance schedule for mowing grass, picking balls, washing balls, etc. is wise for efficiency purposes, advises Ryman.

While Les Bolstad is to be found at the range during much of the daylight hours, there is considerable demand for teaching

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---Presented at the meeting of the Philadelphia Association of Golf Course Superintendents.

U. of MINN. DRIVING RANGE

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aid during the evening after he has left. Having learned this, Ryman made it a point to have someone with golf teaching experience (not necessarily a professional) on hand at this time. He found several individuals who were glad to take the assignment at no cost to the University, but rather on the stipulation that they collect and keep fees from lessons.

Of the 42 tees in operation at the Minnesota range, only 18 are automatic. These are rented at a cost of 50 cents daily. The remainder are of the door-mat type in which it is necessary to use wooden tees. Ryman believes that the automatic tees are vastly superior, however, for the turnover on them during the periods of heavy play is much greater. "And," he says, "the more completely automatic the tees, the better. Be sure to get the kind requiring

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the least servicing and replacement of parts."

The University of Minnesota range opened June 18 last year—shortly before the "pest season" reached its height in Minneapolis. It was found that insects and bugs were definitely a deterrent to potential customers, particularly in the evenings. Measures for combatting this nuisance are being considered at the moment.

Regulate Traffic to Tees

To insure an orderly and business-like operation, Ryman suggests setting up the physical plant so that traffic to and away from the tees can be closely regulated. Careful planning is necessary to insure this. The control building is an integral part in this layout.

When the Minnesota driving range was first opened, participants were required to park across the road from the tees. This was soon discovered to be a mistake. The large majority of people using the range had someone with them—wife, sweetheart, friend, son, daughter, etc. Many brought their entire family. Ryman found that these spectators came along with the idea of sitting in their cars and watching the individual with whom they came hit out his or her pail of balls. In the absence of parking space adjacent to the range and affording good visibility of it, many did not come back. This has been already remedied.



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The lights installed by the University have been a matter of slight controversy. Some interested parties opined that they were higher, more powerful, and more costly than necessary. Ryman is firm in his conviction that they must be bright enough so that anyone using the range can follow the full flight of each ball he hits. This much was learned through bitter experience—sealed lights are the **ONLY** kind. On several occasions the exposed bulbs used on the Minnesota range exploded like popcorn when hit by cold rain.

Personnel has provided no problem for Ryman. There are usually two student employees on hand to assist Dave MacMillan from opening time until an hour or so after closing at 10 p.m. No two students put in this much time, but several dove-tail their work schedules. There is a long and select list of students waiting for employment at the range.

The range, its buildings, and equipment represent an investment of nearly \$50,000, but Ryman points out that this sum is considerably in excess of the required minimum. "You know," he explains, "a large state university such as this is expected to do everything on a very high, if not elaborate scale. Then, too, land evaluations are high in this area. I suppose that a fairly satisfactory range could be started for half this amount, if necessary."

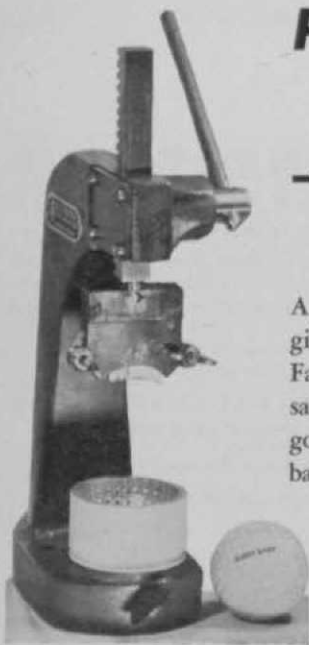
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In spite of the late start (June 18) in opening the Minnesota range, income averaged about \$32 to \$33 per day. Roughly 135 people per day hitting one small pail of balls (27 to 30 balls) at 25 cents per pail return this much revenue. The larger pails of 55 to 62 balls were 50 cents. Ryman figured that it required from 6 to 9 minutes to hit out the smaller number, and an average of 15 minutes for the larger pail. The above daily income made it possible to close the range the day after Labor Day with the books in black ink. Average daily costs of operation (personnel, lights, balls, tee rental, etc.) was about \$30. This does not include interest or a return on the investment.

An important source of income was the concession which handled pop, popcorn, and ice cream. Because sandwiches were available at the lunch counter in the golf course clubhouse nearby they were not on sale at the range.

The bookkeeping should not be a matter of concern to anyone, advises Ryman. He found it a very simple operation.

"We've made a few mistakes along the way and have encountered some rough spots," concludes the Minnesota athletic business manager, "and we know darned well that we still have a lot to learn, but it's an interesting undertaking and certainly a highly worth-while one in terms of the recreational opportunities it affords."

MAINTENANCE THAT MAKES

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