

# Increase Capacity for Play By Streamlining Course<sup>\*</sup>

By **PACKEY WALSH**

Supervisor of Golf, Chicago Park Dist.

Today golf is big business. According to estimates by the National Golf Foundation for 1949; more than 63 million rounds of golf are played annually; over 3 million golfers play more than ten rounds each year; and the present dollar value of golf properties and plant is estimated at 975 million dollars with an annual maintenance cost of 44 million dollars. Conservative estimates, based on factory cost, place the amount of golf equipment manufactured yearly at more than 26½ million dollars. This last figure does not include clothing and other sports accessories indirectly related to golf.

This is big business. This is a far cry from the golf situation in the early part of this century when the game was regarded as a rich man's pastime and was associated with top hats and silk shirts. Today, the so-called daily fee or semi-private courses and the publicly owned municipal courses far outnumber the private golf preserves previous to World War I and the bulk of the huge dollar volume of merchandise and playing fees annually enjoyed by the industry comes from the working man—the plumber, the mechanic, the clerk, the housewife and the student. They are the source of our bread and butter.

We can all be congratulated for the truly phenomenal growth of the game. I, as a golf professional with both private and municipal golf course experience, have contributed something to the picture by promoting the game in my teaching and in my daily contacts with the public. You, in your profession, have played an equally important part in keeping the game fascinating for the millions of golfers that tee off on your courses every year.

The very nature of the game has made our job, yours and mine, a pleasant one. It is one of the few sports where almost anyone can play, regardless of age or sex. It is a game that can be enjoyed by the individual as well as the group and one that offers a refreshing change of scene and pace to almost everyone, regardless of his daily work. It can be a source of physical exercise, mental relaxation and exhilarating competition for everyone—and Americans, recognizing this, have adopted it wholeheartedly.

The game is so universally accepted that golf equipment and clothing have joined the necktie and the gloves on the average individual gift shopping list. The recurring golf outing has become a fixture in many industrial recreation programs. And, finally, many municipalities, ever cautious about the expenditure of public funds for new recreation projects, have bowed to the demands of the public by recognizing the golf course as one of the important parts of the public recreation plant.

At the outbreak of hostilities in the last war, golf operators and employees began casting about for defense jobs and other occupations divorced from the golf picture because the general feeling was that golf was too trivial a matter for Americans in a time of national emergency.

We were all amazed, I think, to find that it was during the war years that golf really came into its own! More and more people, fatigued by the problems and tensions of war-time, turned to golf for a refreshing and strengthening change of pace. Medical men of the Armed Forces recognized the value of physical and psychiatric therapy that golf worked on minds and bodies damaged in combat and welcomed the cooperation of golf operators in the vicinity of the government's general hospitals. It was here that we in golf made our greatest contribution to the national war picture. Golf courses offered the free use of their facilities to the wounded G.I. and later, to G.I.'s in general. The game was a revelation to many of them who had never been near a golf course in their lives. To others, who had regarded it as a rich or old man's game, it was a new thrill. Thousands of veterans, brand new converts to the game, included golf clubs in their inventories of necessities for the full civilian life!

## Post War Boom in Golf

This war-time surge in popularity set the scene for a post-war boom in golf, the greatest the game has ever known. And what did we in golf do about it? Here is the sorry picture we've kept turned to the wall for the past five years:

The relaxation of material and labor shortages following V-J Day brought hordes of golfers trooping to the golf courses all over the nation—and what

<sup>\*</sup>Address at NGSA Convention, Chicago, Ill., Jan. 31, 1951.

(Continued on page 78)

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ceilings might help club managers solve one of their problems.

The Country Clubs Round-Table was presided over by Royce Chaney, Northwood Club, Dallas. Various parties were discussed with the general conclusion being that country clubs need more good excuses for parties and need to put on the parties with complete planning. Parties for the teen-agers came in for discussion. Food cost and service problems, the financial and personal phases of club operation also were discussed with a constructive and specific frankness that accounted for some of the "facts of life" being withheld from recording.

## INCREASE CAPACITY

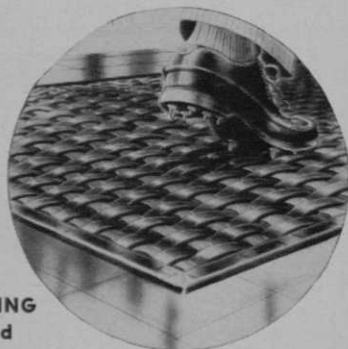
(Continued from page 46)

did they find? They found us draped over our cash register speculating—with the arrival of each foursome—whether the traffic would bear another 25¢ increase in the greens fees. We gloated over the capacity crowds and the congestion at the tees, congratulating ourselves on what a great job we were doing. The eager ex-G.I.'s brought their wives and friends to the courses for recreation in which the entire family could participate. Many left without playing because their pockets couldn't stand the strain. Others, discour-

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aged by the hour-long waits for starting times, soon forgot their rosy memories of what a great game they had found golf to be during their service years and turned to other interests.

#### Fewer Golf Courses

We're five years late — but it still may not be too late to take stock of where we stand in the golf picture today. Oh, I don't mean the usual quick look over the cash register to see how the line is piling up at the first tee! We should look beyond our own courses to the general golf situation as it exists today and how it points to the future.

Today, when we are enjoying the greatest influx of golfers on our courses in the history of the game, there are actually fewer golf courses in operation than there were fifteen years ago.

Think that one over. We have more players and fewer golf courses for them to play on than we did fifteen short years ago! Your golf committees at first blush would probably say: "Wonderful, more business for the survivors, less competition!"

This, unfortunately, is true now, this year — and maybe next year too. But how about the future? Your future and mine are tied up in the future of the game and the way things point now it's going to be a bleak one indeed!

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We should be concerned about the growing line-up at the tees instead of being complacent at how well things are going. More and more new golfers are joining the ranks of the fairway fanatics each year. We know that. But more and more golf courses are falling by the wayside. The inevitable result will be increased crowding at the tees, building up greater frustration among the waiting golfers to the point where they will desert the game entirely for more convenient and less crowded recreation. The situation is graver than most of us realize. Although the new crop of golfers has consistently exceeded the drop-outs, the margin is growing smaller each year and this margin shrinks each time a golf course is taken over for a housing sub-division, or by private institutions or industry. Gentleman, the gravy train is slowing down and it looks like we'll have to get out and push if we want it to keep going!

## Encourage New Construction

What can we do? There are two things we must do: everyone connected with the game—course operators, maintenance

specialists and golf professionals—all of us must make an organized effort to discourage and prevent wherever and whenever possible the further dissolution of our existing golf plants and encourage the construction of new courses. Secondly, we must—right now—do everything we can to increase the capacity of our present courses and to minimize and eliminate where possible the piling up of players at the tees.

If these sound like radical measures to you then you still do not appreciate how fast the door is closing in our faces. I know that never, in the memory of anyone in this room, have all the tightly-knit organizations and associations of the golf industry banded together in a common movement or even in agreement on a common point. This is no time for tradition or petty disagreements—this is a matter of survival! I think we can work together, I know we'll have to. We must throw smugness out the window and beat the drum for more golf courses. Each new course adds solidity to the foundation on which the golf industry is built—

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every golf course lost to us undermines the entire structure that much more.

I know as well as you do that this is an unfortunate time to talk about building golf courses. It looks as though very few projects, not involving gunpowder or splitting atoms, will be built for a long time to come from the way our national economy is being directed to meet the challenge of world emergency. This is why the second measure I proposed a minute ago bears double significance—the need to increase the capacity of existing courses.

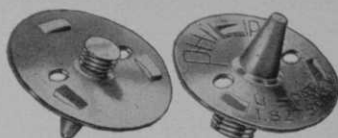
Not only must we combat the growing tendency of golfers to turn away from the game in search of a less crowded activity, we must prepare to meet an even greater demand for golf than we experienced during World War II. If this sounds contradictory it is just typical of the crazy situation in which the industry finds itself today. It is no more contradictory than the fact that golfers are increasing in numbers while golf courses are decreasing!

#### Increased Demand

There will be increased demand for golf because of the mounting tensions being imposed on Americans by the problems of the present world situation. This demand will not materialize if we make no effort to meet it—and we will continue to lose

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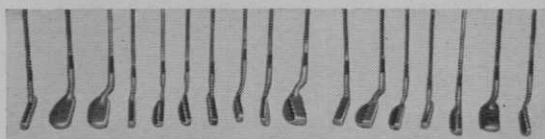
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our present customers at a steadily increasing rate.

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You must cater to the playing pleasure and convenience of Mr. Average Golfer, the duffer who shoots an average of 110 blows per round. He makes up 90% of the golfing public today, he keeps all of us in business, whether we operate golf courses, teach golf, sell golfing merchandise or follow the tournament circuit. Let's give the game back to him, he's paid the freight on it this far. Today's low tournament scores tend to make us all think in terms of tougher golf courses. Forget it. You'll scare away the golfer who can't spend too much time on the game but who would like to have a decent score to show for the time and money he does shell out! **He's Mr. 90%.**

### Simplifying Course

By simplifying your course you can accomplish two things: you can speed up play on your fairways for the 90 per-centers who spend so much time looking for lost balls and you can keep bringing them back to your course by making their

game a more pleasant experience. I know that we've fallen into the habit of measuring a successful business day on the golf course by the number of people we turn away—I wish it were possible to gauge our long range failure by finding out how many never come back!

The Chicago Park District has already recognized the problem of congestion and has taken steps to correct the situation as a matter of necessity. When a golfer leaves your course without having played that's the end of it. When golfers on the Chicago Park District's four golf courses in Lincoln, Jackson, Columbus and Marquette Parks are frustrated for any reason the Park District hears about it and must take heed. Late last year we entered upon a modernization program designed to speed up play on our municipal courses, a program which will also bring the four courses into closer relationship to the capabilities of 90% of our tax-paying players. The first step was to eliminate lipped traps on all the courses—thus reducing the psychological part of the trap hazard. Past experience tells us that this will speed up play and thus will increase our daily capacity. Projects of a similar nature will follow in the modernization program with the same end in view.

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your courses can be enormously streamlined by cutting the grass in the roughs just a bit shorter so that lost balls will be easier to find; clear out ravines or other natural barriers to smooth play where possible; forget about those lipped traps in which so many golfers have ventured never to return. Hold the sadistic side of your nature in check when you make the rounds of your fairways. You'll find many ways in which to break up those weekend traffic jams!

The very same principle could be applied to modern golf course architecture—direct your thinking toward the average player and the game will continue to grow. For instance, the design, placement and maintenance of "rough" is a subject in itself, one that has received too little consideration from us of the golfing fraternity on its long-range effect on golf in general.

A golf course streamlining program will pay off to everyone in one way or another: more pleasure and opportunity to play for the golfer; increased capacity to handle the increased demand for golf that is sure to come with increasing world tension; a valuable contribution to national morale—and simplified maintenance and operating procedures plus more dollars in pocket for us.

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### Indiana PGA Spring Meeting To Be Held April 11

The annual Spring Meeting of the Indiana Section, PGA, will be held at the Lincoln Hotel, Indianapolis, on April 11. It will be an all day session with Geo. T. McCarthy, U. S. Rubber; O. J. Noer, Milwaukee Sewerage Com.; Henry Cowen, MacGregor Golf, appearing on the morning program. E. Stumm, Nat'l. Cash Register, and Joe Wolfe, Wilson Sporting Goods, are on in the afternoon, followed by the Clinic conducted by Byron Nelson. Coach A. N. (Bo) McMillan is the guest speaker for the banquet in the evening, to be presided over by Herb Graffis.

**BUYERS' SERVICE — SEE PAGE 93**

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