

Make Pitch and Putt Courses the "Sandlots" for Golf

By HERMAN L. LEE

The construction of municipal golf courses in the United States has gone a long way toward providing facilities for participation in the game by a much broader segment of the population than that experienced in the early days when golf was known as "a rich man's game." The average man—the white collar worker, the industrial employee and the laborer make up the largest group playing golf today.

However, in this expansion one group has been overlooked, the development of boys and girls as future greats. True, every club has its pro who will spend hours on end correcting your slice, hook, stance or the way you hold your mouth. But most of their students are middle aged business men trying to improve just enough to win a small wager in next Saturday's match.

If there were twice as many public courses in the country, each one would still be jammed with muscle bound shop workers or pale faced office workers, jockeying for position on No. 1 tee, but in this conglomeration, there would be few if any, boys. That is, boys whose body muscles and minds are flexible enough to pick up a natural poise and eager to learn by imitating their heroes.

What we need then is a sand lot for golf, a place where youngsters can go and swat a ball without breaking a window, losing the ball, or needing fifty to one hundred dollars worth of equipment. Stars in baseball, football, tennis, track and nearly every sport are developed in back

yards, alleys and sidewalks, using a non-descript selection of substitutes for balls, bats, tennis rackets, etc.

The only boys who have a chance to learn golf at the bottom are the caddies and the very few who do odd jobs around the club house. But from this handful of boys come a great percentage of the stars of the game. Therefore it seems that if we could offer opportunities to more boys, we would develop more stars and certainly better natural golfers.

Boys and Girls Get Start

Tracydale, an 18-hole, 1300-yard, pitch and putt course in Erie, Pa. does provide the opportunity for many boys and girls to become interested in golf. Adults too, who may never otherwise have lifted a mashie, have become rabid addicts of the game. Tracydale, privately owned, has operated continuously and successfully for ten seasons. Even during the war years with gas rationing, material shortages and long working hours, hundreds of kids and grown-ups spent a couple of hours of relaxation at Tracydale. Even the golf ball shortage was solved by charging a small rental fee for the use of a ball, thus allowing many more persons to play.

Everything is regulation at Tracydale except that the distance from tee to green is shorter and the greens are smaller than regulation courses. The holes vary from 50 to 110 yards. Traps, bunkers and even a water hole provide plenty of hazards, making the layout a good test even for the experts. Even tho all holes are par 3 and some quarter of a million people have



Fun pairs up with excellent practice on short iron shots at Tracydale's 1300 yd. course.



Small but fine greens and all the hazards of big time golf are found on this sand lot layout.

been around the course, only two have ever shot as low as 50.

The whole course covering some 15 acres, is lighted by seventy 1500-watt lamps. The busiest time in the day is between 7 and 10 P.M. Mosquitoes were very troublesome at first but the past year this problem was solved by a periodic spraying with a DDT solution.

Naturally with so many beginners, many odd things happen here that



A modest shelter type clubhouse with office, storage and conveniences is adequate.

couldn't happen any other place. For instance, there was the young lady who fanned the breeze exactly 22 times on the first tee and then on the 23rd try, arched a beautiful shot directly to the flag. The ball took a back spin and dropped into the cup. Another chap made an ace between two elevens. Still another scored an ace on No. 13 hole while shooting for Number 8.

Need for Earlier Training

The greatest compliment paid the course was a letter received from a man who had been passing thru with his family and had stopped for a round of golf. Upon his arrival home, some 200 miles down state, he discovered that he had left his crutches in the club house and couldn't get along without them. They were returned promptly. In 1942 a bride and groom honeymooning in Erie, started a round but only played three holes when it started to pour. It never did stop raining that day, so the management gave them a rain check for another day. In 1947, five years later, this rain check was honored at the desk.

During about four of the past ten years, many of our boys and girls spent various stretches in the armed services. No boy or girl in the uniform of any of the armed services has ever paid to play at Tracydale. Thousands of these kids took advantage of this offer while on leave or stationed in Erie.

It is the purpose of this article to show the need for earlier development of future golfers and to show the part that pitch and putt courses can play in this development. It is safe to assume that many millions of men and women could become golfers if the facilities to provide the initial interest were available.

Supposing that each community had a pitch and putt course similar to Tracydale and the opportunity to become a contestant were granted to one million persons, it would mean the construction of hundreds of additional courses, thousands of new jobs and millions of dollars worth of golf equipment sales. But even more important it would provide good wholesome recreation for young and old alike and greatly increased competition for the comparatively few stars in golf today.

Golf like bowling can be played by both men and women of all ages. Even better than bowling it takes the player out into the open air and provides the most healthful of all exercises, walking.

Some people will say that there are more golfers now than the courses can take care of. True, but if we create enough demand, someone, somehow will provide the means.

Let's start with a few pitch and putt courses. The management of Tracydale has had several inquiries and has given advice and encouragement to persons interested in opening a course. At least some of these inquiries are now realities. Above all, let's get the kids started, let's develop their interest without first requiring them to purchase a set of clubs and a club membership. Make golf available to these kids and they will soon demand the equipment.

All golfdom — the private and public courses, the pros, the architects, manufacturers of balls, clubs and all the sundry articles connected with the game, should be interested in the development of new talent. One of the surest ways to promote golf is thru the establishment of many more of these Tracydales. These courses can be profitable and interesting to the owners while filling a great need in the community.

Let's develop our future major leaguers by providing sand lots for golfers.

A pro can sell what's left of his summer sportswear stock — and a lot more — if he'll make a display of this type of merchandise as "back to school" wear. The students, boys and girls both, are partial to the country club type of apparel and as most of the kids now are as big as their parents there's no size problem with the stock. The "clearance sale" prices pros can put on this merchandise will convert his stock into cash and a profit.

— J. V. Cannon