

What I Look For In a Golf Course

By CHARLES N. ECKSTEIN

Vp. Chicago District Golf Assn.

MORE than 25 years ago I had an Irish friend who often dreamed out loud about what the golfer wanted in a course. The fellow's name was Callahan and while he never made it quite clear whether he was going to run across the perfect course in this life or the next, I do recall that the name of the layout was to be Flanagan's, the fee was to be three dollars and every golfer who played the course was going to be assured of shooting par or better. Callahan envisioned wide troughs running from tee to green on every hole and nothing smaller than wash tubs for cups. The only reason for playing it, Callahan often said, was to make a body feel like a million because he could come in and say: "Well, I shot par today," or "What dya think, I broke 70."

I haven't seen Callahan for a long time now; I don't know if he is still dreaming; I'm not even sure that he hasn't found his perfect course in the next life. Callahan was entitled to his dream, but you and I know that is not what the golfer wants when he plays a round of golf. So, let's see what he does want when he goes to his club — which we can't deny is a luxury for which he pays real hard cash.

To get everything in proper focus, let's start right at the beginning.

When I approach a clubhouse, I look to see how the road is maintained, whether it is landscaped and kept in full repair; how the parking lot looks, whether it is free of trash and debris. From here I wander over to the putting clock where I notice if the cups are cleanly cut without grass growing over the sides. If they look ragged, I say to myself: "Well, this supt. or one of his men hasn't been around here for a week or 10 days."

Stone or Asphalt Paths

The first tee should make a good impression. I check it, as I check all others, to see if the ground is firm and free of divots. The grass should be cut short so that a normal tee will elevate the ball to proper hitting height. I look to see how much turf is worn away from the paths

leading to and away from the tees. In passing, I should mention that some of the more ingenious supts. are using asphalt, crushed stone and similar materials in dressing up paths around tees.

I'm a pretty wild shotmaker, but usually by the time I reach the third or fourth hole I get a chance to hit one from the fairway. Here I check the lie in relation to the condition of the grass. I don't pay much attention to the color of the turf, but I am interested in how it is cut. If you have to dig in and take a divot with a wood, particularly a No. 4, then conditions aren't ideal. I dislike fairways that are full of clover and chickweed.

As for the rough, there is a limit to how long the grass should be. The deepest rough shouldn't present a shot more difficult than if the ball is lodged in sand. In rough adjoining the fairway, the golfer shouldn't be penalized to the extent that he is when he is in deep. Undoubtedly there should be two heights of cut in the rough.

Trap Overhang

One of my pet peeves is to hit a trap some distance from the green and have the ball roll against a lip that requires a shot hit either sideways or backwards to clear it. The overhang shouldn't be this severe.

Like most golfers, I like to see traps well raked at all times. Too often they are properly cared for only on big days. On the greens I check to see if the grass is uniformly moist and if it is of uniform texture throughout. Holding qualities and position of the hole are other things I take note of. Let me say something here about approaches. If greens are dried out and the supt. compensates for this by soaking approaches I think it is grossly unfair to the golfer. If he tries to run up a shot the ball is either slowed down or gets stuck; if he tries to land on the green his ball rolls over. What's the percentage in a situation like this?

I've already made some remarks about traps. Let me add this: It's folly to go to all the work of maintaining traps only to have golfers get away with playing out of them with a putter.

Charles N. Eckstein's views on what he looks for in a course were expressed at a recent Midwest GCSA meeting.