

Foundation Survey Indicates Par 3s Are Here to Stay

WHAT about Par-3 courses? Are they popular? Are they here to stay? How about their future?

The answers to these questions were brought out by a recent survey of Par-3 course operations made by the National Golf Foundation. Nearly half of the 260 par-3 courses listed in the Foundation's files responded to a questionnaire sent out this spring. The 123 answers represented Par-3 operations in 32 of 39 states in which short courses are operated.

Popularity of Par-3 Courses

In 1955, when the Foundation conducted its first survey of Par-3 courses, there were 120 such operations in existence. On Jan. 1 of this year the total had risen to 260. Last year 38 new Par-3's were opened for play, 32 were under construction and 124 were in some stage of planning. In the first three months of this year 17 more new Par-3's were opened and construction had begun on an additional 19.

There's no mystery behind this growth. With present congestion on the nation's courses stretching playing time for 18 holes of regulation golf to five and six hours, golfers are turning to Par-3's for a 'quick' round. In cases where the Par-3 is lighted, golfers can extend their playing time beyond sunset.

More important, new golfers, reluctant to invest time and money in regulation golf until they have tried the game, turn to the Par-3 to test their reaction to the game. While many new golfers graduate to the regulation courses in a very short time, they continue to play the Par-3. Also, the short course is not in competition with regulation layouts although it does take some of the overflow. It fills a definite need in the golf picture.

Economically, the Par-3 is the answer in most metropolitan areas where land availability and cost of course construction are obstacles. Par-3's can be built on a few acres at relatively little cost. Their small areas make lighting for night play physically and economically practical. Finally, the relatively short playing time required for a round of Par-3 golf means that more and more golfers are going to play more golf.

Are Par-3's a passing fancy? Far from it! While the larger, more elaborate and costlier (and most profitable) short course operations are usually of post-World War II vintage, one hotel Par-3 responding to the survey, dates back to 1900! As for semi-private operations, one 9-hole course is 24 years old, and an 18 hole operation reports 28 years in business. Included among the municipal 9-hole courses is an ancient establishment claiming 35 years existence. This latter course is 868 yards long, cost \$4,500 to build, \$2,000 a year to maintain and draws 5,000 rounds of play during its five-month season.

Projecting the average figures in the 1959 NGF Survey, the typical 9-hole, semi-private Par-3 is 5 years old, is 1074 yards in length, is built on 14 acres at an average cost of \$27,605 (excluding land) and costs \$7,490 per year to maintain. It has an average \$15,239.70 in green fees and \$10,296 in shop sales.

The 18-hole semi-private Par-3 also is 5 years old, is 1739 yards in length, is built on 19½ acres at a cost of \$75,700 (exclusive of land) and costs \$17,714 in annual maintenance. It enjoys a 9-month season, averages 30,485 rounds per season, grossing \$38,715.95 in fees and \$16,864 in shop sales.

Lighting Situation

Of the 59 nine-hole semi-privates reporting, 20 are lighted, 37 include driving range facilities, 16 are 'golf center' operations (with driving range and miniature golf course) and eight are operated in conjunction with regulation courses.

Among the 22 eighteen-hole semi-private operations in the survey, 10 have all 18 holes lighted and four have 9 holes lighted. Four are operated in conjunction with regulation courses, 20 have golf driving ranges and eight are golf center operations with both driving range and miniature facilities.

Future of the Par-3

As in the case of regulation golf layouts, there will never be enough Par-3's to satisfy the growing demand for more places to play golf. This demand is growing with the population, rising standards of living and increasing leisure time. In 1955 the Foundation produced its 'Golf Operator's Handbook' to satisfy numerous requests for planning and operating information from prospective driving range, miniature golf and Par-3 course operators. In 3½ years, 5,000 copies of the book have been sold and it has gone into a second printing.