

The Par 3 Course-

Not A Stopgap, It Has Appeal All Its Own

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THERE are more than 300 Par 3 courses in operation in the United States. This includes the 38 opened for play last year.

They range from very basic layouts, built on just a few acres, to elaborate, small scale country clubs with clubhouses and pro shops. They include private, semi-private and daily fee operations, municipal courses, military, school, resort or hotel layouts and courses built at VA hospitals.

Most have been built and opened for play since World War II, and especially during the last ten years. However, the idea of Par 3 golf is by no means new. One resort course, according to the National Golf Foundation, has been in operation since 1900!

Two Surveys Conducted

Five years ago the Foundation conducted a survey of Par 3s then in play to determine what characteristics these operations had in common. It was found that there was a wide variance among such courses in design, costs of construction, maintenance, operation and in the amount of play on each. The Foundation conducted a second survey one year ago and here are some facts it revealed:

The average 9 hole municipal Par 3



course is 12 years old, is 986 yards in length, is built on 12 acres, has an average season of 8½ months, averages almost 18,000 rounds per season, costs an average of \$24,166 to build, costs \$14,467 in turf maintenance and grosses \$12,833 annually in golf sales.

These are averages. More interesting is the range from high to low in each of these information categories. In age, these courses range from 1 year to 35 years. Yardage runs from 588 to 1385. The smallest is built on 5 acres, the largest on 30. The least active operation racked up 3,412 rounds of play in 1958, the most heavily played showed 65,000 rounds. They cost from \$3,000 to \$90,000 to build. Annual maintenance costs run from \$2,000 to \$40,000. Golf shop sales were reported from a low of \$1,500 to a high of \$35,000.

No 'Typical' Par 3

Obviously, there is no such thing as a 'typical' par three course. Several years ago I visited a very successful 18 hole semi-private course built on 7½ acres in East Paterson, N. J. The shortest hole was 40 yards in length; the longest, 80 yards. After looking over the layout I agreed to play three holes to test the greens. I wound up going the full route! By the time we reached the second tee my foursome

(which included the grinning course mgr.) had all kinds of wagers going and I found myself earnestly talking to each putt!

At the other extreme, I visited a 9 hole semi-private Par 3 in the Midwest some years ago where the golf pro explained that none of the holes were under 125 yards in length . . . "because anything less than this distance is not a full 9 iron shot — it just wouldn't be golf" This course was built on 20 acres — nearly six times the area of the East Paterson course and included some holes with the full 250 yard USGA limit set for par three holes. During our tour I noticed a pile of cast iron electric light poles rusting at one side of the course. The pro explained that the owner had purchased over \$1,000 of those poles with the idea of lighting the course for night play. He changed his mind after deciding that the added wear and tear of night traffic would be too much for the greens. Apparently, the owner, who enjoys a considerable local reputation as a successful businessman, must have been doing very well to casually write off more than \$1,000 in light poles and an undetermined added revenue in night play.

Cost Comparisons

A Par 3 calls for a $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ investment in real estate in comparison to a regulation 9-hole course. That is an important factor today in the face of steadily rising land values and keen competition for land use. It means that the Par 3 costs less to build. A regulation course, for instance, will cost from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a hole to build, exclusive of land cost. Everything else being equal, a Par 3 can be built for about one-fifth of this amount.

Smaller land area also means lower maintenance and operating costs. A regulation 9 may require a full time maintenance crew of from four to six men. A 9 hole Par 3, depending on acreage involved, may need only one or two fulltime workers to carry out the required work schedule.

Because the Par 3 can be lighted the traffic capacity of the course can be increased as much as 30 per cent or even more. The 9-hole municipal Par 3 operated by the City of South Gate, Calif., installed a lighting system at a cost of \$14,500 after the course had been in play slightly more than one year. The resulting 32 per cent increase in play during the following 14 months paid for the lights.

Do Golfers Like Them?

What do golfers think of the Par 3 course? They like it. They like the fact that it takes as few as 45 minutes to nego-



Mike Serino, pro at Ft. Jackson (S. C.) Army base, observes putting form of Frank Eldridge, a recruit who won Southeastern Amateur last year and was a member of University of Georgia golf team for three seasons. In winning the Southeastern, Eldridge a 6-month reservist, defeated such well known amateurs as Tommy Aaron and Arnold Blum.

tiating a short 9 hole course; as little as 1½ hours for 18 holes. Women and junior golfers, steadily increasing during the post-war years, find the Par 3 course an ideal place to try the game and to improve their skill at it. Many short course beginners would think more than twice about venturing onto a regulation golf course where their lack of skill and slowness would draw complaints from veteran players.

Private and semi-private clubs as well as municipal golf depts. have built Par 3s adjacent to the regulation course — to take the overflow from the big course on busy days. Yet they find that the short course is often just as busy on the so-called 'slower' days.

So perhaps the Par 3 is not a substitute for the regulation course. It may be built with this purpose in mind but it soon develops an appeal all its own. After a period of time the Par 3 complements the regulation course, and vice versa.

These are all good reasons why the short course is popular. But most important of all is the contribution the Par 3 course makes to the entire community by providing everyone with the opportunity to play golf. Senior citizens can continue the game they can no longer play on the lengthier, more physically demanding regulation courses because of age or health reasons. Youngsters and women can learn the game under conditions better suited to their physical capacities yet closely approximating the 'big' game they aspire to.