

Intrigue, Bandits, Cobras Add Spice to Orient's Golf Story

By **BOB BALDOCK**

Fresno, Calif., golf architect Bob Baldock recently toured the Orient where he inspected a "wild West" site for a new 36 hole course in the Philippines which he has designed and will build for the Manila G&CC. Here is his report:

Maintenance practices on courses in the Philippines, Hong Kong and Japan are 30 years behind ours, but the game is on such a bullmarket boom in the Orient that the gap is being closed.

Their courses, thanks to such an abundance of cheap labor, are doing well enough maintenance-wise. It is, however, interesting to note some contrasts with our modern courses.

The greens, particularly in Manila, are primitive by our standards. They were haphazardly constructed, apparently with little thought as to the length of the ap-



Rakes, carts and eight women to do the topdressing is a daily ritual for Tokyo golf courses.

proach shot and, for purposes of easy drainage, are built in the manner of inverted saucers.

Frosting on Top

They are constantly topdressed with soil heavy on decomposed granite but light on fertilizer. Thus, over the years, a layer several inches thick has been built up — frosting on the saucer tops. This top dressing results in a hard packed surface and it's easy to imagine the problems connected with a pitch and run shot.

Some of the Tokyo area courses are so

busy the holes have two greens each. One recuperates while the other handles the traffic. Our modern greens practices, particularly the heavier use of fertilizer, would go a long way to correct this situation.

There is quite a story of intrigue in the durable, heat resistant grasses now used on the greens in Hong Kong and Manila. Similar to a cross of our bent and Bermudas, the grass originally was developed in Cairo, Egypt.

Smuggled Stolon

The story goes that a golf minded Englishman, before World War II, smuggled a single stolon of the Cairo grass into Singapore for a golf course there. After it was propagated there, the same procedure was repeated in Hong Kong. In the land where smuggling is a fine art, the next step was to take another stolon of the original Cairo grass to Manila.

So, most of the better greens in the Orient today, outside of Japan, come from a single stolon, spirited half way around the world under the noses of agricultural authorities.

Golf in the Manila area has some peculiar hazards beyond the control of the designer. Banditry is common in the area of Das Marines where poverty and wealth exist side by side. During our inspection tour of the property where the course will be built we were accompanied by guards from the local constabulary, armed with rifles and pistols.

Fight 'Em Off

We didn't see any of the reputed Wild West element but Allyson Gibbs, the pres. of the club, assured me it was a wise precaution since the week before I arrived the Das Marines guards had a pitched gun battle with two thugs on the site of the course.

The solution to some of the Oriental courses' maintenance problems seems to be in building the courses with long, easy curves, thus reducing the hand mowing. Gang mowers are a rare and expensive item. One five unit gang was pointed out to me in Manila, an English made job, which reputedly cost \$10,000 — double because of the levying of 100 per cent import duty.

Golfers in the Philippines may not be long hitters, but they have the reputation of being straight down the middle. There's a good reason they hate to get into the rough: Cobras consider the mice, rats and men their personal delicacies, particularly the latter.