



Don Soper

... golf hungry towns need more like him.

The Man Royal Oak Was Waiting For

Public Fee players didn't have a champion until Pro Don Soper came along . . . He's shown the city how to make money out of golf and by next year many golfers will be happy

By AL STARK

PROFESSIONAL Don Soper will bring public golf to Royal Oak, a city of 81,000 just outside Detroit, with an unusual deal. The city is putting up the land for a nine-hole course. Soper will supply the buildings cash — \$50,000 or more to start. He and the city will divide green fee profits until 1981. Then the city takes sole ownership, and Soper will retire to become an elder statesman of golf.

It is an arrangement that fills a void in Royal Oak's recreation program — and one that suits Soper.

Royal Oak is the second largest city in a county which boasts 39 public and private courses, including famed Oakland Hills and Detroit-owned Rackham, where the 1961 National Publix will be played.

Nothing Done About It

Yet, until Soper persuaded the city to lease him land for a driving range in 1950, Royal Oak had no place for the public fee player. Recreation experts called for a public course but city officials never went beyond wishful thinking about providing it.

Now, with Soper's proposal signed into contract, there is promise of more room to play for public players who have found that Saturday morning starting times in this area are reserved by the preceding Wednesday.

Soper had to show city officials how



Soper, Royal Oak mayor, William Hayward, and Jack W. Hutson, an attorney, go over details of contract that will bring golf to the wait-in-line players.

nine respectable holes could be laid out on undeveloped park land adjacent to his range. And he took the initial financial burden on himself. The city came to

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agreement in a 20-year lease that sets aside nearly 70 acres for golf.

Soper announced that work would begin this fall. He said he hopes to have the course in shape for some play within a year. By July, 1962, when according to the contract it must be in play, he hopes to have half a season in.

\$2,000 A Year Rent

The contract leases Soper the 70 acres for 20 years at rent of \$2,000 per year. He must finance construction of tees, greens, traps, and fairways. A clubhouse, parking lot, and fence will come later — out of the gross green fee profits.

Soper already has suggested that he and the city waive their 50-50 rights to net profits for the first 10 years of the lease in order to hurry these improvements.

The contract gives Soper full authority to hire and to set salaries. He will make policy with the concurrence of a special golf committee appointed by the city commission. Play will be limited to residents of Royal Oak and their guests.

How Soper Will Fare

Soper, who is 45, is frank about his interest in the deal: It gives him a 20-year contract in golf, in a situation where he largely will be his own boss. He will get

no salary as professional and course superintendent. Neither will his wife Ruth who assists him at the driving range. However, the contract gives him the full profits of the range and his miniature layout as well as full equipment and food concessions.

Soper has chosen Architect Bruce Matthews, long-time mgr. of Green Ridge in Grand Rapids, to design the Royal Oak course. They have tentatively settled on a par 34 layout of 3,00 yards. A long par 5, two par 4s that will stretch 410 and 435 yards, and two one-shotters at about 200 yards will give Royal Oak golfers a test that belies the overall yardage.

The land chosen for the course has numerous trees and it is located on a rolling landscape. Matthews, who designed the Michigan State University course on which the 1960 Big Ten championship was played, will have the trees in play and will tighten the layout with well-bunkered greens. Soper plans to sod the tees in order to hurry their development. They will be long tees for conservation of turf and to vary shots for golfers playing 18 holes.

Soper is a veteran pro who learned under two well-known figures in Michigan golf, Joe Devany at Grosse Ile and Warren Orlick, now at Tam O'Shanter.