



Many persons are introduced to golf through the public courses. Dr. Damiani, his wife and son, have been learning the fundamentals from Joe Hunsberger (r), pro at Juniata.

By Joseph W. Dragonetti

Rounds Played 233,000— Revenue \$378,000

The impact of public courses is reflected in these impressive figures. They tell the story of a single year's play at five Philadelphia muny courses.

Operation of Philadelphia's five public golf courses represents a big business, satisfying a great hunger for the game by an ever-widening cross-section of people and providing a growing market for services and equipment and a membership potential in the future for private clubs.

Garrett (Garry) Renn, former private club pro and supt. of Philadelphia's public golf courses, which come under the general supervision of the Fairmount Park Commission and the department of recreation, gives an insight into the operation of the public links, some of the problems involved and objectives for the future.

In 1961, according to Renn's annual report to William H. Noble, Jr., director of the Fairmount Park Commission, there were 233,547 rounds played at Philadelphia's five 18-hole courses. Revenues from fees amounted to \$378,460.

\$200,000 Shop Gross

The revenue does not include about a \$200,000 gross done at the five pro shops. These shops are operated on a concession basis. The business of the pros on public links is becoming increasingly important because players at public courses are be-

coming more style conscious and also want to use the finest in equipment, Renn says.

Total green fees at the five courses in 1961 increased by \$7,680 from the previous year. Total revenues have been going up every year since 1955. In that year they were approximately \$190,610.

New records are likely to be set in 1962 because, based on play early this year, total rounds for 1962 will probably go about 10,000 over 1961. Weather permitting, the courses are used the year around. People often line up at dawn to tee off and play until dark.

Cobbs Creek is the oldest of the city's five courses. It was built in 1916. Juniata was built in 1927; Walnut Lane and Roosevelt in 1939. At Karakung, 12 holes were finished in 1927 and the remaining six in 1939. Karakung adjoins Cobbs Creek.

Cobbs Creek an Incubator

Many of Philadelphia's top golfers, now members of private clubs, got their start at Cobbs Creek. This is considered to be a very stiff course with a par of 69. Many important tournaments have been held at Cobbs Creek, including the Philadelphia



Garry Renn (r) has been running the Philadelphia public course golf show since 1950. At left, youngsters are taught how to caddy. This is a special service of the Philly system. It trains club carriers for the private clubs in and around the city, teaches the boys about the game and its etiquette.

Daily News Open in 1955 and 1956. The qualifying round for the Philadelphia Dist. USGA Public Links Championship was held at Cobbs Creek this year.

Each course has a clubhouse and pro shop. The pros operate on literally the same basis as independent contractors in private clubs. Their business is good and getting better. The pros set the tone for the game at public courses, stressing the importance of courtesy and knowing the rules of the game.

Renn concedes that etiquet is not quite as good as at private courses but improvements are constantly being made. Standard fees have been established by the city for lessons. They are \$4 an hour and six lessons for \$20. Business in this area is getting brisker because many newcomers to golf realize that this is not a game you learn by yourself.

Permanent Staff of 50

Although the pros operate as independent agents within the framework of the city's golf program, they also work in close cooperation with Garry Renn in maintenance problems, etc. Renn supervises a permanent staff of about 50. About 15 additional employees are needed in the summer months. He operates out of the Belmont Office of the Fairmount Park Commission.

He has been superintendent for the past 12 years. He previously served as a pro

at Walnut Lane and was an assistant pro prior to that at two private courses, White-marsh Valley and Philmont. Born in Mount Holly, New Jersey, he has lived in Philadelphia since he was 4. He started to play golf when he was 13 at Juniata. He shoots in the 70's, but today does not get to play as often as he likes because of the press of official duties.

Renn is a member of the Philadelphia Section PGA and Philadelphia area rep for public golf courses of the USGA. He is also a member of the GCSA and, in 1959, was chairman of the Philadelphia group's education committee. He is strong on maintenance, drawing on his own experience at the city's experimental golf course nursery, which also comes under his supervision, and from close contacts with such top men as Joe Valentine of Merion, Marshall Farnham, of the Philadelphia CC and Eb Steiniger of Pine Valley.

One of the problems, of course, is maintaining grass on the tees of the Philly courses. Bermuda Grass may be introduced next year. In an annual report, Renn also has recommended conversion to Bermuda fairways.

Temporary green sites (6,000 sq. ft.) are to be sodded at all courses in front of the regular greens with 4,000 sq. ft. of 328 Bermuda and 2,000 sq. ft. of C-1

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Philadelphia Muny Courses

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and C-19 Bent Grasses, according to Renn.

"These greens," Garry explains, "could be put in play when work is being done on regular greens or during inclement weather."

To pay for this, the Park Commission increased green fees in 1960. Yearly permits are \$30, with 50 cents additional fee for weekdays and \$1 additional on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays for 18 holes.

Daily weekday fee for taxpayers is \$1.50 and \$2 on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Non residents and non taxpayers are required to pay a fee of \$2 on weekdays and \$3 on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.

The 15-acre grass nursery adjoining the Roosevelt Golf Course and the smaller nurseries at the five courses have been very helpful to Renn in solving maintenance problems and improving the courses. Renn and his staff also have made extensive alterations to the five courses in recent years.

The clubhouses at the Philly fee courses, of course, do not compare with the edifices at most country golf clubs, but they are

adequate. Facilities include men's and women's lockerrooms, snack bars and the pro shops. Locker fees are \$5 a year or 25 cents a day.

The problem of vandalism at public golf courses is a serious one, Renn said. The courses are policed by Park Guards. Extensive missionary work is done to prevent vandalism, but if an offense is repeated, punishment is severe. At Walnut Lane, in 1961, 500 feet of an 8-foot Cyclone Fence had to be erected to prevent vandalism.

Request Turned Down

The Park Commission's request for additional funds to improve playing conditions was rejected in the mayor's budget for 1962. The proposals will again be requested for 1963, with possibly a better chance of being accepted, because of increasing revenue produced by the courses. Requests for 1963 will look like this:

Equipment and personnel turf grass nursery	\$10,364
Fencing — Karakung	5,000
Bridge — Juniata GC	9,500
Practice Green — 2 courses	6,867
Temporary laborers for courses	16,245

Temporary starters, ticket
sellers 8,125
Personnel and Maintenance of
New Tees, all courses 24,460

The scope of Philadelphia's public course operation is being extended this summer with the city's operation of the Holmesburg course, formerly a private club. The need for public courses is evidenced by the fact that there are now only two private 18-hole courses within the city limits — Bala and Torresdale-Frankford. Most of the clubs which formerly operated in Philadelphia have moved further out into the country.

This One Gets Around

Renn says that it is difficult to get across to many public players that they ought to let faster players through as a matter of courtesy. But this doesn't necessarily apply to one character known as "the cross-country golfer". He plays several holes at Cobbs Creek, not always in sequence, then several holes on the adjoining Karakung Course — then back to the Cobbs Creek Course. He does cause some consternation.

Generally, however, Renn believes the tone of public golf courses is improving. Younger people especially are receptive

to observing rules of etiquette. Renn adds: "Youngsters are learning that while golf looks easy, it is hard to play. Our pros are doing a good job with the youngsters. I notice also that players on public courses are beginning to dress well. The pros have helped to make them style conscious."

Caddie Training Program

Although caddies are not used at public courses, Renn occasionally sponsors a caddie training course to encourage boys to become apprentices at private clubs. One of the aids used by Renn in these courses is a "Caddie Quiz" provided by the Western Golf Assn.

Although Roosevelt Golf Course is quite flat, most of the others have rolling terrain and a park atmosphere help to make the courses interesting. Walnut Lane is situated in the picturesque Wissahickon Valley.

You are likely to meet anybody at a public golf course in Philadelphia, including some characters like the "cross-country golfer" previously mentioned, but there is no doubt of their need to satisfy a deep hunger for the game in an area where most country and golf clubs have a long waiting list for membership.

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