



A fast, dry track and a great day for golf await players at Golden Gate Fields.

*Three California tracks had 170,000 rounds in 1963 on their short layouts . . . Golf is a lucrative fill-in during the ten months that the ponies aren't running*

By **DON CURLEE**

**I**t's a sure bet you'll win nothing but questioning glances by taking your golf clubs to the horse race track in most places. But in the San Francisco Bay Area, a 9-hole course occupies the infield of each of the three pari mutuel tracks, and only during the racing season is golf scratched.

More than 170,000 rounds of golf were played at the three track courses in 1963, about 80 percent by men, although the short, flat, par-30 courses are ideally suited to women. It was the fourth full year of golfing at Bay Meadows in San Mateo, the third at Tanforan in San Bruno, and the ninth at Golden Gate Fields — and the biggest yet for all three.

The way Bay Area golfers are taking to them, even bigger years may be ahead. Race track courses in other parts of the country are becoming fairly common. We know of two others in California, one in Portland, Ore., and another in Little Rock, Ark.

Exploding population in the San Francisco metropolitan area, a shortage of public golf courses and alert management of the trackside links has made them popular with golfers and profitable for their owners.

An alert track manager Charles Coughlin, de-





(Top) Pro Tom McHugh of Tanforan helps young southpaw get his backswing straightened out.

Manager Bill Laws of Tanforan explains some of the course's features to a waiting golfer (below).



scribed by his friends as a "golf nut," gets credit for ramrodding the first course at Golden Gate Fields in 1954. He had wanted an activity to make use of the huge racetrack investment during the 10 months between racing seasons. When he got the golf idea he managed to sell it to his board of directors and opened the course with a pro shop, putting green and driving range.

#### Started Like Some Horses

For a while it looked like a colossal flop. No amount of bally-hoo could attract the golfers. Finally, the few who ventured out began to come back, and they told

their friends. Then, almost overnight, play increased and the bookkeepers threw away the red ink. Coughlin left his job at the racetrack and took a lease on the golf concession. It continued to prosper.

Tony Lema served a short term as pro for Coughlin, whose lease expired after five years. The racetrack owners eyed the golf course plum, refused to renew the lease and began running the show themselves — and they still do.

Although the three are under separate management, all of them have maintained an initial image of cordiality, good course conditioning and reasonable green fees. On some Saturdays a golfer can register at one of the three track courses, get matched with a group and play nine holes in less time than he'd have to wait for a starting time at a crowded standard course.

His green fees on a weekend won't exceed \$1.50 for nine holes, and he can play a second nine for \$1. During the week he'll pay \$1 for the first round and 50 cents for the second — on the average.

#### Work to Avoid Delay

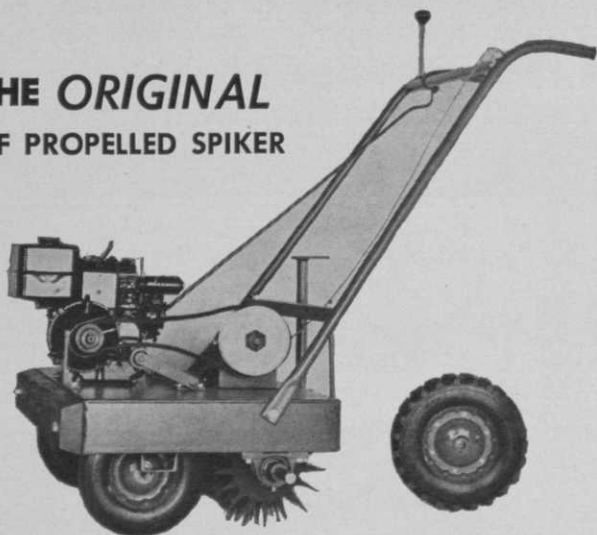
Alert starting moves the groups off rapidly and yet they aren't pushed. When a group wants to continue for a second nine, the delay is seldom long. With no large trees to obstruct their views, course managers can see almost the entire layout at each course from the pro shops. If play slows they can correct the situation quickly by urging laggards to pick up the pace.

Aware of their role as par-3 courses (actually, each one includes three par-4 holes), the California owners try extra hard to maintain a "big course" atmosphere. At Tanforan, for instance there is much emphasis on good public relations.

An unexpected shower drove everybody on the course to cover one day last December. When it became apparent it wouldn't let up, the manager began handing out improvised rain checks. Some of

*(Continued on page 80)*

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### Race Track Courses

*(Continued from page 68)*

them were never cashed, but that investment in good will is still drawing interest.

#### Runs Several Clinics

Pro Tom McHugh at Tanforan donates his time for two six-week clinics for Juniors at the driving range during the summer vacation. Besides sharpening the youngsters' interest in golf, the classes bring out the mothers and perform a subtle sales job at the same time.

While women make up a small percentage of total play, they have their day. At Tanforan, each Tuesday is ladies day and McHugh gives tips freely at a group clinic. Recently he has added a second clinic on Fridays for beginners. These pay off in green fees and in the sale of clubs, balls and other equipment as the women's interest and skill increase.

#### Hooked Drives Retrieved

The driving range at Tanforan borders the left side of the ninth hole which is 180-yards long. Many a hooked or pulled tee shot lands over the short wire fence.

Nearly every ball hit onto the driving range has been returned to golfers, who report the loss to the manager as they leave. Picking the errant balls out of the collection of range balls at the end of the day isn't easy, but it's part of the service that keeps golfers coming back.

In addition to two large putting greens, always open to players, Tanforan maintains two rough greens as targets for short pitch shots, and a protected portion of the practice tee where golfers can hit from the grass surface.

#### Sells "Dollar" Golf

It's not surprising that Tanforan's owners know something about staging a good show and treating customers well. One of the owners of the course is Clarence L. (Brick) Laws, longtime theater owner-manager in the Bay Area and former owner of the Oakland Oaks, a professional baseball team. During his ownership of the Oaks, Laws brought in Dolph Camilli, Casey Stengel, Charlie Dressen and the late Mel Ott as managers — and employed the popular Lefty O'Doul from San Francisco.

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Laws and a partner, Joe Blumenfeld, started Tanforan after watching the successful experience of Golden Gate Fields. They went after Bay Meadows first and were turned down, and got the same treatment at Tanforan, at first. Then, Blumenfeld bought into the Tanforan oval and convinced his co-owners of the possibilities in a "dollar" golf course.

Laws' son, Bill, now manages the San Bruno layout, which cost more than \$100,000 to construct. A substantial portion of the total investment is represented by an automatic, underground sprinkler system, triggered by a master clock. Golden Gate Fields has considered a similar installation and manager William Provence says the cost has been estimated at \$35,000.

The City of San Bruno, without a golf course until play at Tanforan began, quickly adapted. The Lions Club arranged for a city tournament, which drew about 150 entries in 1962 and again last year. Conducted over one weekend, with each participant playing 36 holes, it provides the only opportunity to make a reservation to play golf at any of the dollar courses. Neither of the other courses has conducted a tournament.

### Heavy Summer Play

Even though summer brings wind and fog to the area, play is heaviest then. The long days give commuters a chance to play after work and they take advantage of it in great numbers. Some can even enjoy early dinner with the family and still play nine holes before the sun goes down.

All of the courses can boast attractive pro shops, and lunch counters where grilled sandwiches and beer, as well as coffee and soft drinks are served. During the San Bruno city tournament at Tanforan, iced Lucky Lager beer, sponsor of the Lucky International Tournament in San Francisco) is made available to all players at the halfway mark.

None of the ranges at the three courses has made a go of it at night. Weather probably is the major handicap. Golfers who wonder why lights haven't been installed at the dollar courses for night play get the same answer — windy, cold and foggy evenings might strangle night

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golf before it started.

The banked turns of the racetracks and the grand stands shut out the outside world at the track courses, and all within is golf. Black and orange furlong markers serve as guide posts for calculating yardage and selecting clubs. The track rail takes on an ominous character — out of bounds. Tee markers at Tanforan naming each hole for a famous race horse were in use for a while. But all is golf at the racetracks when the ponies aren't running.

## Interruption Is A Problem

Even so, the courses don't come up winners every time. Professionals and course managers complain about the two-month racing season, during which golf must subside. It's just long enough for regulars to get the habit of playing elsewhere, and the casual golfing customers aren't likely to watch for the course reopening. Play is always light until word gets around again. If the racing season is followed by short, winter days the effect of the layoff is more acute.

Both Tanforan and Golden Gate Fields lie in windy fog belts where typical

summer weather may call for heavy sweaters and thermal underwear. The wind, sometimes so strong that it threatens to topple golfers addressing their putts, can make poorly hit shots look unbelievably bad. But many golfers come to regard the weather as part of the challenge.

Bay Meadows has been plagued by a peculiar set of problems which has resulted in litigation between the course operators and owners of the race track. Part of the contention centers around racing dates, which have multiplied unexpectedly. The racing schedule there has always included extra dates for harness racing, something neither of the other racetrack courses worry about. The golf parking area at Bay Meadows is as far from the pro shop as a par-5 hole, too, while golfers can drive their cars within a wedge shot of the pro shops at the other two.

Golden Gate Fields has entrenched itself firmly in the hearts of golfers in the east bay, where population continues to grow at a phenomenal pace. It is probably the soundest of the three enterprises,



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and with the track management in the saddle, its future is well assured.

On the other hand, the uneasy state of affairs at Bay Meadows makes its future unpredictable. Tanforan, where the play has grown to challenge that of Golden Gate Fields in only three years, has been sold. New owners have announced that the track will be razed and a real estate development constructed in its place. But the Laws believe they have a couple of years remaining, and a favorable settlement in store if their lease is shortened.

### May Open Elsewhere

When they are uprooted at Tanforan the Laws family may be ready to open a course at some other racetrack. They are looking for a likely spot now, but may have to go beyond the Bay Area. If they find it, the good will they've established at Tanforan and their contribution to race-track golf are sure to cause golfers to come pounding down the stretch in search of the best prize of all — a darn nice place to play golf.

### Cut Club Freight Rates

Braniff International Airways of Dallas, Tex., has announced a 50 per cent reduction in excess baggage charges for carrying golf clubs between the U.S. and South America. Between U. S. cities and Mexico City, Braniff will charge a flat rate of \$4 for carrying clubs.

## Associate Memberships

(Continued from page 24)

Junior and Women's programs also have been established for the associates. Women who have associate member cards, pay \$15 per year for golf privileges plus green fees. They are only slightly restricted as to when they can play — being barred from the course on Men's day and until 1:30 p.m. on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.

### Revise Starting Time

As a concession to regular members, we adopted a revised starting time sys-