

LAKE MERCED HOLDS THE LINE

When strategic acres were lost to a freeway, the first inclination at the San Francisco club was to relocate . . . Then someone suggested reclaiming a gulch and rebuilding several holes . . . The club remains in the same old spot, the course is going to be better than it ever was . . . and, of course, the members are happy

By **DON CURLEE**

When the State of California's highway department claimed a portion of San Francisco's well-known Lake Merced G&CC as right-of-way for a freeway it was useless for the 42-year-old club to resist. But by engaging patience, statesmanship, good business judgment and an imaginative golf course architect, Lake Merced expects to be fully playable and perhaps better than ever by this summer. Best of all, play has never stopped because of construction.

It wasn't just club property that the state needed, but a strategic 11.8 acres that included the clubhouse and entrance to the club, the water tower and most of the 10th fairway. Naturally the parcel had unusual value to the golf club and the adjudged fair market value was considerable too. The state eventually paid \$2.1 million (including land, buildings, improvements, severance, loss of access, loss

of playing privileges and cost of utility relocation).

To Sell or Hang On?

At first it looked as if nothing short of complete reconstruction and, very probably, substantial shortening of the course could salvage it. Others considered even more drastic action — selling the entire 150 acres and looking for a new site.

At the depth of the uncertainties an exciting possibility occurred. Why not reclaim Knowles Gulch, an eroded and ugly scar that ran for about 1,400 feet along the northern edge of the club's property? Approximately 450 feet wide and 150 feet deep, it served no better purpose than to catch sharply-hooked drives off the north tee. It was so forboding that few golfers even bothered to peer over its edge to look for their ball, much less try to descend its precipitous sides.

Nobody seems sure when or by whom the suggestion was made to reclaim the

gulch. They do remember that it sounded pretty impractical at the outset — but not to golf course architect, Robert Muir Graves. He regarded the gulch's 13.2 acres as fair exchange for the 11.8 lost to the freeway, and the one chance of keeping 18 full-length holes.

Hookers Backed Idea

Fill dirt is expensive and Graves knew it. The 400,000 cubic yards needed to level out the gulch would cost a pretty penny. So he proposed pulling it down from the adjacent fairway, building up the gulch and lowering the old fairway to create a step effect. Club members were elated with the solution, especially those with a tendency to hook.

In many ways this basic decision and the acceptance of Graves' other proposals for refurbishing Lake Merced were only the beginning. Construction — the tough part — had yet to be accomplished.

But all was not complete happiness, nor agreement. Is it ever, in any club? Necessarily based on relative land values, the negotiation with the state had focused great attention on the monetary value of the club's proprietary membership.

Tempting Offer

One San Francisco newspaper reported in late summer, 1963, that the club was considering an offer of \$16 million or more for the entire course. This, the article reasoned, amounted to a substantial monthly income for life for all members. It appeared at an inopportune time in the club's negotiations with the state and club directors denied validity of the report emphatically; they even demanded a retraction. They feared that the state might regard it as a "planted" story intended to affix an inflated value on the property. They were having trouble enough coming to terms without this.

The board of directors had become extremely sensitive about anything that might upset negotiations. They had learned the hard way that the state was a tough customer and a seasoned veteran at buying property.

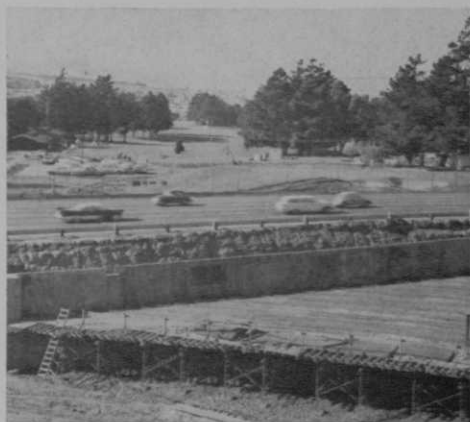
Originally, the board thought the club could be represented in the negotiations by a delegation of two or three board members. This group, armed with a property appraisal and a rough estimate of



Old tenth green at Lake Merced was getting its final play when this photo was taken. Framework of new clubhouse is seen in the background.



New car storage room and caddie house are being used as temporary clubhouse during reconstruction.



Freeway excavation, which took about a 13-acre slice out of the San Francisco course, goes on in the foreground. Traffic is being temporarily routed over Junipero Serra boulevard.

The pro, supt. and contractors got together every week and devised ways of keeping at least 10 holes playable

the cost to reconstruct the course and build a new clubhouse got nowhere fast in the first session with the state representatives.

Bring in Attorneys

Club President James Frank recalls clearly the board's reaction when his inexperienced delegation reported the outcome. "We immediately hired two attorneys, each from a different firm, and a third consulting expert in highway condemnation," he says. That was the beginning of serious negotiations with the state's experts in 1963; they continued tooth-and-nail for 15 months.

Pressure was added because of a previous commitment by the club that the state could take possession of its portion by Sept., 1964. The club was anxious to get the amount of compensation settled so it could establish a budget for the work it had to do. (Directors eventually authorized expenditures in the full amount received for the parcel — \$2.1 million.)

Of course there were some early bills to pay too. Stanford Research Institute had been retained to survey potential new course sites in the immediate San Francisco Bay area. One was on prospective fill land in San Mateo County, covered at the time by waters of the bay.

Considered Buying Another Club

Before the final decision to stick with the old site and turn the liability of the gulch into an exciting asset, purchase of an existing club in Marin County across the Golden Gate, was proposed but an offer was never made.

Ironically, one important consideration was the very freeway which caused all the hubbub in the first place. It will bring the club within an easy 10-12 minute drive from downtown San Francisco. The other sites were much farther out.

Clearing and excavation began last April. Besides treatment of the gulch, which actually creates two new holes, the architect's plans also will accomplish:

- reconstruction (and relocation in many cases) of all greens, and en-

largement from an average size of 4,000 square feet to 5,200;

- acquisition of a separate practice area (part of one fairway was used formerly);
- of one fairway was used formerly);
- an increase in overall length from 6,542 to 6,731 yards center to center, and a championship length of 7,000 yards;
- installation of a fully automatic, underground sprinkler system;
- retention of about 35 acres of tree canopy (only 8.1 acres less than the original layout) and planting of hundreds of new trees;
- reduction of hill climbing — from 301 to 276 vertical feet.

Problems in the Gulch

A number of tough problems of coordination were encountered in construction. In the gulch, five major utility lines had to be relocated or accommodated. These included a 54-inch water line, a 36-inch storm drain, a 30-inch water line, a 30-inch gas main and a 15-inch sanitary sewer.

In the opinion of Bob Graves the real kicker was in keeping the course playable. With justifiable pride he recalls that the aggregate of playable holes has never gone below 10 at any time. He credits the unusual dedication of Ed Berardy, the supt., and the cooperative attitude of the contractors, Sunshine Landscaping (prime) and Wilmoth Construction (grading), both of Fresno, Calif., with preserving maximum playability.

Weekly sessions were held in which Graves, Berardy and the pro laid out temporary alignments for the week ahead. Each hole was handicapped and a mimeographed score card printed. Often a temporary hole's description went like this: "Old number 10 with temporary green."

Protecting existing turf meant that grading and construction vehicles often had to take the long way around instead of across expanses of grass and fairways, but it was taken in stride. (*Continued on page 100*)

"Outdrives them All"

BOWERS
Power **RAM**
GOLF CAR BATTERY



Bowers power-full POWER RAM golf car battery stays stronger, lasts longer... drives your golf cars further, exceeding all your expectations. The POWER RAM's extra distance means extra profits. Replace with Bowers POWER RAM. Write for complete details.

BOWERS

BATTERY AND SPARK PLUG CO.

(Div. of General Battery and Ceramic Corp.)

READING, PA.

Lake Merced

(Continued from page 30)

The members took it in stride, too; the ladies have been particularly loyal. President James Frank says that a number of clubs have responded generously to the appeal of the Northern California GA for playing privileges for Lake Merced members. He is planning reciprocal arrangements already for the time when the new Lake Merced layout opens.

Temporary Clubhouse

A residence adjoining the property has been leased and the kitchen pushed to its culinary limits, while the rest of the house fulfills a portion of the normal lounge function. A corner of the new caddy building and cart storage building serves as a snack shop. The two combined are a temporary replacement for the old clubhouse, long since razed.

The new clubhouse is rising amidst stately old trees. It's a two-level structure that will enclose 36,000 square feet and was designed by San Francisco architect, Mario Gaidano. The lockers and pro shop

will occupy the lower level, opening onto the practice greens and fairway level. Public facilities and the lounge area will be above with a drive-up and main pedestrian access from the higher level of the surrounding terrain there.

Members Are Pleased

"Our members are pleased with the decision to stay and revitalize the course," Frank says. "Somebody said recently that we now have the only course in the immediate area where the land has been made to conform to its use as a golf course, in contrast to allowing the course to ramble over existing terrain."

New at Lake Merced is Haywood (Woody) Wright, formerly teaching pro and shop operator at the Ojai Valley G&CC. He assumed his duties only a few weeks ago.

The construction phase was nearly completed by the end of December. Everybody drew a sigh of relief, especially Graves, who said, "I've never been in such confusion or enjoyed anything so much in my life." Members agree that



may we spray through?

John Bean has a sprayer to fit your course

From tee to green, your course benefits from a John Bean sprayer. Take the high-pressure, boom-type sprayer shown. Fairway weed, brush and mosquito control. Liquid fertilizing. Tree spraying. High-pressure outlet for hose-and-gun green and "spot" spraying. Dust abatement. Stand-by fire protection. Even leaf and brush burning. Select from the most complete line of hydraulic and air-type sprayers, booms and accessories. Just ask the "sprayer people" . . .

Write for free sprayer catalog.
Mosquito Control Data Kit
also sent upon request.



JOHN BEAN DIVISION

Lansing, Mich. - Orlando, Fla. - San Jose, Calif.

they haven't enjoyed the construction phase, but nearly all are convinced that the decision to hold out at the same old stand was a wise one. Lake Merced, they add, probably is a better course for the changes that have been made.

Clubs Reasonably Priced

(Continued from page 32)

degree lie and the No. 3 and No. 4 woods 58 degrees.

Boring the head for proper face alignment is an operation that makes or breaks a club. For the average player, the head should be bored so as to have a 1 to 1½ degree hook since most high handicap players have a tendency to slice.

For the professional or low handicap player, the boring should be such as to create a straight or slightly open face since the expert player is generally trying to avoid a hook.

The radius of the face of the club from toe to heel is called the bulge. I believe it should be 11 degrees. The bulge has a

tendency to minimize the spin of a hook or slice stroke. (Note that I say minimize not eliminate.)

Grip Size Important

Grip size and uniformity are a must in a good club. Regardless of how good a set of clubs may be the least variance in the grip size will not give all the same feel and, consequently, all will not play the same.

The flex of the shaft must be absolutely identical in each club in a set. The flexing point of the shaft should be in the same position on each shaft all the way through the set.

Many of the qualities of a good club are hidden. They are there because skill, time and money put them there. If they weren't there the clubs would not be playable.

This is the story the public must be told.

Classified Ads • P 148