



Leon Emerson, 83, and his wife, 76, play Imperial daily. Mrs. Emerson was once Westbrook CC (Mansfield, O.) ladies champion, but the shorter holes are now more to her liking. Watching is pro Carl Kushin.

## Pitch-and-Putt Next Door

*Imperial GC in Mansfield, O., catches overflow from its Par 3 installation with a chip shot course that is giving a good return on a small investment*

By CHARLES STINE

**A** lighted golf course that was built for \$12,000 on two acres of land attracts the top amateurs in the golfing hotbed of Mansfield, Ohio. It is an idea that could be adapted almost anywhere, and profitably, too, the owners say.

The nine hole course is a pitch-and-putt with so many refinements as to make it a different type operation altogether. The holes are short, the greens are large and of almost private club quality.

The excellent condition of the grounds makes the shots equivalent of chip shots on the finest golf course. The entire area is drained by underground tile and a sprinkler system covers greens, tees and fairways. The hardest rain has never put the course out of play for more than two hours.

The pitch-and-putt is operated by Imperial Golf Courses Inc. It is adjacent to a first class 18-hole, 2539-yard Par-3 course operated by the same group. It is situated five miles east of Mansfield on State Route 430.

Holes on the pitch-and-putt range from 25 to 60 yards. Greens are 1000 to 1500 square feet. Rubber mats and rubber tees are furnished. There is however plenty of good turf on the tees for those who want to hit chip shots from the ground.

All holes are par three, although the experienced golfer is aiming for the pin, not just the green, on his tee shot.

Imperial Golf Courses is the brainchild of H. Robert Gimbel, home builder who describes himself as "local duffer." He saw a similar operation at American Golf Club near Coral Ridge, Fla. and decided something like it was needed in the North. As far as he knows the Mansfield course is only the second of its kind. A third is under construction at Galion, Ohio, 14 miles west of Mansfield by a group that has adopted Imperial's idea.

#### Tee in the Sand

One of the features of the Galion course is the use of several alternate tees in sand traps where the "tee" shot will be a blast with a sand iron.

Both the Imperial pitch-and-putt and its accompanying big brother have been open three years. Construction started in July, 1961 and the course opened the following June. Carl Kushin, a close friend of Gimbel's and one of the original planners, gave up his standing as a top local amateur and became professional.

Construction of the pitch-and-putt course ran about \$7500, with another \$4500 for lighting. All work was contracted out. Lighting is around the perimeter only but is arranged to provide a total absence of shadows. There are eight poles, with 38 fixtures of 1500-watts each. The electric bill runs around \$200 monthly during the summer when the course is open until midnight. In the spring and fall, hours are adjusted according to the weather.

#### Covers Two Acres

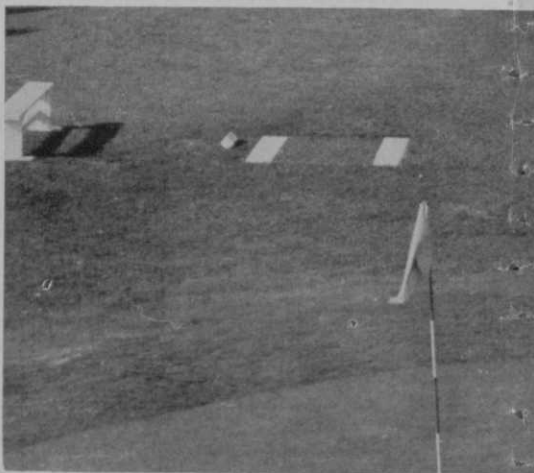
The course was built on two acres that were originally flat. No dirt was removed. Greens were built up from top soil skinned from a neighboring housing development, and in the same manner as if they were being built for a regulation course. The only exception was the omission of

tiling and layers of gravel or other "padding" at the base. All greens were seeded with Penncross bent.

The large size of the greens permits varying pin placement. Gimbel says the greens have not shown wear even in the hottest weather or during the heaviest play.

#### 50-Cent Fee

Fees for the pitch-and-putt is 50 cents July, 1961 and the course opened the following nine holes with a special midweek daytime rate of 25 cents for each additional nine. A \$1.50 fee is charged for all day play seven days a week. Season memberships to the two Imperial courses are \$70 for men, \$60 for women, \$120 for man



Tees at Imperial are only a few steps from the green. They are made of rubber, but player can tee off from turf if he cares to.

and wife and \$25 for each child in the family. Junior single membership is \$40.

Business for the pitch-and-putt comes from all classes, says Kushin. "We get couples on dates, parents with youngsters, and serious golfers who want either practice or a fast skin game." One iron, a putter and one ball are furnished with each green fee. A nine iron is given unless the player requests some other club. Serious golfers, of course, bring their own equipment and usually play with either a wedge or a chipping iron.

Kushin says many regulars who finish

*(Continued on page 134D)*

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## Pitch-and-Putt

(Continued from page 42)

play on the bigger course will come next door for a fast round on the pitch-and-putt before leaving if they find they have an extra half-hour available.

Mowing is done with the seven-gang mower used on the bigger course and finished with hand mowers, although Gimbel says a gang of three would be more practical if the pitch-and-putt were being operated alone.

### One Man Operation

Gimbel says one man conceivably could operate such a course alone and make \$10,000 a year in a climate that permits play year-round or nearly so. He pictures it as an ideal retirement business.

Imperial is five miles from Mansfield, a distance which Gimbel does not feel hurts play. He says, however, if he were building a pitch-and-putt course by itself, he would try to find two acres nearer the city.

### \$50-\$60 Income

Only for the last few months of 1964 were receipts from the pitch-and-putt kept separate from those of the longer course, so no accurate account of the three years' business is available. During this test period green fees from the pitch-and-putt were \$50 to \$60 on "good" Saturdays and Sundays.

"One of the problems has been to make the business more consistent," Kushin says. Even in excellent weather, receipts from one weekday to the next may vary by 300 per cent. There seems to be no accounting for it. Occasionally a large group will drop in after an outing and play all evening and make a mid-week day one of the best.

### Course Record — 22

Course record is 22, shot by several persons. Better golfers will hit all nine greens and drop in a birdie or two but Kushin says it's surprising the number of beginners who whale away at a 30-yard shot and end up farther from the green than where they started. Once in

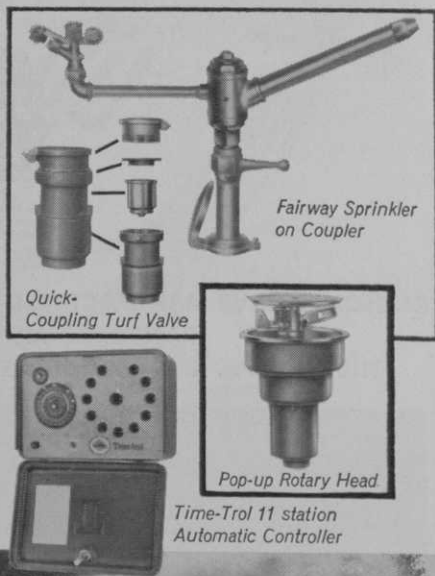
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a while there is even a lost ball. Balls furnished by the course are of medium price quality but are round and smooth to make for good putting.

The course is in many ways a direct competitor to miniature golf except that it allows play on real turf under real golf conditions. A miniature course, however, operates directly across the road from Imperial and neither seems to be hurt.

Proper descriptive advertising has been one of the problems of Imperial.

"People who haven't been here tend to think of our large Par-3 course as the pitch-and-putt, and of our pitch-and-putt as a miniature course," says Gimbel "We're still trying to explain the distinction after three years."

## Main Course Is Exceptional

The Imperial main course is a fine 18-hole layout built on naturally rolling terrain. It boasts of being the best Par-3 in Ohio and may be a match for anything anywhere. There are tee shots for all clubs. The shortest hole is 92 yards, the longest 222. Greens average 2,500

square feet. The 18-hole layout covers 37 acres. One hole plays over a lake and another has a lake alongside the fairway.

The operators are considering lighting at least nine holes within the next year or two.

## Strong League Play

Imperial's big course is not just a practice course. Many of Mansfield's golfers play their regular golf there despite the fact that the city of 50,000 has five full-size layouts. Twelve leagues play regular schedules at Imperial every week through the summer.

One of the things of which Imperial is most proud is the four-man team championship won by its members in competition with 11 other clubs at Mansfield's Twin Lakes club in 1963. All other teams were from full size courses and several were private clubs.

National Golf Day  
May 31