

A bright future

Continued course development in America is tangible proof of the extent and stable nature of the game's growth.

by Roger Ganem

Will this be the year the number of semi-private golf courses exceed the number of private courses? It appears likely to happen, for the first time in the history of American golf.

According to the latest figures compiled by the National Golf Foundation, in 1967 there were 4,166 private courses in the United States to 3,960 semi-private courses, a difference of 206. Also on the rise again, were municipal courses, up to 1,210, their highest peak ever. These figures include 346 courses found through NGF course inventory research and not previously reported. (How private can a course get?!)

In 1967, Americans played on 9,336 layouts, of which 5,069 were 9-hole courses and 4,267 were 18 holes or more.

The number of semi-private courses, which permit green fee play, has been on the increase almost without interruption since 1931, the earliest year for which golf facility statistics were available. Then they numbered 700 to the private course total of 4,448.

Golf has been played in America for more than 80 years, but the game's growth was manifested in the last 10 years. Since 1957 golfers have increased from 3,812,000 to over 9,100,000, an increase of 140 per cent.

All told, 6,200,000 men, 1,960,000 women and 940,000 juniors took to the fairways at least 15 times, and 1,600,000 played less than that, last year.

Most of the heavy action was handled at the 1,210 municipal courses, where 2,800,000 men,

820,000 women and 480,000 juniors got their pleasure. Municipal courses represent only 14 per cent of the existing tracks, yet account for 40 per cent of play.

Almost as popular were the 3,960 semi-private courses, where 2,500,000 men, 800,000 women and 300,000 youngsters swung and swayed. Over 35 per cent of the play was recorded on semi-private layouts.

The number of golfers playing in the exclusivity of the 4,166 private courses totalled 900,000 men, 340,000 women and 160,000 juniors.

GOLF COURSE GROWTH

Golf is beginning to feel the effects of the space age. Lack of space, that is.

Each year there has been an increase of 10 per cent in player activity, which more than offsets the new 300 regulation golf courses that have come into play annually in the past decade.

In the past ten years municipal facilities have increased 44 per cent, private clubs 42 per cent and semi-private courses a whopping 99 per cent.

Despite this glowing growth picture, the courses become a bit more crowded each year. When you consider the trends toward more leisure time, rising incomes, longer lives and expected population increases for the years ahead, it seems doubtful there will ever be sufficient golf facilities to meet the growing demands.

Last year, 437 new golf facilities opened for play, including 278 new regulation length courses, 114 additions to regulation length courses,

40 new par-3 layouts and five additions to par-3s.

Of these, 50 per cent were semi-private, 37 per cent private, 11 per cent municipal and 2 per cent were industrial, collegiate, military, etc.

Leading the activity in course-building was California with 39. Pennsylvania came next with 27, then Ohio with 26, New York 25, Michigan 24, Florida 22, Texas 17,

Growth of U.S. Courses

Year	Courses	Notes
1968	9836	ESTIMATED
1967	9336	
1966	8672	
1965	8323	
1964	7893	
1963	7477	
1962	7070	
1961	6623	
1960	6385	
1959	5991	
1958	5745	
1957	5553	
1956	5358	
1955	5218	
1954	5076	
1953	5056	
1952	5026	
1951	4970	
1950	4931	
1949	4926	
1948	4901	
1947	4870	
1946	4817	
1945	4808	
1941	5209	
1939	5303	
1937	5196	
1934	5727	
1931	5691	

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Illinois and Virginia, 14 each, and Georgia and Wisconsin, 11 each.

Harry C. Eckhoff, director, Eastern Region, National Golf Foundation, points out an interesting innovation in course development: "Two new courses for use by junior golfers only were opened in 1967. They are the Lincoln Junior Golf Course, a 9-hole par-3 municipal operation built by the Lincoln, Nebraska Park and Recreation Department at a cost of \$58,000, and a four-hole 335-yard layout for children only, an addition to Bangor's (Maine) 18-hole municipal operation.

"Three other known golf courses for juniors only in the nation are Hazeltine National's (near Minneapolis) junior golf course, a 9-hole par-3 layout of approximately 820 yards built on 14 acres adjacent to Hazeltine's regulation 18-hole private club; a junior municipal par-3 course operated by the Syracuse, New York Park Department in its Burnet Park; and the Hershey (Pa.) Juvenile Golf Club, a 2,316 yard 9-hole facility which is part of the 54 hole golf complex developed by the Hershey Chocolate Company."

Last year, new course openings were down 8 per cent from the 1966 figures. New construction starts were down 17 per cent. The shortage of available mortgage money at reasonable rates which had prevailed during the past two years, and the increasing costs of construction are having their affect on golf facility development.

Another problem is the rising cost of land. Finding the necessary acreage to build golf courses is also be-

coming a definite factor that has to be reckoned with. To provide a suitable 18-hole layout, no less than 110 acres is considered minimum by the experts, if for no other reason than to protect the players, whose lives would be endangered by courses with parallel fairways.

THE PRIVATE COURSE ENIGMA

There are 282 less private courses in the United States now than there were in 1931, compared to 3,260 more semi-private courses and 667 more municipal courses.

The Midwest area leads in the decrease in private courses with a minus 525, as every state in that section today has less courses of this category than existed in 1931. Tops among them is Kansas with 81 less private courses. (Actually, Kansas' 216 courses of all types is less than the 1931 figure of 225.) Illinois' 194 private courses is 75 less than in 1931; Wisconsin has 87, down 64, Nebraska has 60, a drop of 71, and Michigan, with 148, is down 52. Ohio's 188 private courses rank second to Illinois, but this figure represents a drop of only 10 from 1931.

The biggest reduction in private courses in the nation is seen in New York State. The 277 courses of today are 99 less than the amount in 1931.

The only section of the country showing an increase in private golf courses is in the South. The states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia have

combined to show a total of 1,086 private courses, compared to only 609 in 1931. Each of the states listed above showed a 1967 increase except Florida. The heaviest upsurge occurred in North Carolina (78), Georgia (63), Alabama (61), and Virginia (60). In Florida there are 125 private courses, exactly the number in the year 1931.

Other individual states showing any significant increase in private courses over the 1931 totals are Maryland and D.C. 35, Pennsylvania 29, West Virginia 20, Hawaii, 15, Utah 9, Texas 8, California 6 and New Mexico 5.

The state with the biggest gain percentage-wise? Alaska. Its growth zoomed from nothing at all to two new courses, one a private facility and the other a semi-private course for its 273,000 inhabitants. This means there is one course for every 136,500 people, the poorest record in the entire nation. But for some reason, there are few complaints.

THE MONEY BEING SPENT

Money-wise, the sky is still the limit. There are more people playing golf, watching golf and spending money on golf. The pot for the touring professional is \$5 million and the totals spent by the players for equipment is an astronomical \$150 million.

According to figures released by the Athletic Goods Manufacturing Association in its 1966 Census Report, the latest available, Americans bought 12,515,250 golf clubs, 7,765,608 dozen golf balls, 1,006,385 golf bags, 71,689 golf club carts, 335,528 golf gloves and sundries valued at \$2,065,692.

As in previous years, the least expensive (cost-wise) iron club was the most popular, with 2,770,498 pieces bought. And, as in the past, the most expensive wood club was purchased by the majority of customers who bought 1,219,619 pieces. Good taste also showed in golf ball sales, with the highest priced ball being the most sought after. In golf bags, however, the finest quality was the least in demand. About eight out of every 10

1966 AGMA CENSUS REPORT

ITEM	UNIT OF MEASURE	1966 quantity	1965 quantity	1964 quantity	1966 value	1965 value	1964 value
Golf club irons	each	8,811,973	8,223,636	7,649,060	\$ 51,261,221	\$ 49,419,071	\$ 44,213,328
Golf club woods	each	3,703,277	3,318,108	3,082,514	\$ 31,861,583	\$ 28,527,977	\$ 26,225,771
Golf clubs	each	12,515,250	11,541,744	10,731,574	\$ 83,122,804	\$ 77,947,048	\$ 70,439,099
Golf balls	dozen	7,765,608	7,272,120	6,145,199	\$ 51,888,302	\$ 49,631,851	\$ 43,473,126
Golf bags	each	1,006,385	941,434	863,492	\$ 11,521,728	\$ 10,718,599	\$ 10,086,682
Golf carts	each	71,689	.....	172,174	\$ 1,066,853	.....	\$ 2,774,725
Golf gloves	each	335,528	.....	.....	\$ 411,292	.....	.....
Other golf equipment	\$ 2,065,692	\$ 1,701,054	\$ 1,475,414
					\$150,076,671	\$139,998,552	\$128,249,046

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Golf forecast

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of the total 1,006,385 bags sold were in the two least expensive of the four price categories.

The growth in golf equipment sales has been consistent, increasing between 7 per cent to 9 per cent annually. In 1967, a golf equipment sales accounted for 52.9 per cent of the nation's total athletic and sporting goods sales.

In total related golf sales, including the \$248 million estimated to maintain the nation's courses, wearing apparel and liquid refreshments, a conservative estimate has been placed in excess of \$1 billion.

GOLF'S BRIGHT FUTURE

Golf is a sport that persons of all ages may participate in throughout their entire lifetime. It offers the advantage of fresh air and sunshine, exercise, relaxation, companionship, challenge and rewards of achievement. Even handicapped persons and those who might be out of condition for other, more strenuous sports, can play.

According to Mr. Eckhoff, "Golf course development in the U.S. in recent years is the most tangible and convincing proof of the extent and stable nature of golf's growth. There is every indication that golf facility development will continue to expand.

"Requests for NGF course planning aids in 1967 were up 30 per cent over 1966. An interesting golf course is now considered an integral part of newly planned communities—state, regional and local parks, recreation complexes and resort areas, schools and colleges and area regional renewal programs.

"Golf facilities benefit a community in many ways. They stimulate civic pride and create new business; they provide open space and increase property values in areas surrounding the golf course; they attract new industry, tourists and conventions; and, by no means least, they provide healthful, enjoyable recreation for all age groups."

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