



Grassing up at Alvamar

This new Kansas public course faced unusual turf problems. Here's how it solved them

Alvamar Hills GC, an 18-hole daily fee facility, opened May 15, 1968. Until then Lawrence had never had an 18-hole, or grass greens, public course. Now it has one of the best.

Lawrence, with a population of 30,000 residents and 16,500 university students, lies about midway between Kansas City and Topeka. Both cities were short of public golf facilities. The Kansas Turnpike could deliver anyone in that population area of 400,000 to the course within 30 minutes.

Here was an untapped potential until Alvamar Hills GC was conceived, built and opened.

About three years ago a group of local businessmen bought a hilly, 460-acre farm located a mile west of Lawrence and Kansas University. The leader was Bob Billings, now controller for the 16-

member corporation.

The land within the golf course cost \$160,000 or about \$840 an acre. The site had two ridges with a valley between, split by a creek. One ridge and most of the valley—about 188 acres—was set aside for a golf course. The remainder was saved for homesites, which are still being sold and developed.

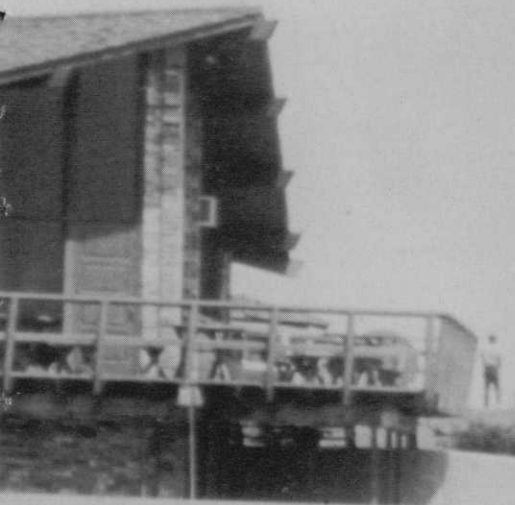
Bob Dunning of Mission, Kan., was retained to design the course. The concept projected by the owners and Dunning was for a tough but flexible course, making liberal use of water and hills, big greens and tees. They wanted a course that would be fun for ladies, students and average public links players, yet would also be good enough to be a major tournament site.

And the result was just that. Twelve holes, some steep, lay up

or down hills. Using five tee settings, the course plays 5,749 yards for ladies to 7,322 yards tournament length, where it is rated 74.7. Tees are as long as 120 yards, average 87 and about 9,500 square feet. Greens average almost 8,000 square feet.

Lawrence is located in a region notoriously difficult for growing stable golf turf. Summers are hot, windy and frequently humid. Winters are chilly, but with little snow. Yet already Alvamar Hills GC is in mature playing condition.

Much of the credit goes to course superintendent Mel Anderson. He is also a stockholder and joined in the new venture after four years as superintendent at Lawrence CC. He in turn gives credit to the zoysiagrass used on the fairways and tees, Cohansey bentgrass on greens and a fully-



Lawrence, Kan., once evoked thoughts of Quantrill's Raiders. Now, it is the peaceful site of Alvarado Hills GC.

By JERRY CLAUSSEN

National Golf Foundation Club Planning
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automatic irrigation system with individual head control.

The use of zoysia makes Alvarado Hills GC almost unique. It is definitely a first for golf courses in that region. Most courses in Kansas and Missouri are covered by bluegrass-bermuda mixtures for fairways and a variety of mixtures of bermuda-blue-bent-zoysia on the tees.

Zoysia as a turfgrass rates high in tolerating heat, drought, shade, disease and salinity. It resists wear and can be closely mowed. Drawbacks are: low cool temperature tolerance and slowness of establishment. It has average winter hardiness.

Anderson reports these reasons for choosing zoysia:

"Over the past few years I noticed that zoysia makes a very

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beautiful and splendid playing surface. It is a rich, dark green and produces an upright leaf blade, which tees the ball up at all times. Recovery from divots is excellent. It is reasonably resistant to disease and insects have not been a problem in this area. Another factor is that zoysia can be mowed to a half inch whereas bluegrass is mowed one to 1 1/2 inches. The water and fertilizer needed after establishment is about half the amount needed for bluegrass or bent. Even though zoysia goes dormant and tan in the winter, the blades stay upright to tee the ball up at all times."

To get a head start on growth, a 2 1/3-acre nursery of Meyer Z-52 zoysia was sprigged July, 1966. Planting of fairways and tees from the nursery was started in late June, 1967. The zoysia was mixed with bluegrass to build a cover crop during establishment. The fairways were about 50 per cent zoysia by the time the course opened and over 75 per cent by the end of 1968.

Planting costs came to about \$500 a fairway. With rented farm machinery, the clay fairway soil was plowed, disced, leveled, harrowed, then smoothed with a drag. It took about 30 days in all.

The zoysia nursery sod was cut 1 1/2 inches deep, leaving some soil for a stolon mix. The crop was ground into stolons through an ensilage grinder and planted with a farm manure spreader. The rate was about 15,000 square feet covered per load or 30 acres planted per acre of stolons harvested. Each planted area was immediately disced in and watered, all within 20 minutes after the sod was taken from the nursery.

The automatic irrigation system, with master controllers in Anderson's office, helped keep the newly-planted areas constantly moist. Also, to encourage rapid

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growth, fairways and tees were fertilized monthly with 176 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre.

For the greens, the choice of Cohansey was also unusual. Most courses in the area have Seaside or Penncross bent on greens.

The Cohansey was also stolonized. From a one-acre nursery, enough was harvested to plant 140,000 square feet, at 12 bushels per 1,000. The rolling greens had a dense, virtually 100 per cent cover by opening day.

The greens were built from a combination of Dunning's blueprints and personal supervision by Anderson. The base of each green has a herringbone pattern of drain trenches, filled with four inches of washed crushed rock. The seed bed mix is 12 inches deep, 76 per cent sand plus peat and native soil, mixed off site.

A local contractor did major earthmoving, filling and rough grading of greens, tees, fairways and four lakes. A Kansas City firm engineered and installed the irrigation system. Anderson and his crew finished the grading, planting and all the before-play maintenance.

The Toro Moist-O-Matic hydraulic irrigation system was a key to establishing rapid turf growth, says Anderson.

"We chose this system because of its versatility and pin-point watering capability with separate head control," he reports. "We also save labor and water."

The system operates through 412 fairway and tee heads, plus four to six more at each green. There are two master controllers and 24 satellite controllers. The water supply is municipal, up to 750 gallons a minute. The four lakes are strictly for hazards and for beauty.

In a dry summer week, Anderson waters fairways twice a week. The schedule is nine one night,

nine the next night, then skip a night. Greens are usually watered every other night. They seldom need daytime syringing, since the roots now run 10 to 12 inches deep.

Fairways and tees are cut at one-half inch, incredibly low for this area. Greens are mowed at seven-thirty-seconds of an inch.

Anderson's maintenance crew consists of four permanent employees plus six extra helpers in summer. His annual budget, not counting capital investment, is about \$50,000.

The investors ended up spending about \$500,000 for the course. This included \$84,000 for an unusual hexagon-shaped clubhouse, plus \$25,000 for furnishings. The main floor has 3,000 square feet, features a large pro shop, bag storage and lounge overlooking the course. Offices for pro John Bonella and living quarters for a watchman are on the second floor. The basement has storage for 40 golf cars. The course opened with 20 cars.

So far the concept and all major decisions have proven sound. Golfers in the area responded well the first summer, averaging 1,500 rounds per week through September 15. The owners expect about 40,000 rounds in 1969.

Golf gold is where you find it. Both investors and players have found it in Lawrence, an old town with a new image. □



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