

WILL THEY REMEMBER THE COURSE OR ONLY THE SCORE?



Webster defines character as "... distinctive qualities ...". In some cases golf course architects are given the financial means to develop distinctive qualities. The Monster at the Concord Hotel in New York State is a text book example. No expense was spared to build an exceptional layout for the scratch and low handicap golfer. In other cases nature was the craftsman on courses such as Pine Valley in New Jersey and Cypress Point in California. Although the designers of these two courses used the natural features to their best advantage, nature set the pace.

Few courses can afford unlimited funds for construction or have natural scenic wonders. Nevertheless, every course, from the smallest rural nine to the multi-million dollar private resort clubs, can strive to emphasize its particular character. The only two prerequisites are the desire and a firm idea of what the course character is or could be.

Age can determine character. Courses built before the 1920s are very likely to have features that are condemned, at least by the superintendent who tries to keep labor costs down. Steep banks and mounds are common construction evidences of horse and scoop or manual labor of yesteryear. The mound behind the trap is all the material that was removed to make the trap. Because this type of course is no longer built, it is unique. This uniqueness can be used to give it character, mood and feeling. Maturity and solidarity, the large native trees and the old clubhouse lend themselves to this feeling.

All signs should be kept to a minimum, especially on a private course and should be made of cast iron or aluminum, or cut into stone. The old standard cotton greens flags are also appropriate. Same goes for tee markers. One old club uses turn-of-the-century cast iron benches. It's off-beat, but completely in character. A course of this

When nature doesn't bless a course with charm and character and finances don't permit building in those qualities, there are still some relatively inexpensive and unique touches that can be added to make a course memorable

By Bill Smart

Superintendent, The Powelton Club, Newburgh, N.Y.

era might bring back the sand box for teeing up.

In keeping with the atmosphere, stone can be used for retaining walls and mall buildings, such as shelters and pumphouses. Another old club has a large substantial clubhouse made of old red weathered brick. Next to it, facing the third fairway, a small wooden shed houses the swimming pool filters. Unfortunately it has a flat slant roof, and the wooden siding is painted green. It breaks the mood and offends the senses.

Of course not all golf courses are vintage. Some are modern. This may not seem desirable; but to be new, it must also be up-to-date. This means large sweeping areas, big greens and tees—features that sweep and flow. Car paths automatically lead the golfer onward. This could be another type of character: spaciousness, breathing room away from the confines of office and city streets.

At one club on Long Island, the character is affluent. One comes away with the feeling that this must be one of the wealthiest clubs in the country. This may or may not be true, but the feeling is there. The grooming is exceptional and the landscaping is superb. Food, furnishing and service are second to none; needless to say the golfers expect no less on the course.

Many courses have potential character that is there, but not fully developed. One course in New England, for example, is located in a valley with no scenic wonders. Further, the budget does not allow anything special in the way of grooming. Chances are that many of the golfers will be from out of state and the chances are also good that the local people will have a keen sense of local pride. A good superintendent and his green committee could work with this. Start with stone walls—all New England courses have stone walls. A good laid up wall is a delight to the eyes. A covered bridge, out of the line of play, could

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Touches of wildlife: the Tropicana CC in Las Vegas (above, this page). Cultivated flowers (photos 1 and 4) add color to clubhouse grounds at Canterbury CC, Bedford Heights, Ohio, and Glen Oak CC, Glen Ellyn, Ill. A rustic fence at Stowe, Vt. (photo 2), adds character to the course while serving a function. Water, wild flowers and spectacular scenery combine to enhance the ambience of The Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs, W. Va., (photo 3). Bleached wood creates a pleasant design at Cypress Point, Pebble Beach, Calif., (photo 5).



double as a rain shelter. Split rail fences on property lines, rustic benches on tees and perhaps a hand pump or natural spring with a tin dipper are touches reminiscent of New England. The city golfer might remember the cold clear water after he has forgotten his score. An old farm wagon could be used for an annual flower planter near the clubhouse or first tee.

Here is an example of developing a potential feature. A sweet corn grower in upstate New York put in nine holes on more or less flat sandy bottom land. Very new, it still showed construction scars along the good-sized stream banks. I rode the edge of the course with him in a golf car and for lack of anything else to see, looked through the scrubby trees that lined the stream bank. The more I looked, the more I became fascinated. Rising from the far bank, out of the deep dark water was a sheer cliff or fissured rock that rose about 30 or 40 feet and was capped with a mantle of hemlock trees. It was a monument no one could build. And it was free. It ran the full length of a par four hole. I convinced the owner to clear away the brush to allow the golfer to view this treasure. It might not give the whole course character, but it certainly made that particular hole.

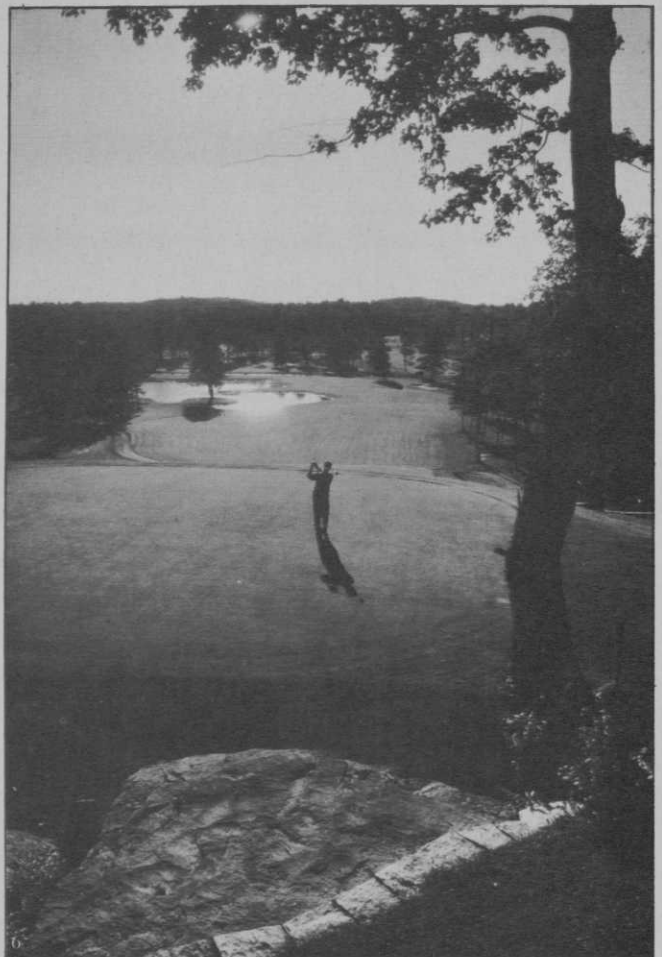
The most difficult challenge is the course that has nothing going for it. No history, no scenic wonders and no money. In this case the superintendent and green committee should take a long hard look at each hole and determine if some feature could be used to build some interest. Attention can be focused on a specimen tree, a rock outcropping, a small stream or a quaint bridge. Sometimes a small amount of effort will make some insignificant feature stand out and become the focal point for the onlooker—shape and prune the trees, landscape around the rock, use some stones in the stream to form a waterfall.

Lacking all else, the superintendent can build the course reputation on exceptionally fine turf and playing conditions. This is perhaps the most difficult pursuit, especially when turf and playing conditions are taken for granted by today's well-traveled golfer. It seems to me, however, that most courses with character also have fine turf. They seem to go hand in hand.

Sometimes a golf course will take on character solely because of the special talent of the superintendent. A course in Florida, for example, looked much like any other except for one factor. The superintendent had more than usual interest in horticulture. He made large mounds of sand between the fairways on the otherwise flat terrain. He had naturalized these with native plants. He had hundreds of small plants growing in cans all around the workbarn. He had not been directed to do this, it was his idea.

Another superintendent had a keen personal interest in carpentry. He built bridges, shelters and tee benches that outshone the commercial products. This was done because of his interest. Others have an uncommon interest in agronomy and try out new grasses on their course.

Each course should invoke some kind of a mood or feeling. This is not shared or understood by all individuals on the same level. For this reason the superintendent and his green committee should be continually on the alert to maintain and enhance it—whatever it may be. □



A feeling of expansiveness can leave an impression on the golfer, as in the case of this fairway at the Concord, Kiamesha Lake, N.Y. (photo 6). Again, water, trees and rocks work their soothing magic on golfers; shown here, The Homestead, Hot Springs, Va., (photo 7).

