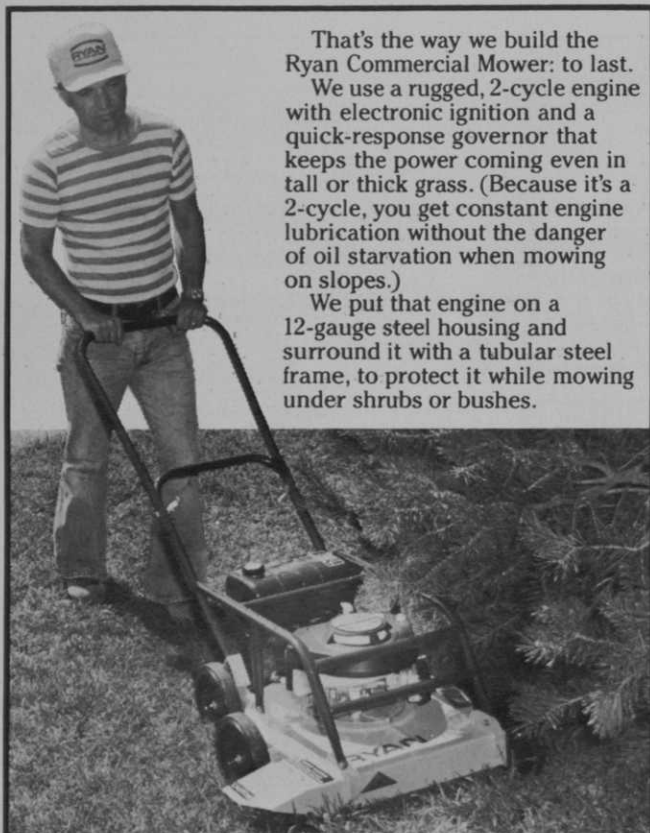


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Viewpoint

The golf course: a unique land use and nature model

"Whatever grounds a great city may need for public purposes . . . it also needs a large ground scientifically and artistically prepared to provide a poetic and tranquilizing influence on its people as comes through a contemplation of natural scenery. . ." (Frederick Law Olmsted in a letter to architect Henry Van Brunt)

In the not too distant future, man will have invaded every corner of the earth. Once the wilderness has vanished, even temporary escape from the city will also vanish. Man is in double jeopardy: at the same time he risks losing the few pleasures of the city, he also risks losing the comfort of occasional contacts with nature.

No environment, natural or man-made, can withstand the presence and sounds of crowds and machines that it was not intended to accommodate. No matter how good the attempt at conservation is, its purpose is soon defeated by the increasing interference of men and vehicles. The marks of man's penetration are everywhere. Contact with nature is very hard to find, because of not only man's increasing control over it, but also his ability to transform it. The natural is shrinking, while the man-made is increasing. The total effect of such interference with the environment will not only change ecological patterns; it will destroy them.

Many people are under the impression that a golf course is an artificial space. Contrary to its conventional interpretation and understanding, this land use is and can be much more than a layout for a sport. The Scottish links course, where the sea and farms link natural terrain and climatic elements prevail, is without an inkling of suggestion towards artificiality. The golf course acted as a "link" between the farmer and the sea. This intermediate landscape was not of much use to the farmer, but the land was free for the citizens to use however they wished. It was undulating and had good growing conditions for turf. Referring to its initial beginnings, the golf course performed the function of park, backyard, and social club for people of all ages and classes.

Golf in all probability was not invented by one individual. Rather it was created by social conditions of the time. People had certain needs and this land use developed from fulfilling those needs. Yet, many of today's social needs are no different than the needs of

past generations. The golf course once again can assist in satisfying the craving exhibited by this technological society for contact with nature.

The golf course can become the local arboretum, wildlife preserve, public park, or green oasis for heavily populated areas such as the New York metropolitan region. The intensity, sincerity, and quality of attention that is directed towards management of these potential uses will be the determinant of not only their success, but their feasibility to exist with the requirements for the game of golf. Such ventures could prove to be very beneficial to communities throughout the country which maintain municipal courses.

Currently, there is a group of concerned citizens in Jamaica Plain, Mass., a suburb of Boston, who identify themselves as the Franklin Park Coalition. The coalition is the outgrowth of many years of individual and joint efforts focused on the rehabilitation of this Olmsted-designed park. (Olmsted also designed Central Park in New York City and Prospect Park in Brooklyn.) Franklin Park includes the Arnold Arboretum, the Boston Zoo, and a golf course which at one time was kept closely cropped by a flock of sheep and was stocked with peacocks until nearby residents complained of their screaming. The planting used native New England trees and shrubs predominantly. When completed, Franklin Park was a democratic, American "People's Garden" open to all the citizens of Boston. The end result of Franklin Park is not a coincidence, but its purpose parallels the original intentions of the first Scottish links.

Whether a course is private or public, its members and patrons will grow and learn to appreciate a facility that not only satisfies their needs but is one that they can also relate to and be proud of.

Land is a very valuable commodity. As with energy, its importance will only be realized when communities and this nation are faced with the problem of its deficiency.

"Let it not be for present delight, nor for present use alone; . . . let us think . . . that a time is to come when . . . men will say 'See! This our fathers did for us.'" (John Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, quoted by Olmsted in *Notes on the Plan of Franklin Park*)

This article by Rachel M. Therrien of the maintenance staff at Winged Foot Golf Club, Mamaroneck, N.Y., appears courtesy of the Metropolitan GCSA.