



A Player's Perspective

GOLF IN WISCONSIN COMPARED WITH ELSEWHERE

By Dr. David Cookson

Editor's Note: Dr. Cookson's observations on the "state of golf" in Wisconsin are reprinted from the WISCONSIN AMATEUR GOLFER'S NEWSLETTER, Vol. 8, No. 1, with kind permission from WSGA Executive Director Gene Haas.



Dr. David Cookson
Maple Bluff CC

I have been fortunate to spend a lot of time the past few years traveling about the country either watching golf or indulging my love of playing different courses, and perhaps some reflections on how our golf in Wisconsin relates to other places might be interesting to consider.

Wisconsin is blessed with very good golf course terrain, and throughout the state we have made good use of it. We don't seem to have become enchanted with the overly long golf courses seen in too many places; in fact, many of our most heavily played private courses could perhaps be criticized for too many short golf holes. Still, our courses are generally fun and strategic - and I think measure up well compared with others around the nation. Wisconsin has three courses ranked in Golf Digest's top 25 public courses, (Brown Deer, Lawsonia, and Sentry World) and another in the top 50 (The Springs GC), which by their prominence raises the standards for our other public courses to attain, and they succeed very well. Our private courses, although not recently having been considered for hosting national championships, except the Walker Cup Matches at Milwaukee CC in 1973, are in my judgement, equal to and often superior to comparable clubs elsewhere.

Much of what determines a good golf

course is its conditioning, and that is where most courses in Wisconsin are way ahead of the rest. Fortunately, we have many excellent green superintendents in Wisconsin who engage in healthy competition with each other, and if one club in an area seems to be in better condition than the others, there is irresistible pressure for all clubs to get to that standard. This has definitely happened, most particularly in Madison, Milwaukee, Racine/Kenosha, and the Fox River Valley where course conditions are outstanding, and substantially improved over conditions existing years ago. This has not generally, occurred elsewhere in the country. Our greens are much more consistently fast and true, our fairways tighter, and the recent, admirable trend toward less use of irrigational water is further ahead in Wisconsin.

Obviously, we have developed many, fine players in our state. Andy North, as a US Open winner, is a prime example, but on the whole we are outdistanced elsewhere in this regard. The most evident reason for this is because of a very short golf season, and consequent lack of opportunity for our players to develop a consistent game. Clearly, the states producing the best players are most often in the sunbelt. Still, I think another one of our problems is that

promising players in Wisconsin often choose not to compete in the major competitions outside the state; rarely are there more than a handful of Wisconsin players attempting to play in the Western Amateur, or trying to qualify locally for the US Amateur or indeed, any of the national events for which local qualifying is available. I see this trend reversing somewhat of late though, with our good junior players starting to roam farther afield, thereby gaining more experience in tough competition, which will ultimately lead to a higher standard of play statewide.

Lastly, nobody in the nation can top Wisconsin in golf administration. California, Minnesota, and Chicago may be equal to us, but we are unsurpassed in service to golfers, both on a day to day routine, and in tournament management. I refer of course to the WSGA, and I am certainly biased; but I assure you, we are held in esteem nationwide, and this is primarily due to the interest and support given to the game by all Wisconsin golfers.

All told, Wisconsin golf is healthy, and compares very favorably with any part of the United States. We have gained tremendously these past two decades, and have developed a solid base to continue this progress into the next several years.

David Cookson