



An Architect's Opinion **THE PRACTICE AREA: A LEARNING AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

By Bob Lohmann

The practice and lesson tee has become common throughout the golfing world since its introduction in the early 1900's by noted golf course architect, Donald Ross. But according to certain USGA surveys, less than 50% of today's golf courses have adequate practice areas. In spite of its potential,

the practice area seems to be an afterthought of most golf course designs and golf club budgets. Either it is completely left out of the original design or it is improperly coordinated with other design elements. When a site is small and forces tight situations, the practice area is reduced in size or eliminated to allow adequate space for the golf course, clubhouse, and parking lot and planned improvements seem to be either the last item on the budget or not included at all.

Before the invention of the practice area, golf players and teachers used the golf course for their practices and lessons. Because the golf course was rarely crowded, playing lessons were possible. Today, because there are more golfers and more demand for the four-hour or less golf round, the teaching and learning process is forced off the golf course except during off-peak times. Some type of practice area needs to be developed and properly maintained on every golf course.

Most golf organizations and golf clubs are promoting golf as a

game that anyone can play. The course itself is the best place to learn the game of golf. But because they are often crowded, the novice golfer is forced to go elsewhere to perfect his game to the level where he can participate without annoying other golfers. A practice area is developed for this reason. Here, experienced teachers can teach the golfer how to play the game properly and how to act on the course. These teaching opportunities provide income and support for the club professionals. They have an opportunity to promote the game and at the same time to develop a profitable business.

Many daily fee and public golf courses provide practice areas for economics alone. The income generated from the use of the range can provide funds for maintenance, repair, and remodeling of the golf course.

The practice area can also be an asset to the experienced golfer. Prior to starting a golf round, hitting a bucket of balls will help loosen up the muscles and relieve the stiffness before approaching



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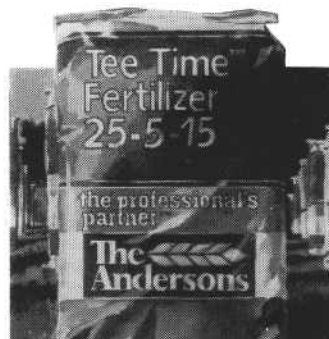
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the first tee. And following a round of golf, it is helpful to stop at the practice area and work on a particular shot that was troublesome during the day's round.

Many golfers who enjoy the game, but don't have a lot of time, can spend an hour or so on the range when a four-hour round is not possible. Here, they have an opportunity to use all of their clubs, rather than only those commonly used during a single round.

The practice area should have the design features of the golf course, but simply be on a smaller scale. The golfer wants to practice or learn the different golf shots that will be performed on the course and he needs more than just an open field for practice. The practice area should be constructed to provide direction for the golfer. Like a fairway, it is more than just an open area for hitting your golf shot. Through the use of multiple target greens, mounds, sand bunkers and trees, the vast open area can become a series of defined target areas for the golfer. Even a fairway can be developed within the area leading to one of the target greens.

Multiple tees should be constructed large enough so that the wear over them is even and severe damage is prevented. A separate area, buffered with mounds and plantings, should be included where the professional can provide lessons. This secluded and possibly sheltered area will provide the privacy a golfer needs to concentrate on his game.

In addition to the practice tee and fairway, a putting green, a chipping green, sand and grass bunkers, mounds, and a rough turf area should be included in the practice area. Then the area becomes a golf learning and practice facility that will be enjoyed by all classes of golfers.

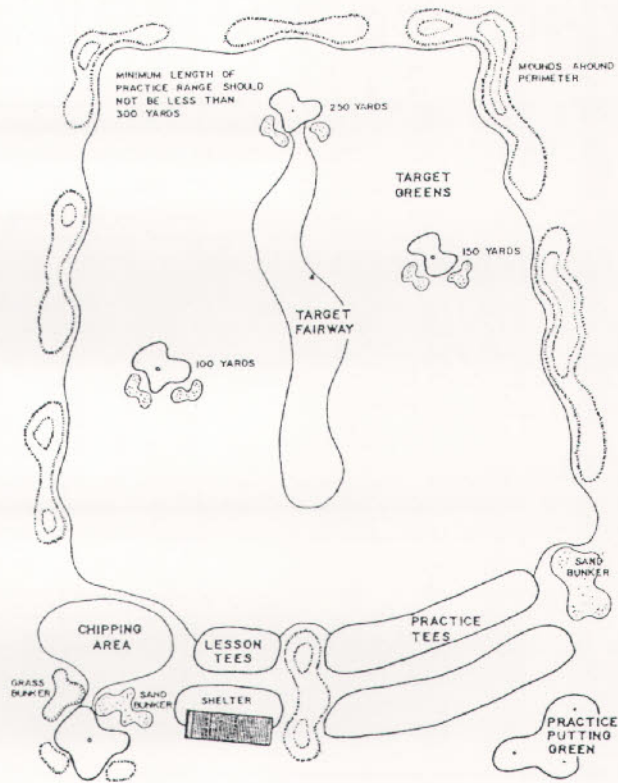
The vast fairway area also can provide additional benefits. For example, it has a potential use as a turf nursery and testing area, and following severe rainstorms or winter thaws, it can be used as a retention basin or flood overflow. The course can be opened earlier in the spring if the water is directed off the golf course and onto the practice area to allow the course to dry.

When developing a new golf

course, the range should be oversized to provide a future expansion area for the clubhouse, parking lot, and maintenance areas without reducing the efficiency of the practice area.

The practice area, regardless of

its size, is an important part of the golf course. But it cannot survive without proper design and maintenance. A practice area needs to be both attractive and useful to benefit the club, the professional, and most of all, the golfer.



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