



Practice is essential to all levels of play. Open Championship contestants at Merion Golf Club, Ardmore, Pennsylvania.

Golf Neglects The Idea That Made It Big

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DONALD ROSS was a golf professional who came from Dornoch, Scotland, in 1899 to become a renowned and beloved American golf revolutionary. He has had an effect on the game as profound as any man. The genial gentleman achieved this wonder in a very simple way — he invented the lesson and practice tee.

Before this Ross innovation, lessons were playing lessons, and all golf practice, except putting, was done on the golf course. The first practice putting

green was born by accident. It was built on the “Ladies Course” at St. Andrews, which was a short, primitive chip-and-putt course.

Nothing . . . absolutely nothing . . . was done in golf course architecture to develop the game from the few early “Ladies Courses” in Scotland until Donald Ross, as professional at the North Carolina golf and health resort of Pinehurst, observed the process of some pioneers endeavoring to be golf teachers. These men were teaching themselves

during the North and South Open Championships at a place irreverently called Maniac Hill. American professionals who spread from the schoolyard at Maniac Hill carried their learning nationwide to their jobs. At their clubs they did not have the convenient and useful classroom that Maniac Hill provided. There wasn't time or teachers enough for the old-style playing lessons.

Golf teachers selected rough areas or momentarily vacated tees or fairways near the clubhouses or the sheds that

were called pro shops. There, the teachers and pupils were not too safe from the stray shots of those playing the course, nor were the players safe from wild practice shots. The tutoring was conducted with difficulty.

By the time American golf was to outgrow its infancy, Ross, the busiest golf course architect in the United States, recalled Maniac Hill and included his epochal first lesson and practice tee in his next golf course design. This innovation definitely gave golf a tremendous impetus in worldwide growth. To my embarrassment and sorrow, I long ago lost my notes of an informative visit with Ross at Pinehurst. My foggy recollection is that Ross said it was about 1914 and the course was in New York or Pennsylvania.

PRACTICE RANGES, despite all their potential for attractiveness and utility, too often remain golf ghettos where the underprivileged golfers are condemned to hack away, sunbaked in education for fun. Try, and

I'm sure you'll find it difficult, to name just one golf course at which there has been a development of the Ross idea fitted to today's conditions.

The Ross practice tee brainchild has continued to grow and benefit golfers, even though it often came as an after-thought in the design of golf courses. The practice area is usually located on leftover ground, and the thought of coordinating it with the location, function, and service with revenue-producing potential for clubs seems to have escaped the attention of those to whom the pleasant game of golf is a business. In the meantime, the practice range showed its power in Tom Thumb or miniature golf courses, the par 3s, and the executive courses.

"Golf Training or Learning Centers" have been devised by at least two golf architectural firms for golf schools concerned with making learning a profitable business. Golf architects might include practice areas when real estate developers ask them to instill the charm of golf into acreage so that it won't be just another golf course.

It was that spirit and environment of the blessed out-of-doors that inspired and guided many through the difficult years of adjustment in this country. Intelligent Americans need and are subconsciously straining to regain the tranquil charm of the days when golf's heart was young in this land. There were no "monster" golf courses then, no moving of mountains of earth to imitate Scotland's dunes. Have we forgotten that golf is something to grow with, a happy free living? The genius of Donald Ross found a simple and sure way to sample this playful Eden. Then the trail seems to have been lost.

With all the imagination there is in the business of golf and the realism that must recognize the imperative necessity of modernizing golf again in every way, why is there such tardiness in making golf convenient in the midst of a tremendous real estate boom to get the city folks to the therapy of the countryside? Who is going to become rich and famous and be the benefactor of those who care and should be golfers? Doesn't anyone in golf recognize this potential!

A practice group at Stratton Mountain Country Club, Stratton Mountain, Vermont.

Photograph by H. SCHRIEBEL

