

# SETTING UP A COURSE FOR THE OPEN

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THE United States Golf Association has been handsomely blessed in the quality of courses which Member Clubs have made available for our major national championships. When you think of the post-war Open Championships, you think of a succession of really fine courses—great names such as Baltusrol, Merion, Olympic, Oakmont, Canterbury, Oakland Hills, Riviera, Medinah.

It is good to report that the course for the 1956 Open, June 14-15-16, stands in worthy succession. Unless we miss our guess, or unless weather plays an untoward part, Oak Hill in Rochester, N. Y., ought to be a true Championship test.

## Two Courses At Oak Hill

Oak Hill has two courses, East and West. Some members think the East is better and more exacting than the West; other members feel oppositely. The East course is the one for the Open. The amateurs played it in the 1949 USGA Amateur Championship, and it took a fine golfer to go through—Charlie Coe. The course record is a 64 which Ben Hogan made in 1942 in the first round of the Rochester Times-Union Open Tournament. Hogan won with 278. The year before, Sam Snead won with 277. These were the only two years this event was played.

Since those days Oak Hill has been renovated somewhat. It should be fully a stroke harder than in 1949—perhaps a stroke and a half or two strokes. Par for the Open is 70, and total yardage 6,902.

Oak Hill rolls through moderately undulating land. A winding creek keeps one extra wary on a half-dozen holes. The course is well-named. It has a great collection of trees, thanks mainly to the devoted arboreal interests of Dr. John R. Williams over many years. For condition

of the turf, you'll go a long way to find a golf course superintendent the equal of Elmer Michael. Oak Hill is only about 15 minutes' drive from the business heart of Rochester.

Now what makes a championship course? Does it have to be long? Does it have to be tightly trapped? What is distinctive about a championship course?

No two courses are alike. Many elements fuse to make up those used for championships. Length is important today; unfortunately, modern equipment has outmoded many otherwise fine courses for championship purposes.

But granting length, if you could reduce all the other elements to the simplest terms, the criterion would be just one thing—control. What degree of control is required? What degree of playing skill does the course call for? A championship course rewards accuracy, penalizes inaccuracy, and gives the most skilled players fair opportunity to prove their skill. On a championship course, class generally tells. Great players like great courses.

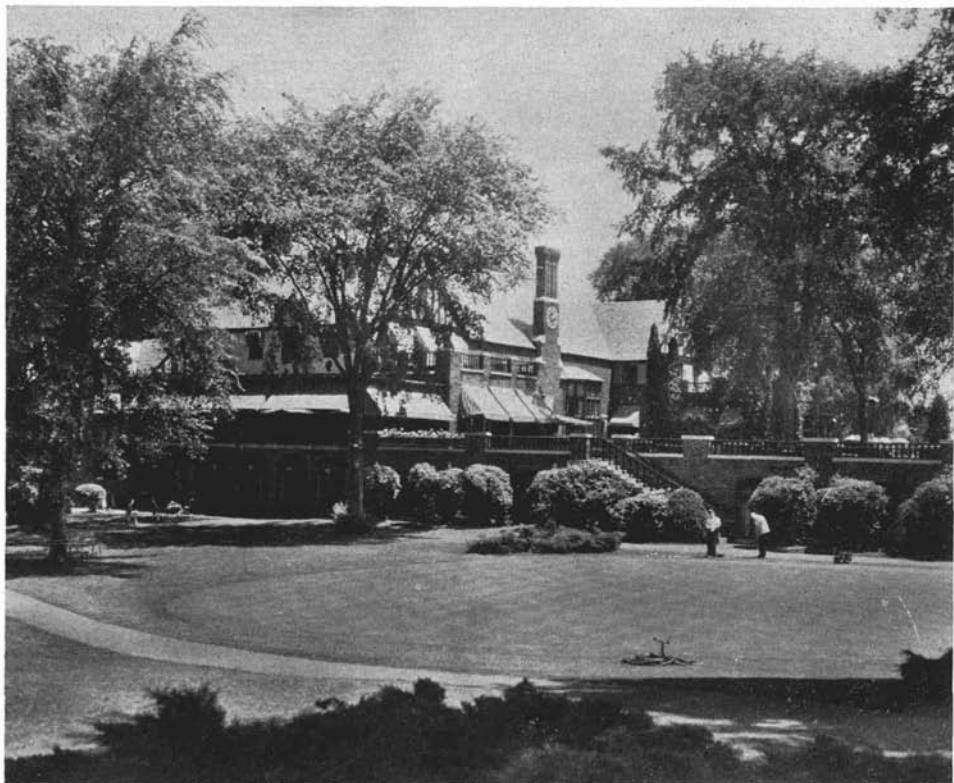
## Accent on Control

The accent on control, sometimes even at the expense of distance, was brought out strongly at Merion in the 1950 Open. Merion was relatively short for the great course it is—just under 6,700 yards, with a par of 70—but in the process of winning the play-off Ben Hogan said Merion had kept him on the defensive more than any other course he had played—kept him conscious of the need to control the ball all the time.

The degree to which a course examines a player's control depends on two main factors—its architecture and the manner in which it is conditioned.

About architecture, there's not much the

## Site of the 1956 Open Championship



*Surrounded by towering oaks, the clubhouse of Oak Hill Country Club, Rochester, N. Y., marks the site of the 1956 Open Championship. The natural beauty of the course, in addition to making it a sight to remember, combines to make it a true championship test.*

USGA does here in selecting courses for its championships. Effort is made to select only basically well-designed courses. The USGA does not require wholesale alterations, contrary to some popular opinion. A USGA competition lasts only a moment of time compared with the whole life of the club; it would usually be unfair to require vast major changes just for one tournament, and many clubs would not accept such a requirement. The USGA never engages a golf course architect to advise on such matters.

Often, however, after a club's invitation has been accepted by the USGA, the club will undertake considerable improvement of its course. In such a case the USGA advises with the club. The tendency is ever-present for a club to make its course

extremely hard once a national championship is on its schedule. Oddly, the USGA is occasionally cast in the role of restraining the club, in order to prevent extremes which would make play unfair.

It is in course conditioning that the USGA works intimately with the club. Although courses are highly individualistic in fundamental design, in the area of conditioning the USGA can and does seek to achieve a degree of uniformity.

The USGA's interests in the turf's quality are looked after mainly by the nearest Regional Director of the USGA Green Section. The Regional Directors are highly skilled agronomists whose lifework is to help USGA clubs to have better turf. USGA championships are usually scheduled two years in advance, to enable clubs to

make adequate preparations. Throughout those two years the Green Section Regional Director keeps in close touch with the green committee chairman and the course superintendent, and visits the course as many times as advisable. Happily, often a Regional Director can do very little to assist, for clubs invariably take supreme pride in presenting the best groomed course possible for a national tournament, and they go all out to insure this.

### Grass Cutting

Simple grass-cutting is another part of course conditioning—how closely it should be cut, where it should be cut, and where not. The USGA deals with this in great detail, for it can make or break a championship.

In modern golf, USGA championships are notable for use of rough in helping to bring about a fine test. Remember that the big objective is to put a premium on control, on accuracy—to reward the skill that produces accuracy and thus bring out championship golf.

This results in a USGA practice of having the grass cut at graduated levels. At Oak Hill, for example, on an average par 4 or par 5 hole, the average drive winds up in grass cut at one of the following three heights:

1. *Fairway*—One-half to three-quarters inch. Fairways generally 35 to 40 yards wide.
2. *Apron of fairway* (light rough)—About two inches, for a distance of 6 to 8 feet immediately off the fairway.
3. *Rough*—About four inches, beyond apron of fairway.

Sometimes the rough is allowed to grow longer out in jungle territory where only the very wild shots would go and where golf is not meant to be played.

Thus, a ball which just misses the fairway has a somewhat more difficult lie than an accurate drive. A ball which is quite poorly controlled confronts the player with a shot from real rough.

### Accuracy Determines Lie

To put it another way, the greater the

player's accuracy, the better his lie for the next stroke.

The heights of cut for Oak Hill outlined above were determined to some extent by the character and the thickness of the grass. The USGA has a Golf Championship Manual of some 20,000 words to guide clubs in preparing all aspects of a national championship, and the section on grounds discusses treatment of the rough as follows:

"It is desired to require greater accuracy from the tees by making all rough deeper and by narrowing the fairways between 240 and 300 yards. The narrowing should be gradual, commencing perhaps at 230 and reaching the narrowest part of from 35 to 40 yards at about 280 yards from the tee.

"No specific length is suggested for cutting the rough as the length of cut depends greatly on the character of the rough itself. Where the rough is thin, a cut of 6 to 8 inches would be ample; where heavy and matted, as is likely where present fairways are allowed to grow up into rough, a cut of even 4 inches might not be sufficiently low. The object to be attained is a uniformly difficult recovery for the player who has made an improper shot. The rough should not be so deep as to make a recovery impossible or to increase greatly the prospect of lost balls, but it should not be so thin that a wood or long iron can be played from it without difficulty.

"The character of the grasses in the rough will determine the type of management. Heavy clover areas should be eliminated or scythed closely not more than ten days before the competition. Thin areas may be fertilized to thicken the sod and to eliminate the possibility of a full-distance recovery shot. A condition of deep, lush grass where a ball may be lost or be completely hidden should be corrected.

"For all rough along the edges of fairways there should be an apron of shorter rough, cut at from 2 to 4 inches, depending on the character of the rough. The purposes of this apron are, first, to hold a ball which is just off the edge of the fairway from running into deeper

rough and, second, to avoid a severe difference in the difficulty of the shot for a ball which is a few inches off the fairway as compared with a ball just in the fairway."

Similar principles govern treatment of grass on and around the putting greens. Championship greens should be keen and firm and true, and should require real control. Thus, the USGA grass-cutting schedule at Oak Hill will be approximately as follows:

1. *Putting green* — About three-sixteenths inch.
2. *Collar of green* — About one-half inch or less, for width of about 30 inches immediately off green.
3. *Secondary rough* — Two inches, for about four to six feet immediately off collar.
4. *Primary rough* — Four inches.

The closer the player stops his ball to the prime target—which is the hole—the more favorable a lie he will have for the next stroke.

The grass treatment above is not invariable. As the USGA Championship Manual says:

"The handling of rough around the greens depends largely on the character of the greens, their size, and the difficulty of the shot to them, the purpose being, of course, to penalize a poorly played shot.

"To accomplish this, greens should be firm. When the greens are firm, small and tight, there will not be much need to increase the difficulty further by drawing the rough in close to the edge of the green. When the reverse is true, rough is necessary to give advantage to the well-played approach shot.

"For this purpose, a collar at slightly under fairway length should be maintained for a width of about 30 inches around all greens. Outside of this should be a cut of medium length rough, 2 to 3 inches high, from which a chip shot would be more difficult and which will also tend to keep a ball from running into the deeper rough. The width of this cut can vary from 2 to 6 feet, depending on the nature of the ground and the

## NEW MEMBERS OF THE USGA

### Regular

Canandaigua Country Club, N. Y.  
Cornell University Golf Club, N. Y.  
Country Club of Culpeper, Va.  
Deane Hill Country Club, Tenn.  
Elkview Country Club, Pa.  
Fort George G. Meade Golf Club, Md.  
Foster Golf Club, Wash.  
Hillandale Golf Course, N. C.  
Kaufman Park Golf Club, Ill.  
Lawrence Park Golf Club, Pa.  
Meadow-Lee Golf Association, N. C.  
Mission Bay Golf Course, Cal.  
Muleshoe Country Club, Texas  
Muscatatuck Country Club, Ind.  
Oakwoods Country Club, N. C.  
Powder River Golf and Country Club,  
Wyo.  
Short Hills Country Club, Ill.  
Speed Employee's Country Club, Ind.  
Suffolk Golf Association, Va.

character of the shot to the green—wider where the shot is more difficult and narrower where easier. Generally, this cut would be maintained up to the margin of bunkers surrounding the green (where they are beyond the fairway cut), between bunkers, and to the crest of slopes and mounds closely surrounding the greens. Beyond this cut the deeper rough should be maintained.

"The greens may be cut at three-sixteenths to one-quarter inch. The higher cut is suggested for greens that are severely undulating, to guard against possible movement of the ball on a slope when the player takes his stance. Daily mowing is essential for several weeks prior to, and during the competition. Early morning mowing is customary during the play.

"The greens should be fast but not 'slippery.' Irrigation should be uniform and sufficient only to maintain growth and color.

"Greens should be firm, and it is hoped that a generous use of sand has been used in their construction. Soft, over-watered greens will permit poorly-played shots to hold. Matted, fluffy turf on the greens should be corrected well in advance of the competition so that the turf will not 'scuff' and deflect putts.

"The greens should not hold easily for a poorly-played approach shot or for a long iron or wood following a missed drive on a short par 4 hole. Short irons and chip shots firmly played with good backspin should, however, hold reasonably well. The greens should not be rolled or cut to a point where a ball could gain speed in putting down all but the severest slopes.

"The practice putting green should be, if at all possible, of the same character and putting qualities as the greens of the course."

### Location Of Hole

As a general proposition, effort is made to locate a hole so that the ground is reasonably level for a minimum radius of about three feet around the hole. The USGA Manual says this:

"In no case should cups be located in tricky places, or on sharp slopes where a ball can gather speed (a player above the hole should be able to putt boldly for it)."

What effect do galleries have on all these course preparations? For the major events such as the Open and the Amateur, the USGA now has each hole roped completely so that spectators are always outside playing areas (except for a few cross-over walkways). This preserves the testing qualities of the course through to the finish. In other days galloping galleries had the rough pretty much trampled down, in the direction of the hole, by early afternoon of the first day. The new system enables players to proceed without serious interruption and enables spectators to see with greater facility.

These, then, are some of the considerations that enter into the preparation of a championship course. There are many others. But when all is said and done, the guiding policy is a simple statement near the beginning of the USGA Championship Manual:

"The USGA's policy is to have a course provide a real test, without being tricky or unfair."

Oak Hill should prove just that.

## USGA Publications of General Interest

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**USGA GOLF HANDICAP SYSTEM FOR MEN**, containing recommendations for computing Basic and Current Handicaps and for rating courses. Booklet, 25 cents. Poster, 10 cents.

**THE CONDUCT OF WOMEN'S GOLF**, containing suggestions for guidance in the conduct of women's golf in clubs and associations, including tournament procedures, handicapping and course rating. 25 cents.

**HANDICAPPING THE UNHANDICAPPED**, a reprint of a USGA Journal article explaining the Callaway System of automatic handicapping for occasional players in a single tournament. No charge.

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