

THE MAN BEHIND THE BEAUTY OF OAK HILL

By A. M. RADKO

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ELMER Michael witnessed his first USGA Open Championship in 1912. It was held at the Buffalo Country Club, and recalls his first disappointment in connection with golf, because he caddied for one of the local players who failed to qualify.

The die was cast early for Elmer Michael, now Superintendent in charge of one of the nation's outstanding golf courses, Oak Hill Country Club, site of the 1956 Open Championship. Elmer was born, at the turn of the century, the only child of Charles H. and Susan Brown Michael. The elder Michael, together with his parents, owned and operated a farm in Erie County at the time. Elmer's great grandparents, on his mother's side, owned a farm in Buffalo which later became the first golf course in Western New York. This course was known as the Buffalo Country Club; later was sold to the city of Buffalo, and at the present time is known as the Grover Cleveland Park Golf Course.

Father A Greenkeeper

The elder Michael worked in a factory, in addition to operating the farm, until he contracted typhoid fever and was advised to seek full-time outdoor employment. In 1902, he went to work for the Buffalo Country Club. He later was placed in charge of the course, during which time he expanded the 9 hole course into an 18 hole layout. In 1908, the elder Michael became greenkeeper at the Park Club of Buffalo, which at the time was a six-hole course. The Park Club was built on the Pan-American Exposition Grounds and it was on this course that Elmer was indoctrinated into the greenkeeping profession.

In 1918, the elder Michael's assistant resigned and Elmer left school to take over the assistant's responsibilities. A few years later, Architect Walter J. Travis was brought in to redesign the city course, and at the age of 22, Elmer was placed in charge of construction. He supervised the work of 40 men, 16 teams, two tractors, and a steam shovel. He remained at this



ELMER MICHAEL

course until 1925, and from there went to Transit Valley Country Club. In 1929, he left Transit Valley and took over the greenkeeping responsibilities at Oak Hill Country Club, where he is now in his 27th year of service.

Developed Turf

When he came to Oak Hill, Elmer designed and installed an irrigation system for both the East and West courses. He also planted the East course greens to a strain of bentgrass that he personally selected and increased while at the Park Club of Buffalo. This strain was discovered on grass plots that were abandoned after the Pan-American Exposition, and were found when the course was remodeled in 1922. This strain looked exceptionally good to Elmer, and when the old Park Club course was abandoned in 1929, he sent a truck into Buffalo to return with a load of stolons from which he developed a sod turf nursery at Oak Hill. This nursery was used to replace the Virginia creeping bentgrass that was originally planted on the East Course. The Virginia strain was unpopular because of its coarseness and because of the grainy turf it formed. At the time, the change was authorized and approved by Mr. Louis W. Chapin, father of Oak Hill's present

president, Mr. William C. Chapin. These are the fine greens on which players in the Open Championship will compete this year.

Recent Improvements

More recent improvements at Oak Hill include a six acre practice driving range, a new 21,000 square feet practice putting green, improved parking facilities, and a new 125 HP pump, which makes possible the pumping of 1,200 gallons per minute at 100 lbs. pressure.

Elmer is a member of the United States Golf Association Green Section Committee, and while attending the 1954 National Open Championship and Green Section Committee Meetings at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, New Jersey, he learned that Oak Hill was to be the site of the 1956 Open Competition. While there, Elmer studied the conditioning technique of Baltusrol's Superintendent, Mr. Ed Casey. In Elmer's words, "Ed Casey did a perfect job in conditioning Baltusrol. I have never seen a course in better shape for championship play."

We have every confidence that those who play or attend the 1956 Open Championship will have equal praise for Oak Hill's Superintendent, Elmer Michael.

Oak Hill Known For Beauty

As the name denotes, Oak Hill is known for its beauty of landscape, particularly its Oak trees. During the years that Elmer has been at Oak Hill, some 75,000 trees were nursery grown and have been stra-

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tegically transplanted throughout the 36 hole course. Dr. John R. Williams has been the untiring guiding hand behind this landscape program, according to Elmer. Many rare varieties and most of the trees that grow in the Northeastern United States can be found at Oak Hill. Thus, spectators and players will have the pleasure of seeing one of the finest golf tests in one of the finest landscape settings found anywhere in the golfing world. Elmer can well be proud of exhibiting Oak Hill Country Club to golf enthusiasts who come to Rochester to view the Open Championship in June.

Correction To Tifgreen Table

The chart on page 27, of the April issue of the USGA JOURNAL, relating to putting quality of Tifgreen, as rated by Golf Professionals and Golf Course Super-

intendents at the eighth annual Southeastern Turfgrass Conference, was in error. We apologize for the error and herewith print the corrected figures.

TABLE III

Ratings by Golf Professionals and Golf Course Superintendents on the Putting Quality of Several Bermudagrass Selections During the Eighth Annual Southeastern Turfgrass Conference, Tifton, Ga., 1954

Selection	Best	Number of Second	Individuals Third	Rating Fourth	Selections As Fifth	TOTAL
Tifgreen	36	20	13	8	1	78
Tiflawn x <i>C. transvaalensis</i>	6	9	5	1	3	24
Tifton 55 x <i>C. transvaalensis</i>	2	---	---	4	9	15
Gene Tift	---	---	---	1	1	2