



Poa annua in a weakened stage.

Public Golf Courses Ain't Dogs Anymore

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WHY WERE public courses considered dogs in the past? I guess because golfers always compared public courses to private clubs, and they probably always will. In the 1960s, public courses fell short for many reasons:

1. Greens were mowed at ¼-inch or higher, three or four times a week.
2. Non-watered bluegrass tees and fairways were mowed once or twice a week.
3. Fairways and rough were mowed at the same height, about 1¼-inch, to minimize lost balls and speed play.
4. Most sand bunkers were filled in and grassed over to speed play.

What was a round like for a public course golfer in the '60s?

During a hot, dry summer day, courses were nearly empty Monday through Friday, except for late afternoon league play. Weekends were jammed with company outings as well as with players with reservations. The first tee ran on five-minute starting times, and was usually 30 minutes late by 10 a.m. Once



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on the course, you might find two or three groups waiting to hit on every tee, and your round could easily take five or six hours.

The non-watered bluegrass fairways were probably parched brown and dormant for the summer. If you walked, your legs got filthy, and your leg muscles ached from pounding on dried-out clay soil. If you rode an electric cart, it probably quit on 16 or 17. Was it fun? I guess it depended on how many beers you had.

One Chicago public course operator led a dramatic change in public course conditioning. He foresaw the future of public golf: "Provide the public course player with private club conditions and service for the price of a green fee."

The man was Joe Jemsek. He began his golf career as a caddie, progressed to club pro and tour player, and eventually became owner of St. Andrews, a 36-hole course in west Chicago, in 1939. He continually made improvements, mainly by enlarging the greens and tees. An automatic irrigation system was

installed in 1965, and bluegrass fairways were overseeded to bentgrass. Weak holes were remodeled, and sand bunkers added to make the course more fun to play. In 1987, John Lapp, superintendent at St. Andrews, began construction of a first-class practice range, which is scheduled to open in the summer of 1988.

Cog Hill, a 72-hole complex, is situated in Lemont, Illinois, a southwest suburb of Chicago. This is where Joe Jemsek began his golf career as a caddie. He bought the club in 1951, when it had 36 holes, and added Course Three in 1961. In 1962, against advice from his architects and associates, he decided to build Course Four, aptly named Dubsdread. A spectacular tournament course

was constructed with bentgrass tees and fairways, along with 110 white silica sand bunkers. Some other public course operators waited for Joe to go broke, but to paraphrase Joe, "You have to set the style."

Chicago golfers flocked to play these well-conditioned courses. Along with success came more change. *Golf Digest* has included Dubsdread in its selection of the top 100 courses. The 1970 U.S. Amateur Public Links was played at Dubs, along with the 1987 Women's Amateur Public Links Championship. The APL is scheduled to return in 1989. Superintendent Lapp works hard keeping four 18-hole courses in excellent condition.

Fresh Meadow has 18 holes and is located in Westchester, a Chicago suburb. The course was completely rebuilt in the late 1950s while keeping it open for play. An automatic irrigation system was added, and the fairways overseeded to bentgrass, in 1968. Superintendent Tom Savage keeps one of the heaviest played courses in Chicago in truly top condition throughout the season.

Glenwoodie is a beautiful 18-hole course in the far south suburb of Glenwood. Superintendent Rory Bancroft is responsible for keeping this public course in superb playing condition.

In a continuing quest to operate top quality public courses, Jemsek again

Pine Meadow's 15th tee — Tournament Course.



rolled up his sleeves in 1984 and built Pine Meadow Golf Club, in Mundelein, another suburb. Architects Joe Lee and Rocky Roquemore took a seldom-used college campus course and combined it with adjacent farms and orchards to create a brand-new public golf course. Pine Meadow features huge Penncross greens and tees, Penneagle fairways, and 75 white silica sand bunkers. The rolling landscape features thousands of evergreens, which are quite unusual around Chicago.

In 1986, our first full year of operation, we hosted qualifying for the Western Open, and in 1987, we had the 72-hole Illinois State Amateur Championship. Jemsek and his son Frank were honored

with a plaque from *Golf Digest* when Pine Meadow was chosen the best new public course in 1986.

One of the keys to success has been to operate lean, and to continually re-invest in the courses and make them better. Plans are now made 10 to 20 years ahead.

What about the Pine Meadow player of today?

1. He has a practice range for warming up or for practice.

2. He has close-cut greens that are mowed every day.

3. He has close-cut bent/*Poa* fairways.

4. He has sand and grass bunkers, along with 2-inch roughs that gobble up errant shots.

Pine Meadow superintendent Robert Padula does an exceptional job.

Do private course conditions mean even slower rounds for public golfers? Definitely not. We opened Pine Meadows using a system called "Keep Pace." This assures average playing times of 4 hours and 15 minutes on weekends between 5:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. The system was created at Village Links of Glen Ellyn nine years ago. The system is now used at about 50 public courses throughout Chicago.

Have public golf courses given the public course player private club conditions for the price of a green fee?

You're doggone right they have.

The 18th at Pine Meadow.

