

What the Open Figures Show

By ROBERT TRENT JONES

GOLF COURSE ARCHITECT WHO PREPARED OAKLAND HILLS FOR THE OPEN

When the Open Championship was played at Oakland Hills, Birmingham, Michigan, in 1924, the course was considered one of the finest tests of golf in America. Its par of 72 was considered one of the hardest to beat. It is significant that Cyril Walker won this Open Championship with the score of 297 — nine strokes over par; and Bob Jones, defending his title, finished second with a score of 300—twelve strokes over par. But in 1924, driving contests were being won with distances in the neighborhood of 250 to 260 yards, while the distances required to win driving contests in 1951 are about 280 to 290 yards, and sometimes the winning distance is over 300.

In the July issue of *Golf Illustrated* for 1924, directly after the Championship, in a discussion of the course, there is an interesting quotation about the par 4 holes: "The par 4 holes are of such length that only the longer players are able to reach in two, and they must hit drives nearly always of 250 yards, and follow them with full brassies." This makes an interesting contrast to the clubs used by Ben Hogan on his last round on some of the longer par 4's during the current Championship. On the first hole of 440 yards, he used a driver and a 7 iron; on the 437 yard fifth hole he used a driver and a 3 iron; on the 447 yard 14th hole he used a driver and a 3 iron; and on the 405 yard 16th hole he used a driver and a 9 iron.

It is also interesting to note that Hagen lost the 1924 Championship by driving into the lake on the 16th hole after playing a drive and a 1 iron; Hogan, in his last round used a driver and a nine iron. The conditions were not identical as the wind, when Hogan played was from the left, while Hagen's approach to the 16th in 1924 was against a head-on wind. However, even taking this into consideration, the difference in playing a one iron and a nine iron is quite a gap.



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With the ball and equipment having progressed so far, is it not only fair to assume that the architecture of Oakland Hills had to be brought up to a standard comparable to the shot requirements asked of the players during the Open Championship of 1924? I, for one, cannot concede that the current golfers are more powerful than the greats of former years. Gene Sarazen at 51 is hitting the ball 25 to 35 yards farther than he did during the Open Championship of 1924.

Tests Basis of Changes

The changes at Oakland Hills were not made impulsively but were made after exhaustive tests during the four preceding Open Championships. My staff and I checked the flight and the roll of the ball, the number of shots in the rough on either side, to what extent the shots were missed, and, therefore, what could be

considered a bad shot or a good shot. When the changes were suggested and made, they were done in conjunction with John Oswald, the Chairman of the Green Committee, who is a good golfer in his own right, and Al Watrous, the Club's outstanding professional, who at 52 is the National P.G.A. Senior Champion. When a trap was located, Al Watrous was asked to hit shots to the proposed target area. After hitting many shots, it was decided whether the trap position was right or should be moved slightly one way or another for fairness. Watrous shot a 69 two weeks before the Championship, and Chris Brinke, one of the Club's better amateurs, shot a 71, and this before the rough was trimmed.

The Basic Principle

In any sport involving the use of a target, the nearer one gets to the target, the more often should he be able to hit it with consistency and accuracy. That, in a nutshell, is the basic principle involved in the tightening of Oakland Hills, and in making Oakland Hills' par respectable again in the light of modern playing conditions. It will be noted that the 1951 Open score of 287 was only seven strokes over the tournament par as compared with Cyril Walker's nine

strokes over par in 1924, and Heafner's second position was nine strokes over par, compared with Bob Jones' 12 strokes over par in the 1924 Open.

It is my feeling that the golf in the two championships was comparable, taking into account the current conditions of each era. Figures below are the average scores for the leading ten players, for the leading 28 players, and for Hogan, Heafner and Locke, on each of the 18 holes, as compared with par. You will note that only on the two par 5's, the second and 12th holes, did the entire field of 28 better par. You will also note in the individual scores of Hogan, Heafner and Locke, that there was no particular hole on which all the players played badly. Hogan was good on holes which Heafner and Locke played poorly; and Heafner and Locke were good on holes which Hogan played badly.

This was true of the whole field. Had there been any particular hole which all the players played badly, undoubtedly it would have had to be classified as a trick hole. However, the proof in the figures is conclusive: when a player missed a shot, no matter on which hole, he was punished for it; and when he played his shot well, par and under par were not difficult to achieve.

Par	Hole	Leading		Hogan	Heafner	Locke
		10	28			
4	1	4.12	4.20	3.75*	4.5	4.25
5	2	4.67	4.75	4.25*	5.--	4.75*
3	3	3.19	3.24	3.5	2.75*	3.25
4	4	4.32	4.33	4.5	4.--	4.50
4	5	4.32	4.41	4.--	4.--	4.75
4	6	4.15	4.11	4.25	4.5	4.25
4	7	3.99	4.07	4.--	4.25	3.75*
4	8	4.36	4.41	4.25	4.25	4.--
3	9	3.32	3.41	3.25	3.25	3.25
4	10	4.37	4.37	3.75	4.25	4.25
4	11	4.19	4.25	4.25	4.--	4.25
5	12	4.88	4.92	5.--	4.75*	4.75*
3	13	3.01	3.07	2.50*	3.25	3.50
4	14	4.24	4.33	4.75	4.5	4.25
4	15	4.19	4.31	4.5	3.5*	4.--
4	16	4.16	4.19	3.75*	4.25	4.25
3	17	3.11	3.18	3.25	3.--	2.75*
4	18	4.28	4.38	4.25	4.5	4.--

* Average for four rounds under par.