Golf Courses: Garden Variety

Where plutocrats and politicians and preachers and professors rub elbows with characters called "Biggie" and "Bootsie" and "Chuck" and "Diamond" and "Shorty" and "Lenny" and "C-more" and "Jelly" and "Big Charley" and "Artie" and "Ernie" and "Tiny" and "Tony" and "Big John" and "Charlie" and "Wally" and "Bama Slim" and "Slo-Joe."

By Sam Lacy
(Photos by Sam Courtney)

To the leisure golfer the public course can be blessing or bane.

It is a known fact that everyone who becomes infatuated with the ancient Scottish game, has neither the means nor the desire to impose his weekend, garden variety efforts on the plush setting of a country club. So the municipal course serves as a haven.

A haven for the ambitious player who dreams of some-day greatness. But, even more so for the young and old, male and female, black, white and yellow, who revel in the chance to sneak away from office of home responsibilities for a few hours in the outdoors.

It should be made clear at this point that anyone would be ill-advised to underestimate the value of the municipal course. This applies especially to young black players with reasonable potential.

There are very few colleges (none of them white) which offer golf scholarships to black hopefuls. Consequently, the likes of Calvin Peete, Jim Thorpe, Lee Elder, Jim Dent, Charles Owens and the others who have been successful as pros, were required to hone their games under the rugged conditions of pay to play rather than play for pay.

The likes of Jack Nicklaus, Tom Weiskopf, Craig Stadler, Hal Sutton, Tom Watson, et al are products of major colleges. For them the avenue to country clubs and the PGA was pre-ordained.

While Ohio State, USC, Texas, Houston, Tulsa, Georgia, Kansas, et al are sending yount white players to the pro tour, any spawning ground for blacks must be located in municipal operations.

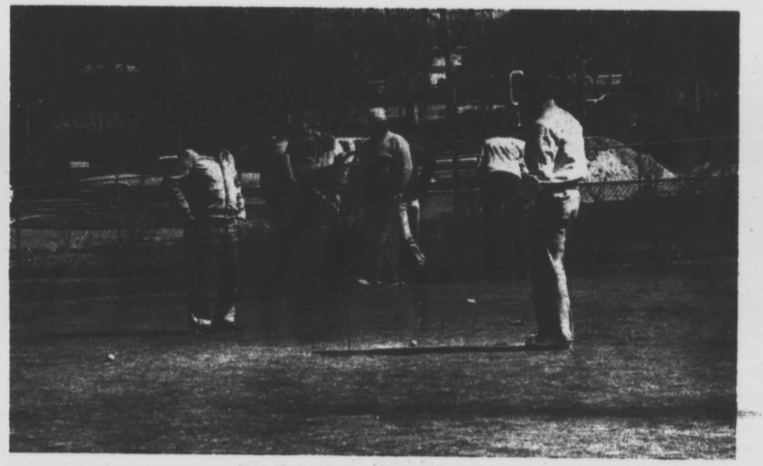
There are many of these, however. The best known, perhaps, are to be found in the widespread Los Angeles area where several public courses are closed off each year for PGA tournaments.

Also Atlanta, Chicago, Greensboro and Winston-Salem, N.C.; Memphis, Miami, Newport News and Philadelphia offer attractive sites for use by the hordes of "hackers" whose numbers increase by the year.

A recent survey disclosed that over 16 million players walk (or ride) the fairways of public courses in the calendar year. Naturally, their abilities vary from new-pro to beginner, from hustler to duffer.

Baltimore and Washington (DC) have their share of such public havens.

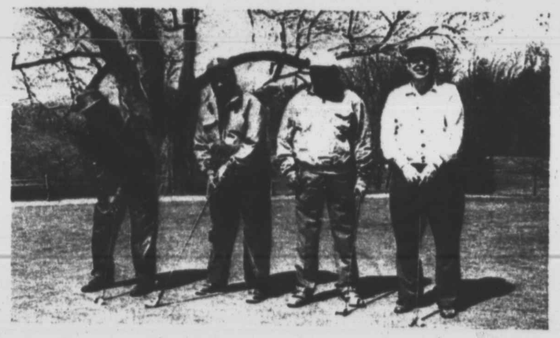
Among the more heavily trafficked in



Practice green at East Potomac.



East Potomac putting green.



Awaiting tee-off at Rock Creek: Starter Bill Hare, players Bill Vaughn and Joe Middleton, and office assistant, Bob Hall (left to right).



Overview of approach to 8th hole at Langston.



East Potomac Driving Range.

Baltimore are Carroll Park, Clifton Park, Forest Park, Diamond Ridge and Mt. Pleasant golf courses. All are well-run facilities.

Washington is a somewhat different story. For decades the habitues of DC's public courses were treated with utter disdain by a family oriented management. That situation has undergone a dramatic change under the supervision of a partnership known as Gold Course Specialists.

The partners are Frank Coates and Bob Brock, who took over the D.C. courses after a highly productive effort at Reston (VA) Country Club.

Since their arrival countless improvements have been made in playing conditions, public relations and clubhouse facilities.

Under GCS direction, three D.C. layouts known as East Potomac, near the Tidal Basin; Rock Creek course in the northwet party of the city, and Langston in northeast have thrived. And the partners' constant work offers promise of a bright future for local lovers of the game.

At the Rock Creek course for example, the clubhouse has been renovated to accommodate a new, fully equipped pro shop.

And in the course of the two years since the new management took over, the fairways and greens hae been maintained as nearperfection as one might expect on a course patronized by thousands of unskilled players each summer.

The two most radical changes, however, are those at East Potomac and Langston.

The more challenging of the two is at East Potomac where the old alphabetical identification of "B" (for the more accomplished players) "F" (an intermediate layout) and "G" (for beginners) has been abandoned for a "Red," "White" and "Blue" format.

The "Red" course of nine holes is reserved for beginners and women, the "White" course, also nine holes, is designed for senior types and high-handicap players, while the "Blue" is an 18-hole stretch for use by players who

(Continued on page 14)

