

THE MCGREGOR LINKS AT SARATOGA

An Unselfish Sporting Venture by Senator Brackett of New York

By DEVEREUX EMMET

THE McGregor Links, three and one-half miles from Saratoga Springs, on the great highway leading to Lake Champlain and the North, owes its existence to the generosity and public spirit of former Senator Edgar T. Brackett. He has never played golf, but wished to add something notable to the already existing attractions of the famous health and recreation center.

There is a natural, golfing country lying between Albany and Schenectady and extending as far north as Saratoga Springs. The geological formation of this country is glacial. It is very undulating, but not hilly, and there are frequent outcroppings of pure sand—regular natural bunkers similar to those in Scotland. In the valleys the soil is browner and more loamy, although filled with fine sand. To get good fairways on such territory it is well to follow the valleys with the holes, making hazards of the knolls and hills, and this idea has been followed out.

Even in the valleys it is necessary to enrich the soil heavily because of the unnatural deposits there. More than three thousand live hundred tons of manure were, in fact, used to provide a soil that is the natural home of the fescue grasses. German bent seed, as well as red fescue, was used on the greens, but it is doubtful if it will persist. However, the fescue sod will be as silky as it is at Muirfield or St. Andrews. On the Scotch courses in old times, before there was water laid on the greens, only the red fescue survived the drying-out process which went on every Summer. It is doubtful if there is any creeping bent grass at St. Andrews even now. An examination of a green at Muirfield would disclose the fact that the fescue grass roots penetrate nearly three feet in the ground, which is extremely characteristic.

A great charm of the McGregor Links will be the very scanty herbage on the rough. It is proposed further to discourage even this slight growth by periodically running a tractor with a gang of disc harrows over these parts. Another great attraction of the course is the fact that the holes wander around over a large area. In fact, it is generally impossible, while playing a hole, to see any Other hole. This adds an air of seclusion and, as many of the holes lead through lovely groves of white pine and white birch, and the whole effect is really delightful and soothing.

The club house is approached by both the ninth and eighteenth holes, and one comes on it quite suddenly. It is a very handsome building, indeed—rather classic in effect, with columns in front. The view of it from the eighteenth tee, through a vista of pines on both sides, is particularly striking. There are three distinct courses, the long, the regular, and the short, according to the various tees used. It has been thought wise to make the long, or championship, course over six thousand six hundred yards

in length. This is about the same as the long course at Lido. It costs more money to lay out three courses in one, one of them being six thousand six hundred yards in length. The tees alone are a serious item. There will be plenty of courses on which to hold the various championships. However, the die is cast as far as Saratoga is concerned. The McGregor Links is of championship length and championship quality, too, and it is hoped that an open championship may be held there in the near future. Certainly the facilities for staging such a meeting in this city of hotels are ideal.

There are two very interesting holes of the Sahara type—the third and eleventh—that are from two hundred and thirty to two hundred and fifty yards in length. In each case the tee is elevated, showing exactly what must be accomplished by the shot; also there is an alternative line that can be taken, necessitating a second shot with a pitching mashie—a different shot, too. In case the longer carry is attempted it is quite possible to make the green, although calling for a rather crisp shot, even with an iron club

at the eleventh hole. This green is ideally shaped and situated for this kind of hole, which is among the best on the course. The third hole calls for a bigger and bolder tee shot.

A great effort has been made to create a very high-class mashie pitch hole, and the thirteenth is a little teaser. It is really three separate holes, according to the tee used. The hole can be made a very severe test from the long course tee by cutting the hole in the left hand corner of the green. This green can be seen distinctly from either the back or middle tee. One knows just what he must do and am see



ONE OF THE BEST HOLES IS THE FOURTH, A GOOD TWO-SHOTTER

all the bunkers around the green. From the long course tee a part of the hollow in the foreground is invisible, which greatly adds to the difficulty of judging the distance. The green is a picturesque irregular island of green turf in a sea of sand slopes and bunkers. There are two iron holes, neither very long, but difficult and interesting and both very picturesque. For a very long iron or cleek hole the eleventh hole played from the forward tee will serve admirably in championships. In fact, the back tee can be used with the ground in a fast condition. What is two hundred and forty yards to Jim Barnes from a raised tee with his trusty iron in his hands?

With such a wealth of good golfing territory to choose from—there were eight hundred acres of it—an effort was made to get eighteen ideal holes of their various kinds without imitating existing holes like Redan and Eden and various other classics—which have been overdone in this country. There are probably over twenty Redan holes south of the Canadian border. It would be wearisome to describe the various holes *seriatim*. There are several very fine drive and pitch, or drive and (Continued on page 56)

SPORTING FEATURES OF THE MCGREGOR COURSE



FROM THE NINTH TEE TOWARD THE CLUBHOUSE ONE MUST CARRY OVER A WASTE OF SAND



THE SIXTH GREEN, COVERED WITH TOP DRESSING, AND THE SEVENTH TEE JUST BEYOND



A BUILT-UP GREEN ON WHICH A SHORT MASHIE SHOT MUST BE HELD AT THE THIRTEENTH



ALMOST LIKE A NATURAL SEASIDE GOLF HOLE THE APPROACH TO THE SEVENTH APPEARS

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pitch and run, holes in the country over natural bunkers and sand hazards to natural greens. There are two three-shotters. Of these, the sixth is unlike any hole the writer has ever seen. After a fine long tee shot, if a high big brassie second shot is played over a hill bristling with sandslopes, the ball is found in a position to play a mashie pitch to a large elevated natural green, surrounded by sand hazards. Failing the two above described wooden club shots, the ball must be played over a different line, and it becomes impossible to get to the green in less than four strokes.