

Make Way for Progress

New Hefner North Soon to Replace Maxwell's Last Gem

By Mae Bentley
Staff Writer

The thought of a Perry Maxwell creation being plowed under surely would shock those who have played and loved his golf courses. His brilliant use of the prevailing landscape and challenging greens would, above all, stand the test of time, devotees attest.

It's a different story for the Lake Hefner North golf course, however. The 41-year-old layout is being recycled under the artful direction of Tulsa architect Randy Heckenkemper, and city officials expect no apologies will be necessary when public play begins this fall on the first six holes and three par-3 academy holes.

The last course designed and built by Maxwell, Hefner North opened in 1951, not too many months before the highly acclaimed, depression-era architect's death. Billed in newspaper clippings as Maxwell's "latest gem" when it opened, it was termed "long suffering" just 12 years later.

It's fate as an overflow facility was sealed with the 1965 opening of the Lake Hefner South Course, and over the years has been given less consideration than the South course and other Oklahoma City courses in funding and improvements.

The original front nine holes are still open, but will be closed in October when the new nine is opened. The second phase of construction then begins on the final 12 holes, which should open in October 1993, when the teaching par-3s will be taken off line.

This is an excellent time to play the original front nine and imagine the course as Maxwell imagined it. It will be gone this fall, as the new course will have all new holes in all new pieces. Except for ball marks on the greens — perhaps left by thoughtless players figuring the course's days are numbered anyway — it's still an enjoyable effort.

"At the time we're shutting it down, it's probably in better shape than ever," said Hefner manager Aisle Hyden. "It has provided a lot of recreation, it's been a pretty good ol' course all in all."

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we hit it."

Water has long been a problem for North, which was built just as a several-year drought was beginning. It's still remembered as a time when you could walk a half-mile into Lake Hefner before getting your feet wet.

According to newspaper accounts, Maxwell built the course with \$105,000 of his own money. The front nine opened in May 1951, the back nine four months later. Maxwell's company was to operate the course for 10 years, expecting to regain its investment along with \$6,000 per year interest, then turn it over to the city.

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Oklahoma City. It was reported, scooped 5 percent off the course's yearly gross for the city's general fund, but over the years paid just a little over \$1,000 on the principal and never made a full \$6,000 interest payment. Finally, in 1962, the city paid \$122,319 to buy up the lease.

The new course appears to be a sure thing. Heckenkemper's talents are obvious at SilverHorn in Oklahoma City and Forrest Ridge in Broken Arrow. He's also designing the second 18 holes at Earlywine.

A delegation of sports reporters was duly impressed when introduced to the new holes at Hefner this week. The project also includes a pair of extensive putting greens and an expensive driving range, which is expected accommodate as many as 100 golfers at a time.

The putting greens are just a few steps outside the north doors of the clubhouse, and from there the driving range extends to the north, with room at the far end for Hefner's teaching pros to operate.

The holes feature definite but not absolute landing areas, strategic and sometimes target bunkers and big,

rolling greens with numerous pin possibilities. The first three holes, with tentative championship distances of 410, 185 (par-3) and 430 yards, wrap around the driving range. The teaching par-3s, located between the clubhouse and the Hefner docks, will serve for a year as the Nos. 4-6 holes.

The eventual No. 4, a 580-yard par-5, heads back to the north along the lake while the fifth and sixth holes, 415 and 360 yards, are doglegs-left leading back near the clubhouse.

"I think the fact that it's new will be one thing golfers enjoy most in comparing it with the old North course, and it's going to have a lot of green grass," said Hyden. "There's some relief in the terrain, but the way it's designed I think they're going to catch themselves standing on the tee or green seeing the lake like they've never seen it before."

• Earlywine's new 18 holes will be directly north and to the west of the existing 18. Manager Mike Smiley said the \$300,000-plus spent over the past three years on the original 18 should ensure its attractiveness when it has to compete against the new 18.

The demand is there, he said. On the Friday before July 4, his club received 165 calls for tee times after the course already had been filled. Such counts on more routine days over the past few years have also been impressive, he said.

• Jeff White of Edmond will be one of the players to beat this week as the Oklahoma Golf Association conducts its junior championship at the Lawton Country Club.

White, 16, won two Junior PGA events this week, shooting a 69 to win at Tulsa's Mohawk Golf Course on Monday and a 73 to win at KickingBird on Thursday.

The three divisions — 11-and-under, 12-14 and 16-17 — have drawn 144 players. The youngsters play three 9-hole rounds of stroke play Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The older divisions have stroke play on Monday and Tuesday, then match play through Friday.

Defending champion Shannon Friday of Guthrie has outgrown the age limit, but the field does include two-time Class 4A state champion Chad Willis of Altus. Also entered is Chance Cozby of Bartlesville. His brother, Oklahoma Sooner Craig Cozby, won the 1987 and 1989 titles.