

It's a family business at Rochester Golf Club

Editor's note: This is the one of a series of articles examining the toughest holes at local golf courses.

By JOHN BOZZO

Sipping coffee in the clubhouse at Rochester Golf Club, I tried to forget my dismal performance on the course's first hole, which included three penalty strokes while I listened to some of the club's fascinating history.

The owner, Eleanor Sadovnik, explained the course was built in the early 1930s. She said the architect brought 18 designers from Scotland and each of them designed one of the holes.

Mrs. Sadovnik and her late husband George took over operation of the course in 1958. It remains as one of the few family-owned golf courses.

Her son, George Jr., explained it's difficult for a family to operate a business on revenue from four months of the year. Rochester Golf Club is semi-private; the public is welcome and memberships are available.

The course is a beautiful 6,800-yard layout from the championship trees and 6,420 yards from the regulation tees. It's a compact course, with some of the fairways running parallel to each other. That provides a nice feature for a golfer like myself so that when I hit a stray shot I don't always lose the ball in the rough but can play from the opposite fairway.

A CREEK winds through the course.

crossing 12 holes, including the 18th twice. Mrs. Sadovnik explained that the Detroit News had evaluated the number six hole as one of the toughest 18 holes in the state but at the Rochester Golf Club they consider number one a tougher challenge.

A glance at the scorecard reveals the handicap supports Mrs. Sadovnik's viewpoint. The first hole is also the number one handicap, while the sixth is the number two handicap. I accepted her invitation to play the opening hole.

Number one is a 442-yard par four from the regular tees. From the championship markers it plays 16 yards longer. There are trees lining the left side of the fairway and surrounding the back edge of the green. Two sand traps sit on the left side of the green.

Stan Savage, one of the employees at the club, explained why they consider number one tougher than the 432-yard par four sixth hole.

"I can hit the sixth green in two," Savage said. "There's no creek on six. But you can't always hit number one in two. You might have to play short because the creek's about 25 yards from the green."

LOSINGEN UP: I swung hard on my first attempt, wanting to get some distance on my drive, but instead hit the ball off the toe of the club and watched it sail almost straight sideways.

I immediately took a mulligan, and the accompanying penalty stroke, as I did not have the time or ambition to chase down my ball in the midst of some women golfers at the eighth green.

Again my mighty swing failed to produce the desired results as I hit a pop fly

into the 18th fairway. Since there were more golfers waiting to tee off I hustled over to find the second mulligan, and failing to locate the ball I took a drop, another penalty stroke, and prepared to hit my fifth shot.

I looked a three-iron into the trees on the left side of the fairway and started toward it. Just then, Tom Baer, Southfield-Farmington sports editor, who was taking photos, found my ball. I had given it up to the creek and happily put it back in my bag.

My fifth shot landed about 180 yards from the green. The fairways at Rochester are nice and so I decided to take a chance with my three-wood. My swing felt good and I thought I had hit the ball well, however, I was unable to find the ball.

The course was busy on the morning I was there and a two-man behind was waiting for their chance to hit, so I dropped another ball and prepared for my eighth shot.

AT THIS POINT, Baer, who I have never thought of as a golf expert, offered some advice: "Hit the ball high and right on the pen and it will stop right away," he said.

The nine-iron shot I hit had a nice arch, but landed at the front of the green. It started rolling and slipped onto the green. For a moment I thought it might roll over the green, but it finally stopped, leaving me a 14-foot putt.

I was short on the first putt, and five inches to the right on the second attempt, before I tapped in the third putt for an 11.

After finishing I headed quickly for the 19th hole.

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