

Top rated golf course tapped for PGA

By BOB GROSS

The 1979 Professional Golfer's Association Championship tournament will be held July 30 through Aug. 5 at Oakland Hills Country Club's storied South Course.

The South Course has been the site of the 1934, 1937, 1951 and 1961 U.S. Opens. More recently, it was the site of the 1972 PGA tournament.

The South Course used to be listed in Golf Digest as one of the top 10 courses in the United States. The 16th hole of the South Course was chosen by Sports Illustrated in 1972 as one of the best 18 in the country. In 1951, after the course was redesigned by Robert Trent Jones, it was dubbed "The Beast" by Open winner Ben Hogan. In 1972, the pros

called it "The Survival Course."

The South Course has received its share of notoriety, and rightly so, but what about the "other course" of Oakland Hills?

The club's North Course will be used during the PGA tournament, as it was in 1972, for a parking lot.

The North Course was built in 1919, and in its first incarnation was a public golf course owned by Oakland Hills. It was called North Hills then and went by that name until 1969. In that year, the clubhouse was torn down, a bridge was built over Maple Road to connect the courses, and it was turned into a private golf course.

It was also redesigned in the same year by none other than Robert Trent

Jones, the man responsible for "The Beast" across the street.

The North Course, in its present life, is a relatively short par-70. According to Ted Woehrlie, golf course superintendent at Oakland Hills, the course from the back tees is every bit as difficult as its sister course.

Jones designed the course with tight targets and plenty of bunkers. In addition, there is one water hole on the front nine, and four water holes — the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th — on the back nine.

Woehrlie said that there is room for 14,000 cars on the North Course, but he expects only 10,000 cars to park there on any given day.

Such a crush of cars will, said

Woehrlie, "trample the grass down . . . after a couple of rains it turns green again."

If it rains during the tournament, "you get ruts," said Woehrlie. It rained in 1972 during the tournament and it was several weeks before the course was put back into playable condition.

"Either way," said Woehrlie, "it's going to look bad. It's a sacrifice you have to make."

Not all of the members at Oakland Hills are pleased about making the sacrifice. Woehrlie said, "A lot of the members don't see the merit of using the North Course for parking, but I sure makes a nice tournament when you can."



The North Course of Oakland Hills as seen from the first tee. (Staff photo by Dick Kelley)

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