

Pros sweat tough Oakland Hills

By M.B. Dillon
staff writer

United States Senior Open participants Gene Littler, Sam Snead and Billy Casper all said the same thing after completing their first practice round at Bloomfield Township's Oakland Hills.

The course is tough — maybe too tough.

The three pros were among the 150-member field, which includes Arnold Palmer. They reacquainted themselves with the championship South Course while practicing in Tuesday's 91-degree, steamy heat.

Tournament play begins today with the lowest 50 scorers entering final rounds Saturday and Sunday.

Littler — who Snead, Casper and OHCC pro Al Mengert consider a favorite to win the Senior Open — said: "There's no way anyone is going to break par here."

"Depending on where they place the tees, I think 287 (seven over par for four rounds) is a good number to win it. This course is very long and very soft — there's no roll on the fairways."

"The greens don't play as fast or quick as in the (U.S.) Open, but they're quick enough," added Littler, 50, who tops the seniors' money list with \$108,350 in winnings.

"To have a shot at this thing you've got to be hitting the ball long."

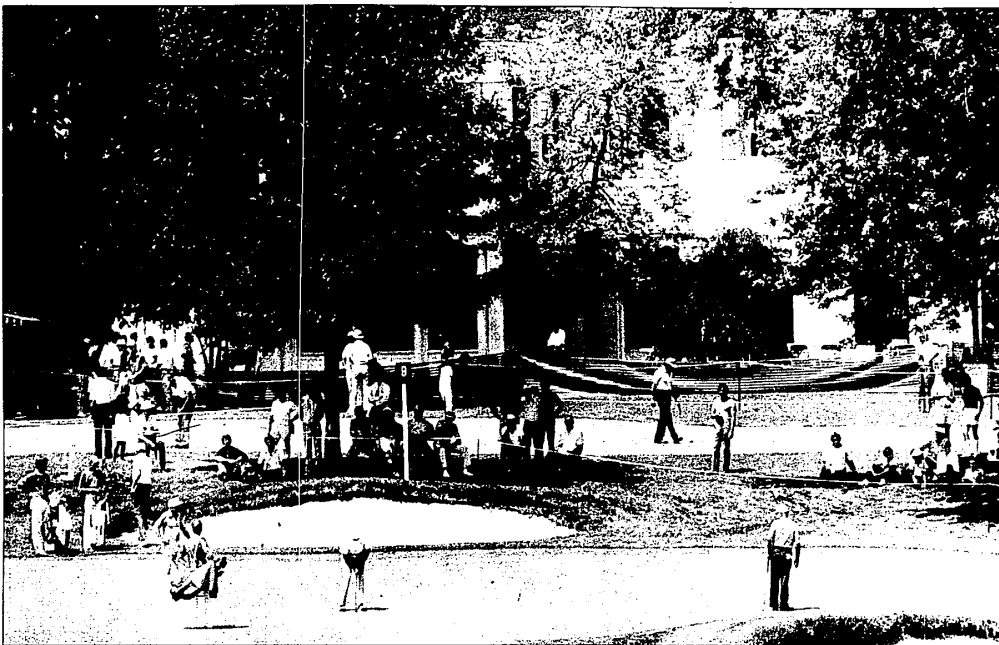
"If I play well I can win it. I'd say the favorites are Miller Barber, Bob Goalby and, of course, Palmer."

"IT'S PRACTICALLY the same course as the (1979) PGA," said 69-year-old Snead, sipping ice water after putting out sidesaddle-style on the 18th green.

"They could ease it up and make it (the total yardage) about 6,400 yards instead of 6,900."

"The course is tough, and the rough is tough. It's matted, and it's very difficult to get close to those slippery greens," added Snead, who shot his age, then bettered it at the 1979 Quad Cities Open.

"Some of these par fours — you can't get there in two. You get no roll on the fairways, and even if you've



Golfers putt on the ninth green at Oakland Hills Tuesday in preparation for the \$150,000 U.S. Senior Open, which runs through Sunday at the Bloomfield Township course. DICK KELLEY/staff photographer

got a two-footer on the green and you charge it, you've got a five-footer coming back because of the undulation."

"The undulations here are as difficult as any greens we play," he said.

"Scores have come way down in re-

cent years, but the scores for this tournament are going to be high."

"THIS IS A GREAT course — as good as any we ever play," said Casper, who turned 59 in June and is the youngest player competing in the Senior Open.

"And it's in fantastic condition."

"The rough is the thing that'll be the determining factor. It's deep, so you've got to stay on the fairway and hit the ball fairly well to have a chance."

"The greens offer a problem," said

Casper, a father of 11 children. "We run into a set of them every once in awhile, so you have to develop a stroke for them."

"A lot in this tournament is going to depend on pin placements and weather conditions. If it rains, the greens will be softer and slower than if it

stays dry and hot. It's conceivable that someone will shoot par."

Littler, Snead and Casper offered various opinions on senior-tour competition and certain United States Golf Association (USGA) rules.

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Souchak stomps familiar ground

By Marty Budner
staff writer

It was reminiscent of a soldier returning from overseas.

Al Watrous, former Oakland Hills club professional, hugged him and talked briefly about old times. Later, in the clubhouse, Oakland Hills President Bill Prew vigorously shook his hand, offered him an ice tea and explained how great it was to see him.

Out on the course Tuesday afternoon, while practicing in stifling-hot weather conditions for the U.S. Senior Open that begins today on Oakland Hills' South Course, Mike Souchak was greeted warmly at every hole.

Souchak, of course, was head professional at Oakland Hills for five years starting in 1967 when he assumed Watrous' duties. And Souchak, a free-spirited individual with a bullish build, enjoyed renewing acquaintances.

"You know I'm really looking forward to (the Senior Open tournament) because a lot of my old friends are here," said Souchak, who figures to be

one of the tournament's favorite sons, along with current Oakland Hills head professional Al Mengert.

"I'm very much looking forward to the competition. It will be more fun this time around. Years ago I was playing for a livelihood, but today it's for recreation."

SOUCHAK would like nothing better than to finish among the top money winners in the \$150,000, four-day tournament. He will be bidding for the first-place cash prize of \$25,000 along with such golf legends as charismatic Arnold Palmer, pre-tourney favorite Gene Littler and 69-year-old Sam Snead.

Although he's much more familiar with the famed "Monster" than most of his peers, Souchak believes he doesn't have that much of an advantage.

"This course will be hard . . . it's never easy," said Souchak, who hasn't played at Oakland Hills since he left the club in 1972.

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Mike Souchak: "Here at Oakland you have to do a good job on the greens, because whatever else you may do right will go for naught if you can't putt."

Fans brave heat, see seniors

By M.B. Dillon
staff writer

Anticipation — you could feel it in the gallery at Oakland Hills on Tuesday as the pros took practice for the real thing starting today.

Decked out with binoculars, Panama hats, collapsible chairs, cold beers, cameras and suntan lotion, the fans followed their favorites around the monstrous course, urging the veterans on.

Marian Benton of Birmingham and Lois Shoemaker of Royal Oak enjoyed a close-up view of the action from underneath the oak trees on a hill near the ninth tee.

"It's fun to watch the pros when they're relaxed and kidding around with each other," said Shoemaker, a member of Plum Hollow Country Club in Southfield. "But we'll be back later in the week when there's a little more pressure."

"This is a good chance for me to see the older golfers, and to watch our (Detroit Golf Club) pro, George Bayer (who qualified for the Senior Open at Franklin Hills last week)," said Benton.

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Benton, who authored a book on the late golfer Horton Smith titled "The Velvet Touch," had another reason for coming.

"I followed a lot of these players at the Masters when I was doing research for my book," she said. "It's good seeing them again."

Benton's novel includes a section on Smith's technique, his accomplishments (among them two Masters championships), and his battle with cancer — a fight he eventually lost.

TOM MIRIANI of Troy, who with his nephew Scott, 19, followed Arnold Palmer and Sam Snead, was feeling the heat — and said so.

But the over-90-degrees temperatures weren't about to keep Scott from enjoying the day.

"I'm visiting here from Bryan, Texas, so

this doesn't bother me a bit," he said. "Watching the pros is lots of fun."

Ralph Morrison of Harper Woods found a way to beat the heat.

A former scratch golfer, the white-haired Morrison wore a Panama hat, a white shirt, white pants, white shoes and constantly kept cool with either a Diet Pepsi or a Strobo.

"I'm the same age as Sam Snead (69) — I just retired," said the Kansas native. "I saw (Bob) Goalby make an eagle on No. 7 and a sandy birdie on No. 9. I'm hoping to see the terrible-tempered Tom (Bolt) from Texas who used to throw clubs."

Parrott's son, John, and Doris Booth, all of Bloomfield Hills, also took advantage of the ninth-tee vantage point.

THEY AGREED that "this is the time you can get a close-up look at the pros."

"And we're rooting for Peter Smith, (an Oakland Hills member who qualified for the senior tournament along with host pro Al Mengert)," said Booth.

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