

# Not enough rough, bemoans club pro

By Marty Budner  
staff writer

IT WASN'T SUPPOSED to be this way. Way back in February, United States Golf Association and Oakland Hills officials virtually promised scores at the 85th U.S. Open to be played at the majestic Oakland Hills South Course would be kept under control.

The golfers would not, they contended, again damage the "Monster's" reputation with absurd low scores like they carded in the 1979 PGA. They were hoping for a return to the era when scores at Oakland Hills were disappointingly high, like the 1951 Open when the legendary Ben Hogan mustered one of just two sub-par rounds.

Why were they filled with such bold premonitions? Simply because it was scheduled for mid June.

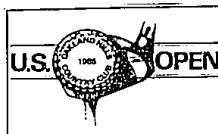
Everyone from USGA Executive Director of Rules and Competitions P.J. Boatwright Jr., to Oakland Hills greens superintendent Ted Wehrle, to tournament director Bud Erickson figured the fairway rough would grow to at least four inches because of Mother Nature's normal rainy spring temperament.

But there has been little rain. The '79 PGA was held in August and the accompanying dry summer weather resulted in low roughs and fast greens.

THIS YEAR was to be different. The high rough and slower greens caused by the anticipated damp weather was to have hindered the world's greatest golfers.

The unusually dry weather has created a similar situation to that which existed in 1979.

When the 156 pros take to Oakland Hills starting with practice rounds today they will find a fast course. Consequently, Al Mengert, the host profes-



sional, reluctantly forecasts record-setting scores.

"Right now the rough is weak and there is no texture to it," said Mengert, who himself has participated in 29 major championships, including nine U.S. Opens.

"I was hoping the rough would have that fine texture to it by now to keep the golfers from reaching the greens," he said. "It just isn't up to what we had hoped because we've had July and August weather in April and May."

Consequently, Mengert has lowered his predicted winning score from 278-

279 to 273-274.

"The course is in magnificent shape. It is set up for a possible record considering the abilities of the great players of today. I hope it doesn't become a putting contest."

"I hope they have to do something other than just putt. I would like them to show the accuracy of their irons. I would like them to show that this is a true championship."

"I've lowered my predictions," he said. "If the weather is calm and the greens will hold the second shots, there is a possibility a 72-hole record could be set. The course is primed."

FUZZY ZOEGLER, the defending Open champion, and his PGA tour mates are now in town in quest of fame and glory which accompanies the Open winner.

Most of the tour's leading money winners this year will be present: Curtis Strange, Lanny Wadkins, Calvin

Peele, Mark O'Meara, Corey Pavin and 1985 Masters champ Bernhard Langer will attempt to conquer the sprawling 6,996-yard, par-70 course in record fashion.

The key, according to Mengert, will be to play well on the front nine and be consistent on the back nine. David Graham, for instance, won the '79 PGA on holes 7 and 8.

"I really feel the championship is set up in the early going and the golfer protects himself on the back nine," said the 56-year-old Mengert. "You'll see the aggressive play on the front nine and defensive play on the back nine. The players will lose it on the back nine."

At any rate, Mengert is glad the tournament is finally here after months — even years — of preparation.

"It is a great thrill to play in the

tournament, but it is also a great honor to be a host pro," he said. "It's a fulfillment of a club pro's dream. It's like being in charge of the President's Inaugural Ball. This is the Super Bowl of golf."

"It's something we've been pointing to for since 1900. Five years of preparation have gone into this. The Senior Open in 1981 was the preview to this. We held the '79 PGA and many other major tournaments so we're not maddens in it. We're experienced at hosting this type of tournament."

"This definitely ranks as the world's greatest tournament — ahead of them all," he said.

Practice begins today and continues through Wednesday. The four-day tournament begins Thursday and concludes Sunday. In the event of a tie, an 18-hole playoff will take place Monday.

## Golfers rely upon lady luck

By Doug Funko  
staff writer

The golfer pulled a beat-up ball out of his pocket as he always did when he approached the tee of a water hole that invariably gave him trouble.

Suddenly, a voice boomed from the heavens. "Use a new ball."

Startled, the golfer looked around but couldn't see anyone. But he did as the voice commanded.

"Now, tee it up," the voice ordered. The golfer complied. "Take a practice swing," the voice thundered. He did. "Use the old ball," the voice boomed.

Golf routines — superstitions if the behavior of someone else is under scrutiny — start innocuously enough. They're spawned by the repetitive, individual nature of the game. Success breeds imitation. Sometimes, though, behaviors transcend logic and routines take on a life of their own.

Al Mengert, club pro at Oakland Hills, which this week hosts the 85th U.S. Open Championship of the United States Golf Association, says he hates to play with anything except a ball identified by the numeral one. Now Big Al knows markings on balls have absolutely no bearing on distance and accuracy.

YET HIE stays with the number one. "It's kind of like being first in a tournament," he said. Mengert acknowledges that he gets annoyed when he has to sift through more than a handful of packages for a specific numbered ball for a club member.

Dave Lancer, a media official for the PGA Tour, admits to a quirk of his own. "I use dimes to mark my ball on the green," he said. "Don't ask me why. I started when I was a kid. I always have three. It hasn't brought me any luck,

but I refuse to leave without 'em."

Gary Whitener, golf pro at Livonia's Whispering Willows and secretary of the Professional Golf Association of Michigan, has seen all kinds during his years as a club pro.

"There definitely is a routine and you can see people do it from the time they have their coffee, get practice in, head to the john — so to speak — to get everything together, go to the putting green, then they're ready," Whitener said.

Mengert speaks again.

"MY DAUGHTER had a friend who had to have three pennies in her back pocket for good luck," he said. "Maybe some day, she had a good round, reached into the pocket for some change for a Coke and found three pennies."

Gestures originally adopted subconsciously as routine may be discarded,

then consciously pulled out of the hat at crucial moments to gain a competitive edge.

Mengert said he once played against an opponent in the U.S. Amateur who snapped his fingers once before he hit every putt and twice before every other shot.

"I think he did it as a distraction," Mengert said.

"It's funny how you associate (Arnold) Palmer with the hitching of his pants," Whitener recalled. "That may have been done to excite the crowd." So why does one person always take three waggles and two practice swings before finally hitting the ball, while another takes one waggle and three practice swings?

Because at one time — probably long ago — that's what happened just before the launching of an excellent shot. Why tamper with success — until things go bad.



Houston, Texas and Honolulu, Hawaii, have the highest average annual temperature in the U.S. (76.1°F.).

SUMMER SPECIALS

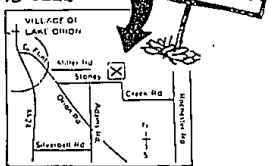
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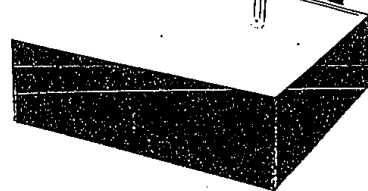
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