

Where the Rubber Met the Road

By Dick Rovig, JP Alumnus



Pictured above is how it looked as one waited to tee off at Jackson Park on a sunny summer day 56 years ago, along with an up-to-date photo. Note the tee box. It is a rubber mat. There was

no such thing as a true “grass teeing area” at Jackson in 1962, nor for the most part at Jefferson or West Seattle. Instead, “rubber tire link” mats resting upon permanent concrete pads or wooden platforms served as the teeing ground. The reason for their use was obvious. Except for a sweep now and then, they didn’t have to be mowed, nor did divots have to be replaced. Temporary grass teeing areas were jury-rigged for sponsored events such as the Seattle Amateur. Hint: the best time to play a round at Jackson, Jefferson or West Seattle is the week of the City amateur. The courses are pristine that week).

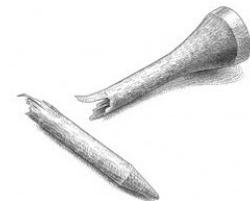


Teeing off a rubber mat in the '60s. The golfer is a young Tom Wells, noted local clubmaker. Tom was an accomplished golfer in his youth (Roosevelt High School).

At Jackson, mats were the norm until the mid-1990s when, over time, a long, long time, grass tees were finally constructed on a hole by hole basis. The 5th tee, a par four at the time (the mat was just down below and west of the fourth green), was the first to be replaced. The hole, a par four at the time, was lengthened to a par five by moving the teeing area back to the edge of Thornton Creek.

Jefferson Park and West Seattle both did have small grass teeing areas only because both courses were redesigned to host USGA National Publinks tournaments; West Seattle in 1953, Jefferson in 1967. Alas, the areas were so small, both courses had to revert to mats following the events.

Wooden tees of varying lengths were available to tee up the ball to the proper height on the mats. Either that or one just broke a longer tee to the proper length. Broken tee



remainders often cluttered the site, particularly around the par threes.

I imagine local dentists made a lot of money as the tees were often shortened by biting them to break them to the proper length.

Soles of the golf club were permanently scarred from rubber skid marks caused by brushing the mats when teeing off, particularly on the par threes. Hitting down on the ball could be a shoulder-jarring occurrence



Vestiges of the mat areas in the form of concrete pads remain on some tees at Jackson (see photos below).



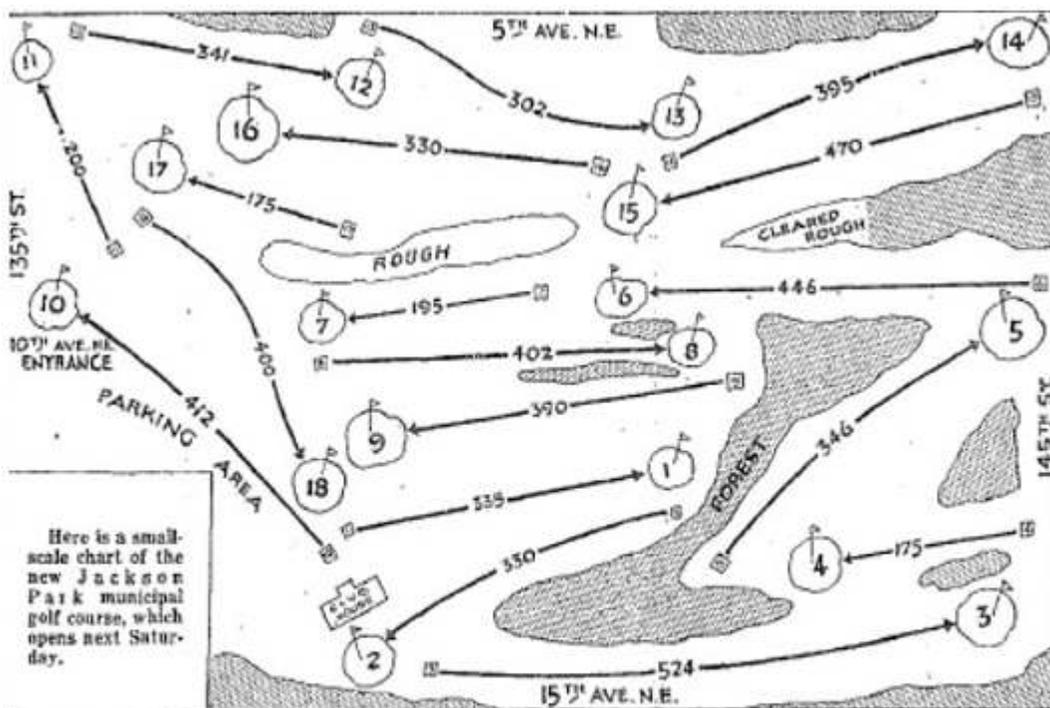
Twenty-eight years ago, John Peoples of the Seattle Times explained the need for rubber tee mats:

...Seattle's courses were designed and built when no more than 10,000 players a year could be expected to use each layout. Jefferson and Jackson routinely see more than 100,000 rounds a year each, while West Seattle gets more than 70,000. During the summer, each course averages 400 rounds played each day.

That's why tees mats, which are unheard of in warmer regions, are as Northwest as the Space Needle. All of Seattle's public layouts are so equipped, with many holes, like the par-3, No. 2 at Jackson and the par-4 No. 18 at West Seattle, requiring them for all but a few days each year.

*The number days **grass tees** can be used for those holes are further limited by players who walk over barriers designed to keep people off while the tees are recuperating.*

According to U.S. Golf Association recommendations, you need 1,000 square feet of tee area per 1,000 golfers to maintain a grass tee year-round. Except for the recently built tees for the first and 10th holes, no grass tee at West Seattle approaches 700 square feet.



Jackson Park Opening Day 1930

Note: Tee areas. Those are rubber mats which were used until phased out 70 plus years later (Front and back sides were switched back then).

Well, Seattle Parks golf has grown up in the 21st century. No more rubber mats, nor more skid marks on the golf clubs, no more biting tees in half, and, no more signs like this.

