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## Golfing in Collegeville

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## Golfing in Collegeville:



## A brief history

1945 *Scriptorium* v.5 n.2 p.30 "Sagatagan Saga" by Clodoald (Cloud) Meinberg, OSB  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/25137>; Golf photo from  
Aschewan collection, LP219, undated

Research on the topic was prompted by an author's request for archival information:

**Newsleaders**  
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Sartell St. Joseph Criers Social Events Opinion Notices E

### 'FORE! GONE' BOOK TALKS ABOUT ST. JOHN'S GOLF COURSE

News Sartell St. Joseph — 23 January 2014



by Cori Hilsgen  
news@thenewsleaders.com

Did you know St. John's University used to have a golf course? The course is described in author Joe Bissen's book called "Fore! Gone. Minnesota's Lost Golf Courses, 1897-1999."

The book describes more than 80 abandoned courses in Minnesota, including the one at SJU and another that was at one time located in St. Cloud. It was called "Hillside Golf Course" and operated from 1930-45.

"I did not write about the more than two dozen courses that have been abandoned since 2000, as I wanted to keep the book more historical in nature," Bissen said.

Bissen said SJU occupies a distinct position in Minnesota golf history. He believes it's one of only two colleges or universities in the state that had its own golf course. The University of Minnesota-Bolstad course is the other.

Author Joe Bissen first contacted me in May 2013, the day after Commencement, for information.

Thursday, May 7, 1925

THE RECORD

AN APPEAL

“The heart of a landscape paradise”; this is St. John’s. But it also has two thousand acres, a bowling alley, a pool hall, a gymnasium, a picturesque lake, tennis and handball courts, and the largest bowl in the Northwest; what more can a boy want? A golf course.

For the past four years the installation of the links has been considered and re-considered but with no other result than the happy anticipation and then the disappointment of the local golfers. But why not materialize these plans? Just observe and consider the budding ability of the Collegeville ‘golfers’ who, under the present inadequate circumstances, must conduct a fruitless search for a suitable place to enjoy the Scottish diversion. All they can possibly

find is the remnants of quondam silvan giants and rough, stony hills.

Is there no suitable location for the links? Well, it is our sincere hope and desire to inform the wide world that there is. With two thousand acres at our feet we can designate with great facility a very suitable location for a golf course.

Near the thriving village of Flynnville and close to the shores of the lowly Watab stretches a verdant pasture surrounded by many trees. Just one small corner of this spacious expanse of *terra firma* would serve as one of Minnesota’s most scenic golf courses.

1920s Johnnies were interested in golf

“An Appeal,” 1925-05-07, The Record, p.1

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/24860>

## Golf Given Impetus As Campus Sport

The ancient Scotch game of golf, which until a few years ago was the most exclusive game in the country, is now being played almost universally. At one time it was played only by the so-called "400", but today we find that this exclusiveness is a thing of the past. Not so many years ago we saw only a few golfers on the courses, and these were always dressed in gaudy golf togs, but today we see the links crowded with players from all the different walks of life, players in their plain, every-day clothes who come out on the course for a few hours of healthful exercise. That it is no longer played by a select few can be seen from the fact that students of St. John's are taking up this great game. But the students are not the only ones who wander up and down the hills in search of the white pellets. It has been reported that even the more dignified personages of the realm have taken a few healthy swings at the ball, and according to the reports of some of the witnesses, they give promise of superiority over our more youthful enthusiasts. As a result, the opinion among the students seems to be that St. John's will soon improve the present course to meet the ever-growing demands of student golfers.

It was only this spring that the students began to show a lively interest in the Scotch game. During every free period one can see students swinging wicked golf clubs. The game has become so popular here that it is no longer safe for a person to stroll about the campus without being encased in the armor of the knights of yore, for without this raiment the reckless student will sooner or later find a golf ball embedded in his noble skull. This is especially the case immediately after dinner when entrants warm up for their prospective foursome of the afternoon. The regular golf course is north of the lower campus, and every afternoon a large cavalcade of students, with caddies, bags, and camp followers, wend their way to the hills. The present course is an ideal location, and with some improvements can easily be the best desired.

It may be of interest to know where to find

our good golfers. It is said that the seminarians have proficient golfers in their ranks—this

"The game has become so popular here that it is no longer safe for a person to stroll about the campus without being encased in the armor of the knights of yore, for without this raiment the reckless student will sooner or later find a golf ball embedded in his noble skull."



PC07 Matted Photo collection box 12 n. 9 no date

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/25222/show/25220>

*The Record* April 29, 1926, p. 11

"During every free period one can see students swinging wicked golf clubs. The game has become so popular here that it is no longer safe for a person to stroll about the campus without being encased in the armor of the knights of yore, for without this raiment the reckless student will sooner or later find a golf ball embedded in his noble skull."

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*The Record* April 29, 1926, p. 11

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“Construction on the course will probably begin this fall...”

**Professional Lays Out St. John's Golf Links**

Archie Houle, assistant professional at the White Bear Yacht Club course at White Bear, Minnesota, laid out a golf course for St. John's last Tuesday. Mr. Houle, a brother of Coach Houle, is well qualified to do this, having designed four courses previously this year.

The course is on the same plot of ground which has been used by the students for the last few years. It is scenically beautiful and possesses an unlimited number of natural hazards. Mr. Houle has taken full advantage of these hazards and worked them into his design in such a manner as to cause a great deal of trouble for both beginner and veteran. The first, second, third, fourth, and ninth holes all have water hazards 'twixt tee and green' and placed where they can do the most harm to the unwary golfer.

Construction on the course will probably begin this fall, but due to the short time left it is expected that only the stumps and rocks will be cleared off before winter. It will be finished in the spring and be open for play immediately after. The greens will be of sand. Father Arnold is expected to have charge of the construction and also of the upkeep. He will receive advice from one who has control of the upkeep of the public links of St. Paul.

*The Record* Nov. 4, 1926, p. 9

THE RECORD

**Father Arnold Begins Work on Golf Links**

No definite steps have been taken on the construction of St. John's golf course, as yet. Father Arnold, however, has graciously started this work on his own initiative; he is ably assisted by some of the students of St. Bede's and St. Gregory's Halls. They have confined their efforts to the first hole, and have already made an excavation for the green. This green is built into a hill and should prove very interesting—and troublesome—to any golfer.

One of the main problems which will be encountered is the clearing off of the stumps and stumps. It is not expected that much of this work will be done this fall as the approach of winter is close at hand. Once started, with the aid of a team of horses, it will be a matter of but a few days before it is finished completely, including the greens and tees. This will undoubtedly be done in the spring, and then St. John's will have a course of which it can be truly proud.

- <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/25142>
- 1926-10-07, *The Record* p.1 and
- 1926-11-04, *The Record*, p.9
- <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/25242>
- For a profile of Coach Houle see the 1926 *Sagatagan*, p. 49,
- <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/18908>
- Fr. Arnold would be Fr. Arnold Mondloch

## Organization of Golf Team Is Probable

A move, which has been started by Hamline, is being taken up by most of the other schools in the conference. A golf team has been organized at Hamline, Macalester, St. Thomas, and probably St. John's. The first three mentioned schools have scheduled matches with each other during the coming two months. This will be concluded by a conference meet, in which all members of the conference will be invited to participate.

It is expected that St. John's will be ably represented at this final meet, if not in the inter-school matches. Some very good material for a golf team is present here amongst both college and high school enthusiasts. Ryan, Hornig, Miller, Blake, Callaghan, Maertz, Deagen, Johnson, Schaefer, and Moynihan are all experienced players and are able to "drop the long ones". With this array of talent this school need not fear being poorly represented at the state meet, which, by the way, is due to be played at Town and Country, a well-known course in St. Paul.

Because of the late snows and rains here during the last few weeks but little work has been done on the golf course as yet. As soon as weather conditions become more favorable, the work on the greens will be finished. There is still a number of rocks and stumps left in the ground, which is the only serious detriment to the course as it now is. It has often been stated in this column, and is being done so again, that St. John's will have one of the niftiest nine-hole golf courses in the state in regard to design and setting. Very little work is needed, comparatively, to put it in first class condition. This will provide many an aspiring young Johnnie golfer with a means for practice.

"It has often been stated in this column...that St. John's will have one of the niftiest nine-hole golf courses in the state in regard to design and setting."

1927-04-07, The Record p.10

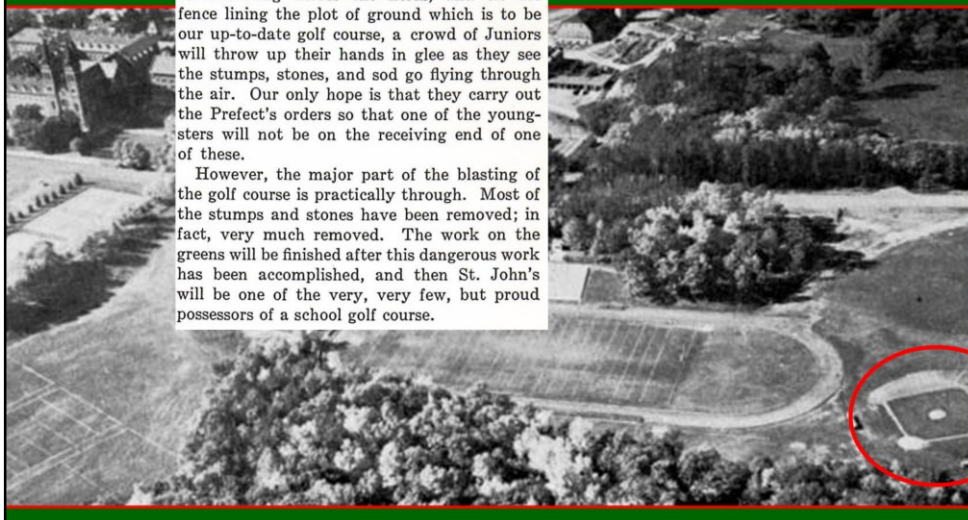
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/25450>



### *Work on New Golf Links Progressing*

A miniature World's War is being staged on the grounds north of the baseball diamond. Every few minutes a series of detonations goes reverberating across the fields, and on the fence lining the plot of ground which is to be our up-to-date golf course, a crowd of Juniors will throw up their hands in glee as they see the stumps, stones, and sod go flying through the air. Our only hope is that they carry out the Prefect's orders so that one of the youngsters will not be on the receiving end of one of these.

However, the major part of the blasting of the golf course is practically through. Most of the stumps and stones have been removed; in fact, very much removed. The work on the greens will be finished after this dangerous work has been accomplished, and then St. John's will be one of the very, very few, but proud possessors of a school golf course.

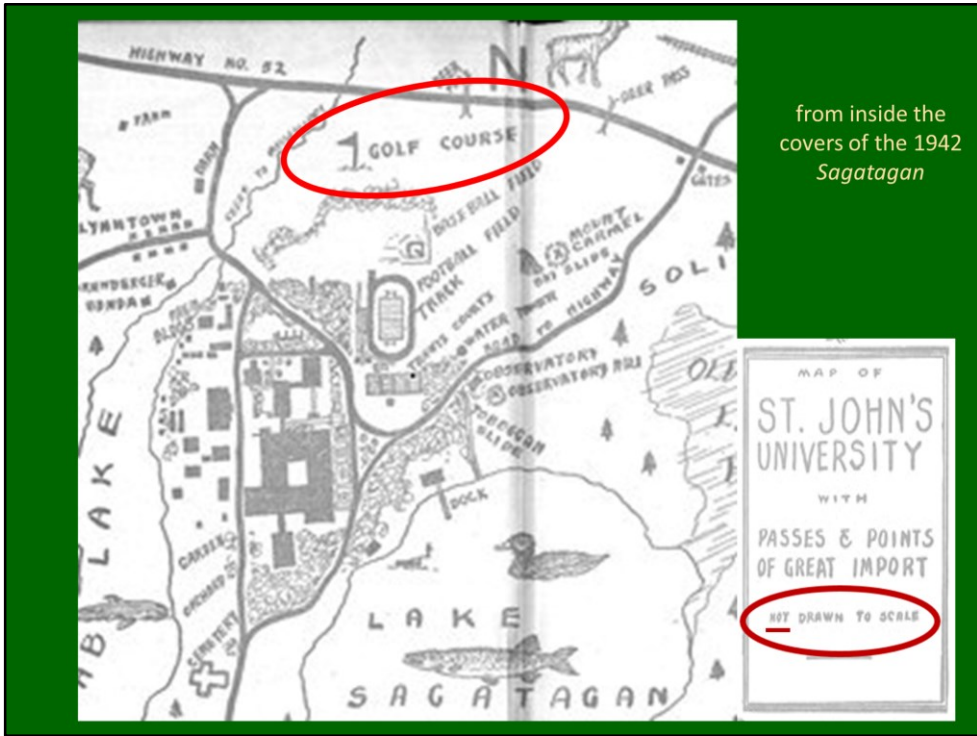


1927 April 28 *The Record* p. 5

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/25419>

Aerial view ca1949 B&W looking W

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/519>



from inside the covers of the 1942 Sagatagan

Campus map from inside the covers of the 1942 Sagatagan yearbook



1938 aerial photo of the north end of the campus

Image from the SJU Archives



Image from the SJU Archives

North of the tarvia and between Pine Knoll and the Water Tower all the hilly ground drains into the pond on the golf course (which is about 12 feet below the Sagatagan this year). This drains out into the Watab creek.



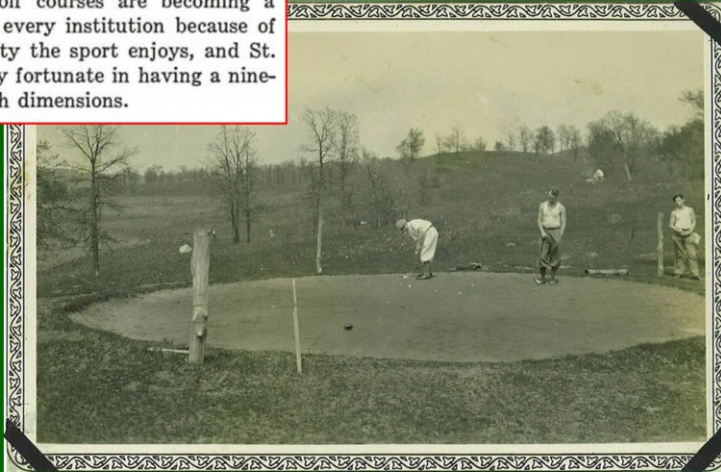
Undated photo in the SJU Archives

Text from "Sagatagan Saga" in the 1945 *Scriptorium* v.5 n.2 p.30

1945 *Scriptorium* v.5 n.2 p.30 "Sagatagan Saga" by Clodoald (Cloud) Meinberg, OSB  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/25137>; Golf photo from  
Ascheman collection, LP219

Work on the St. John's golf course will continue as soon as the weather permits. The fairways have been cleaned of trees, stumps, and other debris, and all that remains is the completion of the greens. When finished completely, St. John's will be the possessors of one of the most picturesque courses in this part of the state. Golf courses are becoming a necessary part of every institution because of the wide popularity the sport enjoys, and St. John's is especially fortunate in having a nine-hole course of such dimensions.

*The Record*  
April 26, 1928



Postcard ca. 1940

*The Record* April 26, 1928, p. 7

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/CSBArchNews/id/25892/show/25890>

Postcard ca. 1940



RT. REV. ALCUIN DEUTSCH, O.S.B.  
President

“...the college president, Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B., who had no objection to golf for the students, was opposed to the sport for members of the community. He considered golf a game played almost exclusively by the wealthy, leisured classes of people and opposed to the vow of poverty. Besides, he thought it a waste of time that could be more profitably spent at almost anything else proper in a monastic environment.”

*Scoreboard* Chapter 10



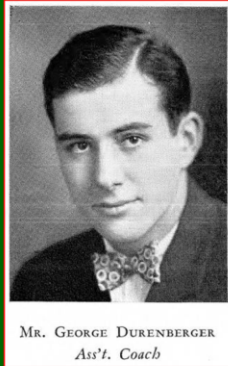
Postcard ca. 1940

Abbot's photo from 1929 *Sagatagan* yearbook

Text from <http://www.csbsju.edu/Documents/SJU%20Archives/Scoreboard.pdf>

Postcard ca. 1940

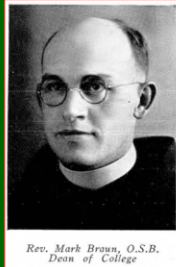
“Three of the school administrators of St. John's, like the students, had caught the golf fever, and during the summer months indulged in their new diversion. It ... was necessary to keep their golf activities safe from the abbot's attention, or from the attention of anyone else, for that matter.



MR. GEORGE DURENBERGER  
*Ass't. Coach*

However, the young director of athletics, George Durenberger, was a companion with them in some of their golf adventures and still loves to tell about the golfing escapades of the three Benedictine administrators, Frs. Mark Braun (later Abbot Mark), Walter Reger and Theodore Krebsbach, all three deans of the various departments of the college and prep school.

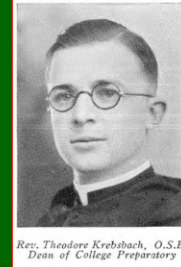
*Scoreboard Chapter 10*



*Rev. Mark Braun, O.S.B.  
Dean of College*



*Rev. Walter Reger, O.S.B.  
History*



*Rev. Theodore Krebsbach, O.S.B.  
Dean of College Preparatory*

Photos from 1929 *Sagatagan* yearbook

Durenberger:

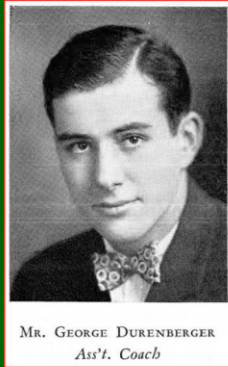
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<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/17789/show/17691>

Text from <http://www.csbsju.edu/Documents/SJU%20Archives/Scoreboard.pdf>



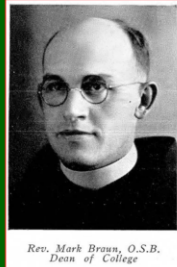
"The clubhouse for the three monks during these years consisted of a long pile of cordwood stacked close to the first tee. The Reverend Fathers tucked their clubs in the woodpile between the cordwood sticks where they usually escaped the rain... On many occasions he would have to replace his few clubs in the wood pile and return to his office."



MR. GEORGE DURENBERGER  
*Ass't. Coach*

"One balmy summer evening when they were all gathered on the summer porch with the community and the abbot,... out of the generosity of his heart, Bro. Ambrose, a famous community gagster, approached Fr. Mark and gave him a handful of golf balls he had found on the golf course."

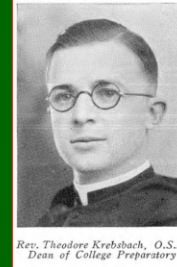
ca. 1931 - *Scoreboard* Chapter 10



Rev. Mark Brown, O.S.B.  
*Dean of College*



Rev. Walter Reger, O.S.B.  
*History*



Rev. Theodore Krebsbach, O.S.B.  
*Dean of College Preparatory*

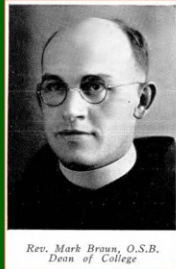
Photos from 1929 *Sagatagan* yearbook

Durenberger:

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/17789/show/17717>

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/17789/show/17691>

Text from <http://www.csbsju.edu/Documents/SJU%20Archives/Scoreboard.pdf>



Rev. Mark Brown, O.S.B.  
Dean of College

“Fr. Mark later said, ‘It was an acutely embarrassing moment!’ He also had a faint suspicion that the episode was one of Bro. Ambrose's practical jokes, for which he had a unique propensity.

Rumor has it that the carefree hours spent on the golf course by Fr. Pat O'Neill, O.S.B., a blithe spirit from St. Bernard's Abbey in Alabama, was the reason for the eventual (and inevitable) ban on faculty golf.”

*Scoreboard* Chapter 10

Photos from 1929 *Sagatagan* yearbook

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/17789/show/17691>

Text from <http://www.csbsju.edu/Documents/SJU%20Archives/Scoreboard.pdf>

## What became of SJU golf in the 1930s?

From *Scoreboard*:

“Around 1931 the Great Depression began to make its effects felt in all colleges in some way or another. At St. John's its effects were especially experienced in a decline of interest in golf. Moreover, drawbacks to the St. John's golf course became more apparent as the golfers became better acquainted with the new courses that were springing up in the smaller towns throughout the state.

George Durenberger has vividly described the drawbacks.

The first was the fact that the course had been superimposed on the St. John's cow pasture. When the herd began to be increased in size in the early '30s, a handicap that at first was little more than a bothersome hazard suddenly became a major problem. Big George describes the situation:

‘One of our first major problems was that the cows somehow developed a liking for standing on the greens; cow droppings, plus hoof marks, made putting somewhat difficult. Someone came up with the idea of installing fence posts around the greens with a single strand of barbed wire. This kept the cows off the greens, but it still posed a new problem for the golfers approaching the green. Special ground rules had to be worked out.’

Text from <http://www.csbsju.edu/Documents/SJU%20Archives/Scoreboard.pdf>

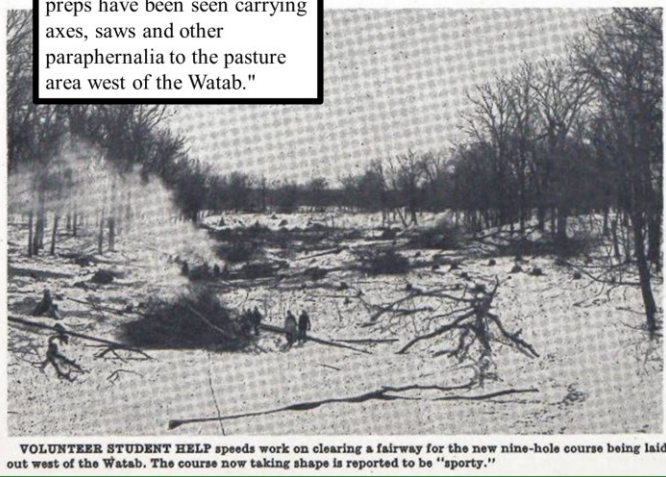
'Another problem was the vast accumulation of leaves from the nearby hardwood trees, especially in spring and fall. As someone said at the time, "A golfer spent one hour golfing and two hours looking for the ball among the leaves."



A third problem, a serious one, was the close proximity of the fairways to one another. On several of them a slice or hook could easily cross an adjoining fairway, thus providing a dangerous physical hazard. Not a few players had been struck with golf balls over a season. Finally, when the Depression had touched bottom in 1933 and student interest in golf had reached a deep low, **the administration decided to abandon the course as a safety measure.**"

Text from <http://www.csbsju.edu/Documents/SJU%20Archives/Scoreboard.pdf>

"For the past three months small crews of frustrated lumberjacks, faculty, collegians and a smattering of preps have been seen carrying axes, saws and other paraphernalia to the pasture area west of the Watab."



VOLUNTEER STUDENT HELP speeds work on clearing a fairway for the new nine-hole course being laid out west of the Watab. The course now taking shape is reported to be "sporty."

## AFTER 20 YEARS . . .

### GOLF MAKES A COMEBACK

By Jim Cesnik  
●Every spring for the past twenty years eager golf enthusiasts have made a bee-line for the football

field where they have utilized all the available space to perfect their putts and send their drives booming onto the baseball diamond. Not only has this endangered the life and limb of everyone concerned, but it has created

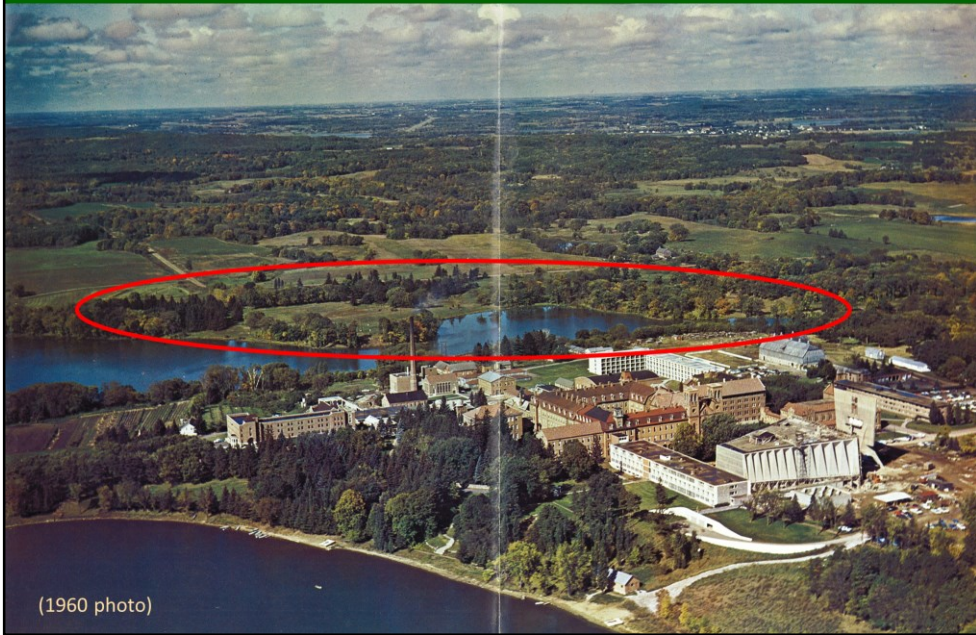
dangerous, and tricky and was abandoned in 1933.

Before undertaking this project, a consensus of opinion was taken from the students and alumni. In the survey conducted on campus it was discovered that a majority of the students played golf, and most of those who didn't, showed a lively interest in learning the sport.

A rough drawing of the proposed course hangs from the wall in George Durenberger's office. During basketball games this winter many alumni voiced their opinions on golf at St. John's. Said one who presently has four sons at St. John's, "This is one of the finest projects that St. John's could undertake for its students. All my boys play golf. When they're out on the golf course I never worry about them." A monogram winner of many years ago stated, "I learned to play golf on the old course, and it's the only sport I've retained and am still playing."

There is much work still to be done this spring before the course can be subjected to a leveling of rough spots and the installation of sand greens. Any students, collegians or preps, who feel the urge to put in a few self-satisfying hours in the great out-of-doors are strongly urged to contact George Durenberger.

“...the pasture area west of the Watab.”

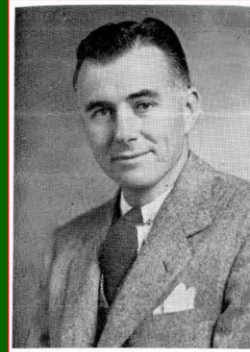


(1960 photo)

1960 aerial photo <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/517>

All seemed to be progressing regularly. But then suddenly all work stopped.

Athletic director George Durenberger:  
"Work progressed slowly but surely. The workmen brought along their chain saws and opened up a fairway through the woods, though much of the area was clear.



Mr. George Durenberger

Then came the letters.

One said that God had been good to St. John's for 99 years and we must not do anything to offend him.

Another wrote that golf was a game only for the wealthy people, so we would be doing our students an injustice, since most of them are poor, by creating an interest and skills for a game economically beyond their means.

Another objected to the picnic area: 'If we permit this to happen, the grounds will be surrounded by women in short skirts.'

Some of this rubbed off on Abbot Baldwin, as I was instructed to stop the work on the course for the sake of peace, and we did."



Abbot Baldwin Dworschak

*Scoreboard* Chapter 10, RE: 1955

*Scoreboard*, chapter 10

<http://www.csbsju.edu/SJU->

[Archives/BooksaboutStJohns/ScoreboardBook/ScoreboardChapter10.htm](http://www.csbsju.edu/SJU-Archives/BooksaboutStJohns/ScoreboardBook/ScoreboardChapter10.htm)

Durenberger photo from 1950 *Sagatagan*, p. 11

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/18882/show/18789>

## GOLF FACILITIES



“Golfers practice at the McNeely Spectrum on campus.

The Spectrum comes complete with cages for the golf team to practice driving.”

<http://www.gojohnnies.com>

[http://www.gojohnnies.com/sports/2009/5/26/GOLF\\_0526092532.aspx?path=mgolf](http://www.gojohnnies.com/sports/2009/5/26/GOLF_0526092532.aspx?path=mgolf)



THE OFFICIAL ATHLETICS SITE OF SAINT JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

# SJU SAINT JOHN'S JOHNNIES

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**GOLF** SCHEDULE | ROSTER | STATS | COACH ALPHEIS | HISTORY | ADDITIONAL LINKS

## SJU GOLF HISTORY

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**National Champions**  
2007, 2008

**National Tournament Appearances**  
2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014

**MAC Champions**  
1968, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013

[All-MAAC](#)  
[All-Americans](#)  
[All-America Scholars](#)  
[MAAC Honors](#)  
[National Honors](#)

**Record Book**  
[Saint John's MAAC Tournament Scoring Records](#)  
[Saint John's National Tournament Scoring Records](#)  
[SJU Golf's Best Competitive Rounds, By Course Since 2000 \(Pdf\)](#)

A resource on golf history on the SJU Archives' website:

**Chapter X: Golf p. 375-390**

[http://www.gojohnnies.com/sports/2008/8/5/GOLF\\_0805084948.aspx?path=mgolf](http://www.gojohnnies.com/sports/2008/8/5/GOLF_0805084948.aspx?path=mgolf)

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Scoreboard: A History of Athletics at Saint John's University, written and compiled by Dunstan Tucker, O.S.B. and Martin Schirber, O.S.B.

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<http://www.csbsju.edu/sju-archives/sjuhistory/booksaboutstjohns/scoreboardbook>

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### Chapter X: Golf

The history of golf at St. John's should rightfully have a preliminary section entitled "The Birth and Death of a Golf Course"-a strange title to be sure, for after all a golf course is simply a piece of landscape adjusted to provide pleasure for human beings who tramp across meadows, ford water hazards, get into traps and out of them, all in pursuit of a white pellet that finally drops with a plunk into a hole in a bit of turf called a green. But the St. John's golf course! That's a different story-the only school-owned golf course in the state.

The coming birth of the St. John's golf course was announced more or less as a rumor in the April 2, 1925 issue of the *Record* to the effect that St. John's might be planning to build a golf course: "The little white pellets may often be seen flying around the lower campus pursued by enthusiasts of the great old game. Who knows but that St. John's may put in a golf course in the near future!"

A year later, April 29, 1926, the sportswriter noted that some progress had already been made for a golf course. The site of the new course was the area north of the lower campus. "Every afternoon a cavalcade of students with caddies, bags and camp followers wend their way to the hills. The present course is in an ideal location and with some improvements can easily be the best desired."

A year later, 1927, a writer reports hearing loud detonations of dynamite explosions on the course, blasting out stones and stumps that obstructed the fairways. "The work on the greens will be finished after this dangerous work has been accomplished, and then St. John's will be one of the very, very few but proud possessors of a school golf course" (*Record*, April 28, 1927).

Progress on the newly created course was leisurely. In the fall of 1927 the tees and greens were plotted out, as suggested by golf pro Archie Houle, brother of Coach Bill Houle, and early in the spring of 1928 the Golf Club began making preparations to schedule matches with the other MIAC colleges. They were certain to make a good showing, they said, because they had in their midst two top-flight golfers: "Prospects were never brighter for a formidable golf team. St. John's is fortunate in having two men who probably have no peer in the conference: Walter Moynihan and Joe Ryan." Moynihan, it continues, was the city champion of Sauk Centre, and for the past two years, champion of the

<http://www.csbsju.edu/sju-archives/sjuhistory/booksaboutstjohns/scoreboardbook/scoreboardchapter10>



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Saint John's Abbey  
and elsewhere as noted  
by Peggy Landwehr Roske,  
CSB/SJU Archivist  
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1945 *Scriptorium* v.5 n.2 p.30 "Sagatagan Saga" by Clodoald (Cloud) Meinberg, OSB  
<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SJUArchives/id/25137>; Golf photo from  
Ascheman collection, LP219