

JIMMY JACKSON: PRO WITH A PURPOSE

If all goes well this fall, James D. Jackson will once again lend his teaching expertise to underprivileged youngsters.

Jimmy Jackson has an appointment. He is slated to conduct a series of golf clinics at six junior high schools in School District 9 in New York City's South Bronx, one of the worst depressed areas in the city.

Action taken by the community school board at the end of March and confirmed in a letter signed by Andrew G. Donaldson, community school superintendent, gratefully accepted Jackson's offer to bring his unique golf clinic to that district's schools.

Jackson, professional at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, one of New York City's 13 municipal layouts, is no stranger to direct community action. His efforts in reaching troubled and disillusioned youngsters in New York City's ghettos have borne fruit in the past. Areas, such as Brooklyn's Bedford Stuyvesant and Brownsville, names that are synonymous

A grueling year-round schedule at New York City's Van Cortlandt Park municipal course doesn't keep this professional from getting involved in the community

by DOUGLAS LUTZ

with teenage rebellion, have been visited by Jackson.

His unusual talks center on the values to be found through a pursuit of golf and the benefit to the city in general of well-maintained facilities unharmed by vandals. Specifically, he encourages his young listeners to accept the challenges of golf. Rather than just lecturing, however, his program is action oriented. When the clubs come out and the practice balls begin to fly out over the heads of the assembly, the youngsters really get turned on. Skeptical, jeering audiences have been turned into wildly cheering, en-

thusiastic converts to the ancient and honorable sport by Jackson's magical ability with golf shot demonstrations.

His ability to communicate with these youngsters, many of whom tuned out on society long ago, is due to many factors.

Foremost, he cares. And they know it. It's not something one can fake and get away with. Not with these sophisticated kids who can spot a phony a mile away. They've been conned too many times.

In these predominantly black population clusters, Jackson, being black, is living proof that one can make it. As his story unfolds, the audiences recognize a man who has risen above poverty, who has walked where they now walk, and through the medium of golf, has carved himself a share of respect and success.

When Jackson encourages young people toward an involvement in golf, he knows what he is talking about. He was born in Amityville, Long Island, and like many teaching professionals, be-



gan his career as a caddie. Several Long Island courses, Peninsula, a beautiful nine holer that was located in Massapequa Park and fell to real estate encroachment in 1970, and Bethpage in Farmingdale, saw Jackson's services as a bag totter. When the Jackson family settled in Jamaica, Jimmy attended Long Island City High School and went on to major in physical education at Virginia Union University in Richmond. A basketball scholarship put him through college, which would not have been financially possible otherwise. He took his court skills out West and played some professional ball before returning to the New York scene and the pursuit of a golf career.

As a teenager, he further developed his golfing skills on three Queens courses, Pomonok, Hillcrest and St. Albans. Sad to relate, all three of these exceptional layouts were early victims of "progress." Hillcrest became St. Johns University. Pomonok is now the site of ticky-tacky housing and part of the Queens College campus, while St. Albans shut down in the early days of World War II to make room for the St. Albans Naval Hospital.

There was a time when New York youngsters caddied at city courses. Now it's a rare sight to find anyone

willing to spend the five hours or so it takes to complete 18 holes for the nominal fee of \$2.50 and maybe a tip. Jackson bemoans the fact that he has been unable to get his caddie program moving at the Van Cortlandt course.

"It's tough to generate any interest," he says. "The young people can't make enough money at the present rates. If we could charge a decent fee, some of the kids would get involved."

Caddie fees are set by the city, not by each location or profes-



sional. I inquired whether or not he felt New York City players were entirely out of the habit of using caddies. He felt they would be receptive to caddies because Van Cortlandt hasn't any electric cars. The four finishing holes traverse such steep hills that cars have been ruled out as unsafe. Parking space also is a problem. The clubhouse area, situated on a strip of land between a roadway at the base of a hill and Van Cortlandt Lake, is tight. Additionally, it is removed from the course itself by about 600 yards. Jackson thought regulars might welcome caddies because even pulling a hand cart can be tiring, especially on the four finishing holes and the extra yardage to and from the clubhouse.

America's oldest municipal golf course, which may be Van Cortlandt's only claim to fame, keeps Jackson very busy. In addition to handling the small pro shop, which is a 10 foot by 30 foot cubicle at one

continued

Van Cortlandt's ancient clubhouse-boathouse (bottom left) has attracted city golfers since 1889. Jackson's tiny pro shop (same photo) is attached to one end of clubhouse. Free lesson session (below) for youth group is a typical Jackson "clinic." Young hopeful (left) in teaching cage gets backswing pointer from Jackson.



JACKSON *continued*

end of the clubhouse/boathouse, he gives an average of 10 to 12 lessons a day during the normal season. Facilities are so tight at Van Cortlandt that Jackson has to use a teaching cage alongside the open terrace that serves the luncheonette and the paddle boat fleet.

"It takes years to learn to teach properly," Jackson said recently in outlining his teaching activities. "I started in an open field in Jamaica, Queens, back in 1952. Ap-

pointments were made on my home phone and I'd meet clients at the field. Everybody thought I owned that open piece of real estate, so I just let them think what they wanted to, but I was just using it. The Cadillacs and Lincolns would line up along the curb and their owners would wait for their scheduled appointments." Jackson went on. "Since 1957, until last year, I've taught groups of 20 to 40 people in night adult education courses in Queens high schools. I've run a Fri-

day night clinic at a Queens department store for some time, too. For two years I had a golf studio in the Apollo Theatre building on 125th Street in Harlem where I taught a lot of show business people to play golf. I'm still involved with some entertainers. Aretha Franklin is one of my pupils, along with saxophonist Lou Donaldson, Al Freeman Jr., the actor, and Sarah Vaughn's drummer, Jimmy Cobb. I've never lost touch with the show business world."

HOW OTHER PROS ARE INVOLVED

Jimmy Jackson sees the responsibility of reaching young people as a full-time thing. He envisions free weekly clinics not only during the height of summer, but during bad weather, too, and particularly early in the season.

He has proposed a golf club arrangement, which would run 12 months a year with film segments, caddie instruction, rules and etiquette classes and the fundamentals to be taught in a net, if necessary, during the off season.

His proposals have been put to New York City's Director of Recreation, Jerry DeMaris, and to Commissioner of Recreation, Joseph P. Davidson. His plans are under study at this time.

Jackson said recently, "The idea is not to ram golf down the throats of the kids, but by giving lectures and lessons every two or three weeks you can keep their interest alive."

He feels land is pretty tight at many city courses and teaching areas are limited as it is, so alternative uses of the courses, such as picnics, might be automatically eliminated from consideration.

Jackson's best advice to serious-minded fellow professionals who want to get involved in community action is to seek out the youngsters at the school level. Go into the schools. Offer your services. Give lectures and demonstrations. Break up their academic day with an interesting diversion. The response from an enthusiastic group of teenagers will be ample reward.

Jimmy Jackson's frontal attacks into community action triggered a few inquiries around the country. GOLFDOM wondered if other

professionals had taken action or given thought to what they might do to help. How professionals, usually highly regarded, especially by youngsters, might interject themselves into the life of their communities.

We found genuine concern and vital interest in spite of demanding work loads. Involvement with junior programs seemed to be the thrust of most professionals. Even in this small sampling there was every indication that today's professional could be counted on to recognize his community's needs and to take appropriate action.

OMAHA, NEB. L.I.A. Schmidt, general manager and head professional for the past three years, has been at Miracle Hill for eight years. He outlined an interesting program undertaken in the Omaha area. In a serious attempt to promote junior golf, clinics have been set up that extend over a 12-week period during which time team play is organized. Handicaps are established and tournaments, using the handicap information to establish the flights, are run off. Trophies are awarded to the winners and runners up in each flight, and merchandise prizes are awarded to those in third and fourth place.

According to Schmidt, there is great interest among all clubs in the Omaha area in promoting junior programs. All high schools there have teams as do many of the junior high schools. Recently, girls' teams have been established at some of the high schools.

Miracle Hill is host course in Omaha for the entries into

nationwide competition sponsored by the Independent Insurance Agents through local agents.

POCATELLO, IDA. "Since fencing in the clubhouse area and providing night lights, we've had very little vandalism," according to Marshall Adams. Adams is head professional at Riverside GC. In his nine years at Riverside, Adams has seen vandalism brought under control to a great degree—and not only through obvious deterrents such as fencing and lighting.

Positive programs for youngsters has been Pocatello's approach to satisfying the demands for youthful expression.

Adams' enthusiasm for the youth of this Idaho community runs high. He has seen involvement demonstrated in a real sense on the course at Riverside and at Highland GC, another city-operated facility. State university teams play at Riverside as do high school squads. The high school program is noteworthy, because no fees are charged. Annual passes are issued for play on the city courses. Each June, high school seniors are exposed to an intensive three week series of lessons at \$1 each. The fee is levied only to offset costs, such as practice balls. Junior tournaments are held for the 9 to 14 year olds, and by Adams' account, "By the time they're 14, they're pretty serious about their golf."

Under a tournament program administered by the parks and recreation department, medal play is contested at Riverside while Mike Renshaw, the pro at Highland, is running tournaments under match

Jackson came to Van Cortlandt in 1969 after fighting hard to get the post. In spite of his reputation as a teacher and his work with underprivileged youngsters, his color stood in the way. Prestigious, if not necessarily financially rewarding, New York City professional jobs had always been filled by whites. The color barrier overcome, Jackson went to work building a following. His extensive teaching program today reflects his popularity as well as his ability.

One of his real kudos as a teaching professional is his designation as official professional for the United Nations Golf Club. The organization is made up of members of various delegation staffs stationed in New York. In addition to their regular play at various clubs in the metropolitan New York area, they plan a golf outing each year that includes the entire membership. For the first time in its history, the group selected a New York City layout for this year's

outing. As Marvin Weill, president of the club, explained in a letter to Jackson, "Most of our members are of modest means and a day at a semi-private club is too expensive." Twelve foursomes, male and female, showed up on April 12, a Thursday, and Jackson had made all the arrangements. "It was a fine day," he reports, "and everyone had a great time. After golf we served a buffet lunch out on the open air terrace overlooking the lake."

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play rules. Then they switch around. Highland is longer than Riverside by about 500 yards, so mixing and matching provides the youngsters with a fair challenge.

The name Pocatello may be worth a chuckle or two in musical comedy circles, but when it comes to motivating the youngsters of the community, it's not a laughing matter.

DES MOINES, IOWA. Approximately 450 high school youngsters are listed each year in the free playing classes run by their coaches at courses such as Waveland GC. Professional Frank O'Braza lends his wholehearted cooperation to Des Moines' answer to encouraging community activity at the city layouts.

Assigned to three courses, the high school contingents are given free tee off times between 8 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays or on Wednesdays and Fridays. Monday is reserved for the superintendents. Qualified golfers ranging from 7th graders on up are allowed to use the facilities.

Match play, which lasts an entire week at all three courses, is the Boy's Junior tournament, prior to age 17 when they can qualify for the city tournament. During the junior years, flights are organized according to ability and scoring, not necessarily handicap ratings. Small trophies are awarded in each of the flights, which are donated by the Chamber of Commerce.

Considering that 50,000 to 55,000 rounds are played each year at Waveland, one can assume that golf in Des Moines is a popular sport. There seems to be time, however, to

consider the needs of the community youngsters.

O'Braza's dedication to Des Moines golf is a seven day a week assignment. He lives on the course and is continually on the alert for potential vandalism. There has been very little at Waveland. "We're completely fenced in," he says, "and surrounded by housing. Perhaps we've been fortunate not to have much trouble, but it's a constant worry."

Judging from the extended youth program it might be said that the lack of Waveland's vandalism and destruction problems could be traced to the involvement with the Des Moines younger set.

OAKMONT, PENN. This genteel community of 12,000, famous as the home of the Oakmont CC, site of the U.S. Open for the fifth time, is also home for another course. Situated just across the road from the old Blackburn layout, which Oakmont acquired in 1962 to use for parking cars at that year's open, an old nine holer dating back to 1924 manages to hang on. Nowadays Valley Heights GC is a commercial course surviving in the shadow of its famous sister layout.

John Clements has spent the last five of his 50 years as a professional there. He has his problems. How can you cope with a local lad, well-known to the management, who chooses to run around some of those marvelous old greens on one of those six-wheel all terrain vehicles? Answer is, you don't. "If the boy doesn't have enough supervision at home," Clements said recently, "there's not much we can do here at

the course. What we need are high wire fences all around the layout. It's the only thing we can do."

Clements reflects sadly on the state of the small operator who is frustrated by current youthful attitudes. Although Valley Heights is not tied into any city system of recreation budgeting that might help in involving youthful frustrations into more meaningful pursuits, it still provides the community with an alternative to the often inaccessible heights of the Oakmont layout. Clements can do just so much. He can cajole, encourage and inspire, but without proper funding his interest in helping his community must be limited.

In mid-season, Valley Heights accommodates an average of 100 golfers on weekdays and 150 on Saturdays, Sundays or holidays. In that group are many young people who take their games seriously. Youngsters, who can afford the modest fees, \$2.50 weekdays and \$3.00 on weekends for 18 holes, and who just might not otherwise get the opportunity to blast one across a ravine with a 160-yard carry, as they must at the 365 yard sixth, deserve to share a golf course untrampled by others less concerned with a patch of green dating back before many of their fathers were born.

Valley Heights has no caddies, no bar, and golf cars are out of the question, because the bridge across the ravine is too narrow to accommodate them. John Clements has that rare quality we have found in so many of the unsung heroes of the golfing profession—a belief that what they do will be projected to their young followers.

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When a municipal course is able to compete for outing groups with the many fine semi-private courses around the area, somebody must be doing something right. The course is in excellent shape, according to Jackson. The atmosphere on a weekday morning can be very pleasant and relaxing. This recreational mecca, dating back almost 100 years, projects a nostalgic feeling conducive to having a good time. It reflects, in many ways, the genteel days in New York's sports history. Jackson's mild-mannered approach to handling the sudden influx of a 50 or so member club is no doubt a definite selling point as well.

Jackson feels there has been an improvement over last year's reported vandalism problems (GOLFDOM, April, 1972). "Many of our fences have been repaired so we seem to have less of a problem," he explains. He expects ranger patrols to be added this season. "At least rangers have been promised. They'll probably be park department employees, not policemen. But it will be a big help."

Operating problems at this ancient course sometimes result from the physical layout of the park itself. "We've got two separate parking lots removed from the clubhouse and we're a long way from the subway station," Jackson says. "We found many of our hand carts way over on Broadway at the subway. Tired golfers, after the long walk back to the clubhouse from the 18th, didn't feel like carrying their bags, so they just borrowed our carts and left them. I couldn't afford to hire a kid to scout the parking lots and walk all the way over to the subway to recover the carts, so we've added a \$1 deposit to the \$.75 rental. Most of our carts come back now. Sometimes the refund turns into a small sale, too."

Larger sales, such as hard goods and shoes, are helped by the use of Bank Americard charge privileges. "Public course players don't have much cash to lay out, so big purchases can be spread out. It makes it a lot easier for them to buy," according to Jackson. "We've had good success with Bank Americard

and this season I'll be adding MasterCard."

With a steadily increasing business, he would like to expand the size of his shop. "I've managed to build the business up since coming to Van Cortlandt and it's increasing daily," Jackson reports. "We emphasize hard goods, but I also keep a stock of slacks, shirts and socks."

A fair share of New York City's 687,611 rounds played in 1972 can be attributed to Van Cortlandt. They sent off 45,354 individual golfers in what was essentially a rainy season. Confirming Jackson's frustration over the lack of youth involvement in the city golf scene were these figures: Of the 45,354 tickets sold in 1972 less than 2 per cent (only 730) were sold to juniors with youth permits. Weekend play accounted for 17,755 rounds; weekdays, 16,307, and seniors with permits completed the count with 10,562 tickets.

The busy season has kept Jackson on the job seven days a week except when the course was closed down during inclement weather. This season Jackson will add an assistant professional to the staff, which presently consists of one man, John Verrilli, who handles selling.

In spite of the work load and the continuing frustrations of being a municipal course professional, Jackson manages to initiate and implement community projects. Once again, this year he will take his message of the good life golf can bring directly to the youngsters most in need of encouragement. All that remains is for the school principals in School District 9 to summon him. He'll find time to fit his "clinics" into his schedule. Jimmy Jackson will be ready as he always has been.

Last season he ran a clinic day for a group of drug addicts from the Mt. Morris Community Center of New York's Narcotic Addiction Control Commission for which he was given a Certificate of Merit. It was hung proudly in his tiny shop.

"A similar group will be back again this season," Jackson says. He added what may well be the definitive statement when he put it simply: "Maybe through golf we can all help." □