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WHY A UNIFORM BALL?

The *United States Golf Assn.* by returning to all match play for the amateur champion returns golf to the people from the television networks. So there won't be millions watching a TV program of the National Amateur. Those millions will be playing golf, which primarily is a participant's game, not another exercise in sitting on the fanny.

The USGA's Green Section has been more effective than any other sports organization in arousing the nation to the urgent need of protecting natural beauty.

Now, with the complex problem of trying to agree with the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews on the specifications for a worldwide golf ball, the USGA is at the potentially most dangerous period in its history.

As one of the few who has observed for many years USGA's nervous efforts to control the distance of the golf ball, I continue to wonder why. That fear of Nicklaus, Palmer and a few others hitting the ball too long for my course is something I survived when Jimmy Thomas was the longest hitter. Those who hit the ball too long for courses I've paid to play can stay off. If they want to play a different game than my kind, okay with me. I am representative of at least 90 per cent of the world's golfers and I've yet to see a ball I could hit too far.

The unfortunate previous experience of the USGA in legislating a new ball—the short-lived “balloon ball”—was the result of one of its older officials aging past the stage where he could out-hit opponents. He still could finesse the approaches. He was an honorable and persuasive man. He cost American golf millions and didn't do it any

good by his ball obsession.

Now I am afraid the USGA and R&A in their striving for a uniform worldwide golf ball aren't going to do a bit of good for anybody except the Japanese ball makers.

For them the change of specifications will virtually destroy the golf ball market for American and British ball makers.

And who would the proposed new ball help to enjoy golf more?

Not me or the vast majority of other golfers the world around.

So why a new ball?

Last year during the PGA I heard the USGA officials tell of the concessions the R&A had made to satisfy the USGA's ideas for a new ball. The R&A had come along with the USGA on the steel shaft, the center-shafted putter, the moderately-ribbed faces of iron clubs and the abolition of the stymie, but I couldn't see the “why” of the uniform ball and I, like USGA and R&A officials, had grown up asking first, “Is it good for golf?”

I grew up in golf as a customer with professionals telling me what ball to use for the game I played. Then came the compression ratings that were presumed to substitute for pro advice on balls, but the compression ratings didn't generally work. The ignorant and solvent hopefuls wanted to play the same high compressed balls the hard-hitters played. The soft-patting ordinary golfers hitting high compression balls is like trying to drive a croquet ball.

Is the golf ball played under the same conditions in New Jersey and New Zealand, in Carnoustie and Calcutta, in Tennessee and Tokyo?

I don't think so. And I am one of many millions who has bought golf balls in many countries. And that's

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more than can be said of professional playing specialists who haven't spent as much for initiation fees and dues as I have.

Whatever the USGA and the R&A do in fooling around with changing ball specifications will be right for a few, wrong for many millions more.

The R&A has a trustworthy precedent in Queen Elizabeth I, who created an empire by side-stepping in a crisis and letting nature take its course.

The costly cast head irons have given professionals the merchandising awakening jolt many of them needed.

Players are buying these clubs in surprisingly larger numbers.

"Buying" is the correct word. Quite often the golfer would come into the pro shop and tell the professional to get him a set of these new irons. The professional didn't do any selling. He didn't have any idea the customer wanted new clubs and sometimes was dazed that the customer didn't faint when the price was mentioned. The profes-

sional may have thought the buyer was too tight to buy expensive new clubs. It turned out that the professional was the one scared by the higher price.

The spurt the aluminum shaft gave club sales was, to a large extent, another case of the aluminum-shafted clubs being bought rather than sold.

Pro salesmen say there is a big lesson in the quick sales surge of the aluminum shafted and cast head clubs. They declare the lesson is that too few professionals and their assistants really know how to sell clubs or even try to sell them.

During the past three or four years I've asked pro salesmen what percentage of professionals they regard as being good at selling clubs. The highest answer I've got is 20 per cent.

"Good at selling clubs. Hell, half the pros I see don't even do a good job of displaying clubs so they'll attract buyers and sell themselves," a pro salesman in one of the central states told me. "They don't seem to know that eye-catching display of clubs will get buyers just as buyers

respond to the appeal of a well-displayed golf apparel."

Remember 15 years ago when you'd go into a pro shop you'd always see one or two golfers inspecting clubs. Now you seldom do.

Why not? The professional had better find out.

About a quarter of golf clubs now probably don't fit the player, but the player seldom knows by any means other than accident that his game could be improved by new clubs with a "feel" that in itself is a lesson.

Club fitting is a service to golfers that is pro-only and the courts can't put you in jail for boldly displaying new clubs and offering a valuable and unique pro-only club fitting service to buyers.

John Gerring becomes golf director and co-owner of 27-hole Holly Hill CC, near Greenville, N.C., which will open late this year. . . . *Bill Delk* goes to Deer Track GC, Surfside Beach, S.C., being built, from his pro job at Pineland CC, Nichols, S.C. . . . *Bill Vach* now professional at Lehigh

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RETAILER/TEACHER *continued*

concede that lesson business was off from the previous season by as much as the national average of 11.9 per cent, as indicated in GOLFDOM's survey (February issue, p. 29). The decline was in the neighborhood of 5 per cent in the Chicago area. However, the range between the rise and decline in lesson giving was wider than it may have been in a long, long time—up in a few cases to around 10 per cent and down in another, isolated one to 20 per cent. More professionals than not said their lesson volume was a little lower than it had been the previous year.

Conversely, sales of merchandise have been rising steadily, capping with a 24.7 per cent increase in 1972 over 1971. These percentages would make one wonder just how much emphasis lesson-giving should receive.

Lesson giving in the southern part of the District, which wasn't too hard hit by rain last season, was as good or better than it had ever been. However, in the north and west sector, where as many as 20 to 40 playings days were lost due to the weather, business naturally was off. Lost lesson giving time, though, wasn't in anything like direct proportion to lost playing time. Several professionals report that on days when the course was closed, it was still possible to use the practice range. A scattering of professionals say they managed to jam in a lot of lessons in 1972 by spending more time on the teaching tee than they normally do when the weather is right.

Some professionals feel that if they had had indoor facilities last year, their lesson business wouldn't have suffered. But at clubs where they have facilities for teaching under roof, professionals say this isn't necessarily so. In the summertime people don't like to practice or take lessons indoors. They want to be outside where they can see the ball fly, if only 125 or 150 yards out, and not plop into a net. Except for low handicap players, who are more concerned with making contact than getting distance, club members are more receptive to teaching when it done outdoors.

GOLFDOM'S survey shows that in-

come from lessons at private clubs averaged only \$1,700 in 1972, down from \$2,000 the previous year. These are, of course, national averages and reflect revenue at many locations much smaller than typical Chicago District clubs. Most Chicago professionals said that they thought the average would be at least \$2,500. They based their estimates on a \$10 minimum fee and at least 250 teaching hours per club per year. About three out of four Chicago professionals estimate that they and their assistants teach a total of 400 hours and some put the figure at 500. The instruction fee for head professionals is in the \$12 to \$13 per hour range and is from \$2 to \$3 lower for assistants.

None of the Chicago District professionals who were surveyed uses video in teaching. One reason is that the camera, monitor and tape combination costs in the neighborhood of \$1,500 and, except in only a few instances, it isn't thought that teaching revenue are large enough to justify that kind of an expenditure. A second reason for not introducing video is that most practice ranges aren't equipped with electrical outlets. However, about one out of four professionals report that they used movie cameras from time to time in helping their pupils to study and improve their swings.

None of the 20 Chicago District professionals whom GOLFDOM queried is willing to concede that he personally is a "merchant" prince; as charged by the aging contemporary. There has been vast changes in pro shop operations since he came on the scene 25 or 35 years ago, something that he himself has had to recognize and swing over to, otherwise he wouldn't still be in the business. Nobody can say whether the changes have improved the game, but there is no question that members and players have dictated them. Maybe the oldtimer should take the view that while the modern professional is giving golfers the elegant merchandise and fashionable pro shops they want, he isn't neglecting the teaching side of the game. It may be slightly diminished from what it was years ago, but few golfers have detected this or are complaining about it. □

GRAFFIS *from page 8*

Acres (Fla.) CC two courses. Vach formerly was at Golden Gate CC, near Naples... *Mike Kahler* now pro at Sioux Falls, S.C., Westward Ho CC, succeeding Paul Wilcox.

How soon do replaced divots grow enough to repair their scars? Not nearly quickly enough, according to our observation over many years and courses.

The Japanese have the best way of repairing divots. The woman caddies carry little bags of soil fertilizer and seed that they apply to the divot scar promptly after it's made. This protects following players against bad lies. The divot soon is grown over. Daily divot repair in the severely scarred areas is standard operating procedure at most courses, but that shouldn't relieve a player of the obligation to temporarily replace the turf he hacked out or of repairing the depressions he's made on greens.

Ken Johnson from Colville, Wash., Elks CC to pro post at Sun Dance CC near Spokane.

Some superintendents are concerned that the recent lag in new course building is sharply diminishing the field for turf management school graduates, yet golf architects have plenty of business.

Modern Talking Picture Service, 2323 New Hyde Park Rd., New Hyde Park, N.Y., will loan free to clubs movies of Masters, Bob Hope Classics and Kemper Open tournament.

Club Managers Assn. of America is getting along faster than the Golf Course Superintendents Assn. of America and the Professional Golfers' Assn. in getting its members "certified" as formally meeting top job requirements.

Bill Simmons named professional and golf director at The Hamlet, Delray Beach, Fla. Joe Lee owns the course. Simmons moved from Connongate GC, Orlando, Fla., also owned by Lee.

Hubie Smith resigns pro job at Arnold Center GC, Tullahoma, Tenn., to be director of the \$500,000 World Open at Pinehurst (N.C.) CC in November this year.

Bob von Hage and *Bruce Devlin* designing second course for Sapphire Valley Inn, N.C.; also another for Doral at Miami. □