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BOB RICKEY

INSIDE THE INDUSTRY

HEAVY TRAFFIC ON GOLF COURSES PREDICTED

Twice a year the top people in the National Golf Foundation routinely assemble to review the events affecting golf; more specifically, those aspects of the golf industry with which the NGF is most involved. These include promoting more golf course construction and instructing golf teachers in the universities of this country to be a more integral part of the golf scene. The second purpose for the semi-annual gatherings amplifies the first: these sessions allow the golf experts to exchange and compare notes concerning potential problems affecting the golf industry.

Such a meeting was held in Chicago early in January. The fact that the top brains of the foundation congressed in defiance of snow and cold rather than warming in Scottsdale's gentle sun (the original meeting site), dramatized how profound was the conviction of executive director Don Rossi that the energy crisis could damage the foundation's immediate goals and retard the over-all momentum of the golf industry.

Consequently, it was a sober group that convened in the Windy City to hear such outstanding golf leaders as Mark Cox, Professional Golfers' Assn. executive director; Ken Emerson, National Club Assn. executive director and Gerry Marlatt, Club Managers Assn. of America president. Interestingly, although none of these gentlemen had been asked to discuss the effects of energy shortages on the golf industry, each one devoted most of his comments to that subject. None of the speakers were present to hear the others, because their busy schedules called them away; but each left behind essentially the same message and in absolutely positive terms. In the collective opinion of these three experts, a gas shortage of long duration will cause unprecedented usage of golf

courses. They reasoned thus: because traveling and exotic vacations will be curtailed, Americans will turn their energies to their nearby golf club, regardless of its classification, for their chief source of fun and recreation. Further, these experts predicted that a comparable demand will be exerted on such other facilities of the golf course as the dining rooms, bars and tennis courts. They concluded with a warning. Unless the industry is prepared to reckon with the massive invasion of people, these very people would turn to other activities in which to invest their time and money.

In the ensuing six months since these provocative thoughts were expressed, it has become obvious that the golf industry is facing one of its greatest challenges and an equally great opportunity. We who control golf's direction must do so with ingenuity and flexibility. With these qualities, we can take advantage of this opportune time. Not since World War II have conditions so necessitated a unification between the golf leadership and the golf constituency to ensure the survival and growth of the industry. The opportunity is there, if everyone acts in concert. We must do what the times and conditions require: simply, cooperate with one another. This is not the time to do battle. □

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