

OUR 50th YEAR

by HERB GRAFFIS

When GOLFDOM's first issue appeared in February, 1927, Lindbergh had taken his big chance, Calvin Coolidge was just settling into the President's chair and Americans were taking long shots on the stock market and prohibition booze.

Nearly 4,000 golf courses existed in 1927, the majority of which were of the 9-hole variety. Looking at those courses as a potential market, as well as a playground, GOLFDOM started as the first golf business journal.

GOLFDOM's publishers and staff had the good fortune to become close friends and collaborators with the active powers in all factors of golf business. This relationship in innumerable instances accelerated the growth and stability of the industry. Before GOLFDOM had been a decade in business, the annual volume of golf equipment was that of all other athletic games combined. GOLFDOM's educational work helped professionals to become the largest retailers of golf goods dollar-wise and highly effective developers of the market. Professionals became

protectors of the buyers in assuring product quality up to the expert standards of teachers and suppliers close to point of use.

The magazine's editorial and advertising pages quickly became important tools in golf business. GOLFDOM was not modest about proclaiming its service and other profitable merits. It persistently made its utility known to both its advertisers and its readers in the market. In those pre-computer days when there was thinking, buying, selling and using by personalities, GOLFDOM's intimacy with the businessmen of golf made it a marketing power. In many respects GOLFDOM improved and extended the market.

Learning more about the trade was something that flourished in all sectors of the business and GOLFDOM was in the vanguard of the education movement. In fact, the magazine had a great influence on the three main trade associations with which it deals today.

Formed in 1928, the National Association of Greenkeepers, now the Golf Course Superintendents

Association of America, brought together district associations as the PGA had united regional pro associations in 1916. The greenkeepers held their first national educational convention and equipment and supply show at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago in March, 1927. In January of that same year, the Club Managers Association of America had its inaugural gathering at the same site. GOLFDOM was practically a member of the family at the christening of both associations.

Outside of its championships, the PGA started out primarily with a purely social background. By 1927, though, the organization had begun its growth into a trade association.

In New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and several other cities, Mondays, during the golf season, pros met two or three times a month, usually in a restaurant or speakeasy near where Spalding, MacGregor, Wanamaker, Burke and other golf equipment manufacturers had their sales offices. Those meetings were informal, but orderly. Those gatherings were valuable spots for GOLFDOM to

get business close-ups from pros and salesmen.

From the start, salesmen of playing and course equipment and supplies had an important part in GOLFDOM. The first issue carried an article on improving pro shop sales by Earl Schlaw, a salesman for Burke. Course equipment and supply salesmen were featured sources of news and articles.

GOLFDOM wasn't three issues old before it discovered that with the salesmen, the magazine constituted the business education team, golf urgently needed. It was an expensive, tough task to sell to pros and golf course superintendents. The courses were spread over much territory. The pro might be on the lesson tee, in a playing lesson or elsewhere when the pro salesman called and there was nothing for the salesman to do but wait until the pro was free. The superintendent might be anywhere on the course supervising or sharing in some heavy work.

Maintenance budgets were novelties GOLFDOM began advocating with increasing vigor in 1927, '28 and '29. Any major work to be done on courses was decided usually at club annual meetings and everything else was a matter of performance when the green committee chairman could get the money, or hoped he could and in the meanwhile got the course equipment and supply dealer to extend the club's credit.

Most course construction and maintenance expense during GOLFDOM's early years was financed by the course supply dealers. In the Chicago area there was J. Oliver Johnson and the George A. Davis Company, which had been started by Davis, an ex-pro Johnson salesman and which continues in business with Davis still alert, energetic and progressive.

Most durable of GOLFDOM's advertisers was Charles Maddox. He was in the first issue as a course builder and he was a pioneer in drainage, soil conditioning, fertilizer and seed direction by specialists. He also was resourceful in helping the clubs and architects of his construction jobs to get financed. He and his son, who has the

ingenuity of his father, continue to flourish in course building.

Through the year, GOLFDOM has prided itself on getting the top trade writers in every field of the business to express their opinions and views over the magazine's pages.

O. J. Noer was the first of three valuable GOLFDOM writers, who combined his expertise in investigative and sales consultant agronomy into many topical articles for the magazine.

Noer had a great insight linking him to the superintendents, their bosses, the scientists, the architects and builders. Noer's GOLFDOM copy was cited by journalism school instructors as bright examples of business writing that blended the intensely practical with style and material attracting the reader. In the October-November-December combined issue, Noer would do a Golf Course Maintenance round-up that virtually was a score card on courses for the year. The annual round-up gave the practice of annual course maintenance budgets a tremendous boost. It showed what could — and maybe had — happened anywhere on courses that gave green chairmen a foundation for planning.

People in the industry were getting interested in professionalism and through GOLFDOM, the trade became more serious on its attitudes on turning golf business toward a highly profitable sector. Both sides of the business began to get involved, particularly at educational seminars in which many industry personnel participated.

Educational seminars in course maintenance began to flourish in the '30s. These operations at state colleges had tremendous benefits for golf and for the beauty of the country in general. GOLFDOM campaigned for them vigorously. Much of the programs were condensed and featured in the magazine. Editors covered many of the two-to-four day short courses, GOLFDOM gave club officials repeated reminders superintendents, often at their own expense, were learning at the short courses, sectional meetings and their

annual conference so much to improve results and efficiency of course maintenance, there was no parallel for this education.

This campaigning not only did considerable to have superintendents' educational meeting expenses paid by clubs and other employers but made golfers realize superintendents were responsible for the condition and earning power of the course on which all other golf revenue depended. That recognition accounted for the formal change of name from the old greenkeeper to golf course superintendent and an upgrading in prestige and pay.

Club management subjects in GOLFDOM were handled with more treatment from policy aspects than from the technicalities. The reasons were plain. Most managers of the leading country clubs were men of hotel and restaurant experience in the United States or in Europe. They operated the clubhouses as restaurants. They did good jobs and usually at substantial losses. The larger and newer clubhouses in 1927 were built generously like baronial mansions. They required big and expensive operating staffs. Prohibition at the clubs meant the club couldn't make any money selling alcoholic drinks. Frequently a locker room attendant did very well financially as the members' dependable, convenient bootlegger, although most members brought their own liquor to their tables and lockers.

Good chefs were not hard to get but shifted often. They were not well paid and club kitchens usually were hot, uncomfortable places to work, none too well designed for food storage, cooking, serving and dishwashing. Living quarters for clubhouse employees seldom were what the members or his guests would want to see.

Food service at clubs varied widely in volume. Weather and food cold storage was limited in the pre deep-freeze days. Leading country club managers of those days were gourmets and were involved in epicureanism. These veteran managers were almost automatically among the CMAA founding members.

Among the club managers of American restaurant and hotel

50th YEAR

CONTINUED

backgrounds and the European transplanted experts who had worked in kitchens with the chefs of European fame were Clint Holden, Harry Fawcett, Tom Jones, Barney Grady, the Bangs family, Fred Wood, Fred Craeford, Erich Koch, Jim McGoogan, Wayne Miller, Carl Jehlen, Clyde Mingledorf, John Brennan, Kenneth Meisnest, Henry Dutton, Russ Miller, Royce Chaney, Charles Smith, Walter Cummings, Pete D'Angelo, Jack Fina, Jack Febel, Joe Tonnetti, Harry O'Hagan, Paul Worrel, Frank Brunner, Ralph Sykora and Tom Ream. They gave country and city clubs personalities. They were intrinsically gracious hosts who expressed the welcoming spirit of their admirable members.

When GOLFDOM started, the managers of the high prestige clubs and in fewer cases the pros, identified the social rating of the golf clubs. The superintendent was the grass farmer, too often far apart from the non-sweating city fellow members. One of GOLFDOM's most difficult and delicate jobs was to educate the member into an appreciation of the superintendent's abilities and responsibilities. Even if the city man had been a farm boy, when he got to be a golf club official he was inclined to think cutting the grass, a little watering of the greens, some seeding of bare spots and spreading some fertilizer now and then was all the maintenance needed.

Course improvement articles by two Chicago superintendents, Edward B. Dearie, Jr., Ridgemoor Country Club, and Matt Melville, Southmoor Country Club, on how to produce and maintain a first class golf course showed there was more being done than the golfer ever realized in providing him with a pleasant place to play.

Universities providing instruction in golf course management have been the best thing that ever happened in the business and

GOLFDOM promoted them aggressively. After the University of Massachusetts, there followed golf course maintenance classes at Penn State, Rhode Island, Rutgers, Cornell, Maryland, Tifton, Georgia, Michigan State, Purdue, Ohio State, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Ontario, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas A&M, California, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, Iowa State and Tennessee.

There never has been anything else in sports or industry anyway near as valuable to this nation in preserving and adding to its natural beauty and protecting Americans against concrete stir-craziness as the collaboration of the state agricultural colleges and the greenkeepers who became golf course superintendents.

More often than not, GOLFDOM has attempted to keep the entire industry informed on the stories that would affect them in the future. From the very, first year of existence, the magazine wrote there was a severe need for better cooperation between the club manager, superintendent and professional.

"There's enough glory for all," commented GOLFDOM editorially in urging more teamwork long before the General Manager concept put the clubhouse manager in the top spot on the payroll because the books are kept in the clubhouse and overall operating procedures were covered there.

Clubhouse volume needed boosting in 1927 as it does now. Clubs were increasing in those days and nights of the Great Gatsby, the time the columnist Westbrook Peglar called the "Era of Wonderful Nonsense." The majority of new clubs in the large city areas were financed on more hope in the glorious rise of the stock market and real estate optimism that extended from the Florida boom to the suburbs of almost every city. The competition for members was keen. When a new club opened it had to be another ring in the social circus. O. M. Smeltakopf, an experienced manager, wrote in GOLFDOM's initial issue "Opening Is a Tough Task." He had come from established club manager jobs in Chicago and other metropolitan districts.

Smeltakopf was about to open a

new clubhouse in what had been the country home of a wealthy family on their estate far northwest of Chicago. The situation was typical of the golf-real estate developments in that happy, hopeful, hysterical period of prohibition and stock skyrocketing. The club promoters didn't think of the labor hiring and training, housing and paying and direction of help, of adapting a family home to club food service and weekend room operation, carpentry, painting, plumbing and cost problems at an old home converted into a new clubhouse.

Suppliers of course equipment and materials, clubhouse provisions and pro shop merchandise had to show genius and patience in carrying through many of the clubs that were new when GOLFDOM was new.

When the stock market crash came in 1929, club building practically came to a halt in the metropolitan areas. The 9-hole clubs continued to start in small towns. GOLFDOM had been foresighted or lucky in not trusting to the growth of golf from a game to Big Business being a stock market side show. The first story in the first issue of GOLFDOM was on a popular, substantial and flourishing golf club at New Albany, Ind., being started on \$3,700.

No accurate count of the country clubs that were in financial trouble and had to reorganize under the modified bankruptcy legislation was ever made, but guesses put the number at more than five percent of the nation's golf clubs that had 18 or more holes and often with new, costly clubhouses. The bright side was that in 1930 and 1931 golf play increased. So did sales of clubs and balls.

Thus, in broad terms was the story and the condition of a game that had been regarded mainly as a society pastime starting to grow into a huge business and having as an influential elemental in that progress, a vigorous trade magazine growing up with the industry.

In future issues, other parts of the GOLFDOM story will be told and illustrate how the magazine influenced one of the biggest sports industries in the nation. □