



HUBBY HABJAN:

PORTRAIT OF A PROFESSIONAL

Years before Hubby Habjan ever thought of being a dedicated club professional, he was learning the golf business from the bottom up as a nine-year-old caddy at his native Onwentsia Country Club.

When you talk to Habjan, you realize here is a professional that takes his business seriously and the record and achievements speak for themselves. Since taking over the head job at the Lake Forest, Ill., club in 1956, Habjan has been Professional of the year in both the nation and his section, member of the PGA rules committee, president of the Illinois PGA and since 1974, a national PGA vice president.

On his resume, Habjan sums up his attitude about his business with this phrase, "Teach the game of golf, its rules and ethics and offer the finest golf clubs for my pupils."

At 44, Habjan is at the top of his profession and that's the way he sees his livelihood. He never refers to anyone in the business as a pro. Everyone is called a professional.

The basis of Habjan's success in the business has been his attitude about the golf professional being in a service business. "I think it's up to the professional to present an enthusiastic and interesting golf event program throughout the season, including lessons, junior programs, tournaments, handicaps, merchandise and above all, a service program at all times."

Service has played an important role in Hubby's success and it's an aspect of the professional's job he likes to discuss.

"Any success I've had over the

past 20 years can be traced to my ability to understand service. Golf professionals have a service job. I've always thought the professional is a lucky guy because his job is always a challenge. In order to offer the best service, best merchandise and best instruction, you've got to be pretty sharp."

With success should come results and Habjan has definite salary figures in mind when he measures the Class A professional's worth.

"Each club offers different means of arriving at a professional's salary. Some clubs move a lot of merchandise. Others provide the pro with revenue from outings. And still others pay a salary for outstanding service. But despite the type of club, a Class A professional should clear \$30,000; if he isn't now, he should in the future.

"It's up to each professional to sit down with his employers and work out an amiable agreement. Too often, professionals are guilty of poor communication. If he's doing a good job and offering the type of service expected, it's surprising how much his membership values the services he provides. This will vary, of course, with club location. When I say \$30,000, I'm speaking about clubs in or near metropolitan areas. For the professionals in rural areas or smaller communities, the salary will reflect the locale's standard of living. But in these areas, there are many ways to subsidize one's income. For instance, I know several professionals in rural areas who have capitalized on their semi-celebrity status by giving advice on

local radio and T.V. stations, putting on exhibitions, and community lessons.

"Every professional should be a promoter and as long as he promotes quality, his membership will go along with it," Habjan added.

One of the most talked about subjects this past year has been the "pro-only" decision in favor of New Orleans's Golf City. Habjan views this decision as a healthy one for the majority of professionals.

"I feel it helps us if we understand what's happened. As long as the pro-only policy has existed, it's been abused by manufacturers and professionals alike. Not all, I'm not saying that, but what this decision does for the pro is it forces him to reevaluate his priorities. He should compete on a fair trade level with his downtown competition, offering better service, the best equipment at the fairest price. Personally, I've felt for a long time that the professional's role as a merchandiser has been over emphasized

"He should provide what his membership needs, and this varies from club to club, but his primary concern should still be service. Serve your members' needs in equipment, offer merchandise at a 20 or 25 percent markup and if this doesn't adequately supplement your income, work out an incentive or additional income plan with your membership.

"Members are going to buy what they want at the price they want and you have to serve these requirements. Under the pro-only system, the professional was represented as

HABJAN:

a rip-off artist who was selling merchandise for 15 or 20 percent above the downtown cost. Lower the markup. The volume will go up and credibility will return.

"The pro has many advantages over the retailer. First, among these is superior service, but included is the free use of the pro shop, proximity to the course and steady flow of customers. If you are charging the same or five percent above what the retailers are asking, how many of your members will spend the time to 'look for a deal'. Not many. But important here, is to make your members aware that your prices are competitive. Much too often, they are not aware of it. A retailer's customers are spread throughout a large area. They spend a lot of money advertising. Ours come through the shop at least once or twice a week. That's quite a deal."

Asked about the possibility of the pro losing exclusivity of line to the retailer if the "pro-only" question is resolved in favor of department and sporting goods stores, Habjan thought the result could strengthen the pro instead of weaken his position.

"Obviously, I don't want to see the day when the club pro is reduced to being just a store clerk. I'm against that. If the pro loses something to the stores downtown on equipment and is cut out of revenue of golf cars, he will have to work harder to come to an agreement with the club on his livelihood," Hubby added.

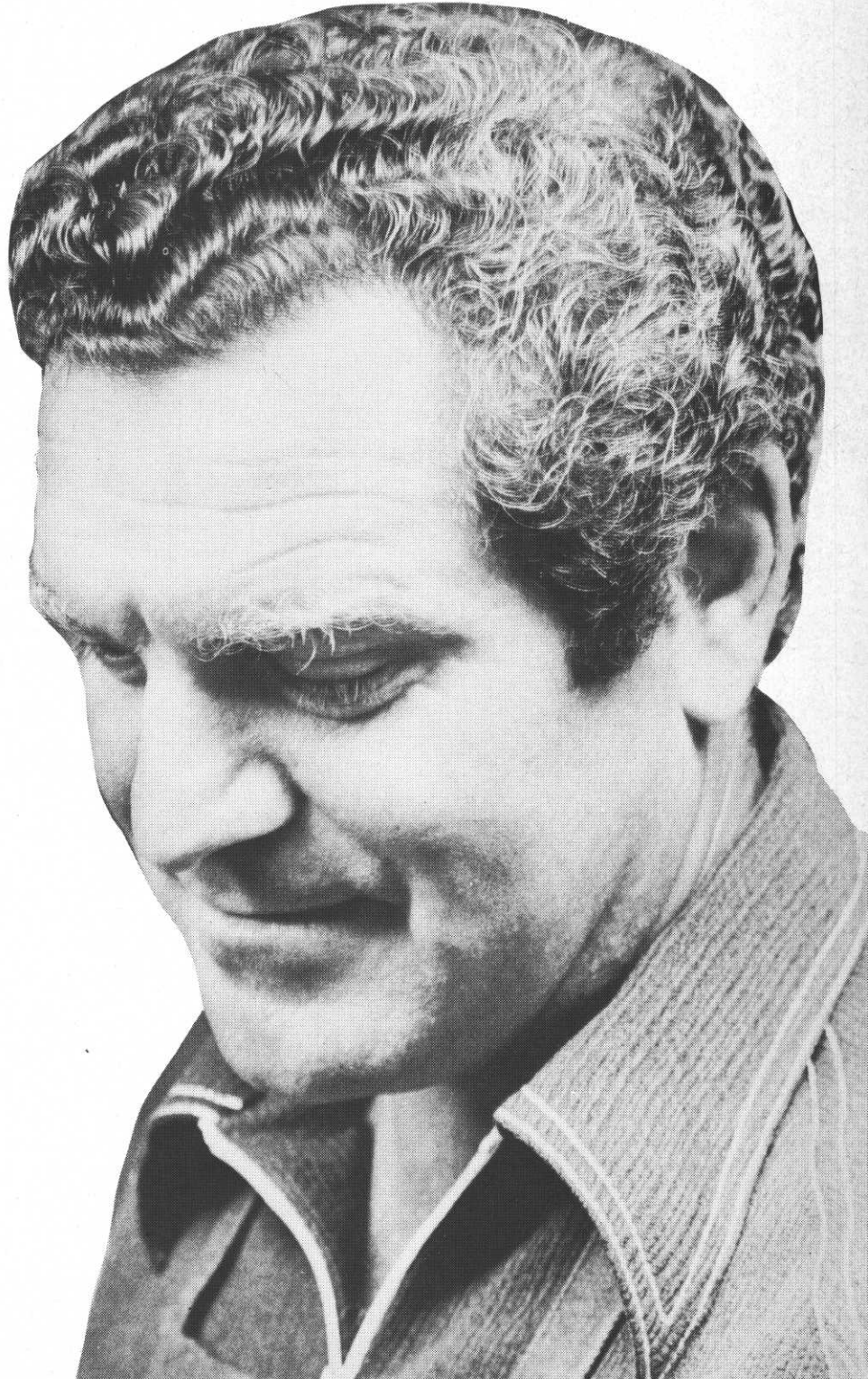
Restating his case, Habjan insists that with the changes in the industry everyday and more so with the status of the professional with his respective club, as many services a pro can generate for his membership, the easier it will be for him to survive.

"Today, the young person who wants to become a qualified professional has a better opportunity than ever before. Through the PGA and other sources, all the tools are available, so much so that the weak won't survive.

"Every professional with a Class A classification should possess a thorough understanding of how to

teach, maintain a service program of events, run a business, run a good caddy and car program, maintain his playing ability and maintain his members' golf equipment. Professionals should always retain the image that we are in the service business," Habjan said.

Habjan looks at the PGA's recertification program as an asset to keeping the organization on a professional plane. Utilizing a number of activities, including section meetings, business, teaching and merchandising seminars, the professional has the opportunity to



HABJAN:

achieve nine points in the program every three years.

"Recertification will keep the PGA member current and involved," Habjan commented, but recently PGA President Henry Poe was quoted as saying the recertification effort was not as successful as the organization had initially hoped for. In fact, some 1,500 to 2,000 members risk missing the recertification deadline and ending up with their membership in inactive status.

"Through recertification, the PGA has made a definite decision to elevate the association. We won't digress on this. Either professionals will be good and informed businessmen or they won't be PGA members," Hubby added.

As an active PGA member and officer, Habjan will probably remain a dominant influence in how the organization will run in the future. Obviously, he along with the present leadership think quality of member should replace quantity. "I believe that the PGA is headed in the right direction. We have established a number of comprehensive programs enabling the body to move forward."

Seeing the professional move forward is what Habjan is all about. Habjan is convinced, though, the professional is not destined to become a general manager, but for that matter he doesn't think the superintendent or club manager are either.

"I believe there are three experts in three different areas at a country club and all of them are well-equipped to run their respective operations. I am not convinced that any of the three could step in and run the entire club operation.

"If it came down to it, I suppose I could be a general manager, but I suspect pro shop operations would then rapidly decline with my attention directed elsewhere. Without a doubt, I am against the general manager concept," Hubby asserted.

Habjan's argument against the general manager policy is the relationship between the three parts of the course operation and a general manager. This will tend to insulate the members from the department heads and the membership does not

have the opportunity to see their ideas and plans directed to the membership and its committees.

Contending the general manager concept usually develops weakness in the department heads, Habjan says a general manager will hire individuals that will fit his program better and at the same time are easier to work with.

"A general manager is normally required in an operation of industry where precision timing and coordination of all departments is a primary factor in the finished product. This is not true in a golf operation. Under the general manager concept, committees often cease to function with the general manager reporting directly to the board," Habjan added.

Whether there is validity to these



Habjan is one of the country's outstanding authorities on club repair. In his shop at Onwentsia he repairs and makes hundreds of clubs a year.

arguments is uncertain. Certainly, there are clubs in the country that are utilizing the general manager concept and for them, it has proven successful. What Habjan continues to note, though, is that all clubs are not alike.

Without a general manager, Habjan believes more proficient individuals will assert themselves in the areas of shop operations, grounds supervision and clubhouse business. "Strong professional people will usually seek employment where they have the opportunity to exercise imagination and creative

ability and generally control their product," Habjan said.

As an alternative plan to the general manager concept, Habjan offers an operating committee consisting of the various department heads. This committee would coordinate the combined activities of the major departments. In this way, the end result of the overall operation would fulfill the objectives of the membership.

A departmental operation organization such as this would work completely with the club board of directors so decisions of policy would be put into action without delay or misunderstanding.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Habjan is skilled in the art of building and repairing clubs and has been since his youth. More than anything else, the Illinois professional looks to poorly-fitted equipment as the root of many golfers' inconsistent play.

Habjan has been quoted in the past as insisting that the professional has to be more than just a wrap-and-run merchant and must fit clubs according to the particular weight, height and posture of each customer. "I have seen golfers who have switched from off-the-rack hardware to properly fitted golf clubs reduce their handicaps by five strokes within a relatively brief span."

Obviously, since Habjan bases his entire outlook on the business on his members' ability to play as well as they can, it stands to reason, he would insist on properly fitted equipment.

Making clubs has been a labor of love with Habjan down through the years. It isn't unusual for Hubby and his staff to manufacture more than 2,000 clubs in a season. In fitting a customer, Habjan goes to the practice tee first to see the golfer hit balls and then determines the needs of the individual and translates them into shaft, lie and length, weight, grip, loft and balance.

With still many years to go in his golf business career, Habjan is quickly becoming an example that many apprentices can follow without too much fear of failure. To be sure, Habjan is solid in his conviction that the role of club professionals is based on their service to the profession. □