GOLFDOM

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SWINGING AROUND GOLF

Small cheer: Short takes to reflect on golf business in 1975, and a look at 1976. . . . What probably was one of the brightest spots was the surge in junior golf. Estimates of the number of kids involved in pro and school junior programs this year range from 300,000 to 450,000. This interest has eased, at least temporarily, the concern about what might happen with the caddie recruits diminishing as golf's market insurance. There were an estimated 400,000 golf cars operating last year, and that is about how many caddies there were in the '50s. . . . Despite a dismal record of golf course turf conditions this year, the turfgrass scientists say the good side of a bad year was that new varieties of fairway and greens being held for early introduction to the market came through adverse weather, disease and pest conditions very well and promise immunity to much of the damage suffered this year. . . . An experienced estimate based on information from pros and pro salesmen in various areas indicates pro shop sales in 1975 were about 10 percent under 1974 figures with club sales being in more of a slump than apparel sales and ball sales dropping seven percent due to weather reducing play. . . . Alexander M. Radko, director of the USGA Green Section Eastern Region and national research director summarized a miserable year for golf turf. He said it was the worst year ever for fairways. Many courses succumbed to the prolonged heat and humidity and scald, wilt, disease and almost anything else you want to name. *Pythium* was perhaps the most widespread and most costly, he said. The Green Section noted serious outbreaks of the insect *Ataenius spretulus* at courses particularly in New Jersey and Connecticut. The previous attack of the insect was in 1970, mainly on fairways in low, moist areas. Club and fee course execs and superintendents will look in vain for any figures on the cost of the year's turf damage and the effect of general financial conditions on maintenance budgets, especially financing equipment and supply needs. The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America never has taken interest and action in this area. The old idea that each course differs so much from all others with no basis of comparing maintenance costs can apply, continues to rule. . . . Approximately one-fourth of U.S. golf courses are owned as private investments. Yet there is a tendency to view golf business as a mainly private-course operation. The USGA is going to have to be realistic about this pay-play situation and make an adjustment of its associate members. The owners of private courses and some municipal course officials report play has been up this year. Many of the unemployed have money enough to play golf as an escape and a low cost form of entertainment and exercise that will keep the unemployed man waiting to get called back on the job nutty. . . . There has been a reduction in waiting lists for membership at clubs. Initiation fees at many clubs are said to be too high for the prevailing economy although not out of line with the book value of the clubs. . . . Generally tennis has been disappointing as a source of increase in clubhouse business at private clubs. Tennis players don't sign food and drink checks enough to make money for the club. Club managers say the tennis boom has not been any boom in revenue but has been an increased expense at country clubs. . . . The golf resort and golf-home site development situations have been showing signs of needing plenty of knowledgeable shake-ups to get on a solid basis. Perhaps the tough year of 1975 will hasten the necessary corrections. □