

PART II

OUR 50th YEAR

by HERB GRAFFIS

Promoting golf business has always been part of what GOLFDOM is all about. Through the years, the magazine instituted programs, which today are taken for granted by many in the industry.

Probably the most notable example of this was a plan called PROMotions. This operation led to the construction of hundreds of courses all over the nation and as an outgrowth of this project, the National Golf Foundation got its start in 1936.

PROMotion enlisted the aid of club professionals and superintendents in getting courses built in small communities. It was also important in helping pros in shop merchandising and to get golf classes established in high schools.

In this way, as part of his winter schedule, the club professional would be able to establish potential golfers for the future by these indoor classes. Location was never a problem. The indoor sessions were held in factories or the high school gyms and even as part of YMCA adult evening programs. The pros would go wherever there were prospective golfers.

Club professionals found the

high school promotion quite popular. Students and their parents liked the professional teaching. Private clubs were cooperative and the program gained the support of the PGA. However, school officials, including some physical education instructors, criticized the program due to the volunteer, unpaid golf professional not having teaching credentials.

Results of many projects by GOLFDOM plainly revealed the urgent need for a marketing development and service organization similar to the collective work done in many industries, other than golf.

Telling its story about market promotion to a few top men in the equipment sector, GOLFDOM convinced these manufacturers the work of enlarging their market was an attractive and essential investment. The task was something the whole industry would have to assign itself to. The manufacturers had seen what the primary effort by GOLFDOM had achieved and needed little convincing.

L. B. Icely of Wilson, Charles Robbins of Spalding, E. C. Conlin of U.S. Rubber and Phil Goldsmith

of the interests that owned MacGregor were quick to get the bigger and planned promotion of the National Golf Foundation organized, financed and off the ground.

Course equipment and suppliers, although not primary beneficiaries of the golf market, were not hasty about participating in the financing of the NGF. They were not fiscally fat or daring, as those in the club making end of the business, but later they engaged in the development work that pushed for an immense and immediate market for course machinery and supplies. This effort presented them with a most valuable show window for grass growing and maintenance material.

Early financing of the Foundation was extemporaneous with Spalding and Wilson tossing most into the passing hat, since they were doing the largest golf business. The PGA's young tournament bureau needed money. PGA members who were not playing on the new and thin circuit were complaining about how PGA dues income was building business for tournament players to get rich. The club and ball makers

were caught in the middle as the club pros' sales were the largest dollar volume in the market.

Foundation financing, so the operation could grow, eventually was worked out by Ted Woolley of Golfcraft, heading a committee which devised a revenue schedule based on steel shaft and ball rubber thread use. A budget program worked out by Fred Bowman, former Wilson president, with a committee of executives from other companies set the pattern for financing that has enabled the National Golf Foundation to become one of the most productive and helpful of any industry's market development organizations.

Glenn Morris was the first executive director of the NGF. He had been advertising manager at Wilson, then general manager at L. A. Young Golf Co., which made Hagen equipment. He was succeeded by Rex Morris, then came William Pack, Harry Eckhoff and the present director Don Rossi. These men have accounted for the steady growth of a sports market promotion which definitely is an immense public service.

Always with a strong "pro-only" frame, GOLFDOM frequently conducted surveys to learn the marketing score with the pro, superintendent and club manager and continues to do this today.

In 1932, a survey found facts to justify the statement that a pro shop with its immediate private or public course customers, the annual turnover in membership and the spreading influence of the word of the pro as a golf playing authority made the pro the market equivalent of 675 buying golfers. Examination by industry executives indicated these figures were perhaps a conservative appraisal of the marketing value of the golf professional-retailer.

A review of GOLFDOM's pages over the years shows how the golf business has developed. It was evident from the beginning there had to be a close relationship between the three different areas of management — club professional, course superintendent and clubhouse manager. Over the decades, these people have become the golf businessmen. Their identity and distinction has become clear to their employers.

A pro might be a pretty good player and an acceptable teacher at a club or fee course, but if he didn't show he knew enough about course and clubhouse operations to function as a golf businessman, he generally was regarded by employers as an overgrown caddie.

The superintendent might be a good man with good results most of the time in growing grass, but if he didn't fit his course management in with the pro and the manager, coordinating all departments as a complete club, the grass man might as well be taking care of a graveyard, by the appraisal of the golfers.

If the club manager didn't know and feel enough about the whole business and play of golf to give the clubhouse a pleasant, golf atmosphere, the man might as well be running a restaurant or a saloon. He wasn't showing the people who paid him that he knew golf business.

To the balance of business in the three departments, GOLFDOM added coverage of the executive viewpoint and responsibilities of club or public course officials or owners.

When editorial material has to be useful to the men in charge of courses in Maine, as well as California, in Washington, as well as Florida and the country in between, an editor has worries. His judgment and luck are continuously tested. He needs good advice from experienced men in the industry. GOLFDOM got this.

In operating stories, basic elements such as wise buying, utilization and extending the family appeal of clubs never change in price and style. A case was the story of J. P. McCann, club manager at Cascade Hills Country Club, Grand Rapids, Mich. McCann wrote in the September, 1927, issue how he brought members back to his club during the "Dog Days" of July and August in southern Michigan. Still today, GOLFDOM continues to tell the story of the golf businessman and passes it along to his colleagues in other parts of the nation.

Budgeting course and grounds work was uncommon in GOLFDOM's early days, hence there were numerous articles from superintendents and green chairmen who were having satisfactory experience

with programming the maintenance work and buying.

Some delicacy was required in GOLFDOM's campaign to make pro shop buying more businesslike and tougher. Usually pros bought from any salesman they liked after making primary purchases from the major ball and club companies, who frequently had pros "subsidized" with bonus balls, clubs and a moderate amount of cash. The pro salesmen and GOLFDOM were good friends and salesmen wrote many articles and news tips. Consequently, the experience stories telling of pros who related how they'd improved profits by being careful to buy brands that would move quicker did not delight some salesmen who were selling mainly on personality.

Buying education stories didn't appeal to some manufacturers either. GOLFDOM's reply to critics of its "tighter buying" theme was that when a pro bought unwisely he couldn't pay his bills. Those who were overloading the pros actually were the ones who lost.

Over the years many of the problems that beset the industry 50 years ago, are still with us today. For example, the lead article in the January, 1928, issue was on the task of selecting committee chairmen. That same subject was a prime topic of discussion at a USGA Green Section meeting last year when the president of the famed Winged Foot Club noted that picking chairmen was still the most important task for club officials. This was echoed in part in the March, 1976, issue of this magazine in a cover article.

In that same January, 1928, issue, GOLFDOM marked one of the most effective and valuable campaigns it ever embarked on — the importance of good course drainage. This was a critical aspect of the golf course, which affected the entire operation and its traffic flow.

Moody S. Allen, superintendent of parks at Asheville, N.C., told how improved drainage had greatly benefitted his city's municipal course, which drew many tourists. Course drainage then was generally an accidental matter. Drainage either was on the site or it wasn't. After the architect and builder had finished, it was usually the head-

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ache of the superintendent to install something after the fact.

Wendell Miller, who had been a professor at Ohio State University got into drainage engineering. GOLFDOM got him involved with golf course projects. He wrote numerous articles. Then the Green Section campaigned for proper drainage. With adequate drainage, more acreage would be available for better golf courses and the playing season would be lengthened by play and mowing being earlier in wet springs. The Augusta National course, where Roe's Creek flooded the bottom lands, is an exhibit of the success of the Miller work and the drainage accent GOLFDOM brought into golf business.

Another feature of GOLFDOM in the '30s were the clubhouse plans. Revolutionary changes were ruling out the baronial, castle type of clubhouses with summer residence quarters for members and guests and cramped, hot quarters for clubhouse employees. Air conditioning, frozen food storage and sharp reduction in clubhouse staffs weren't due for years, but it was obvious most clubhouses were too costly in construction and operation for a business that didn't operate at a good rate at least six days a week and almost the year round.

GOLFDOM was busy in editorial surveys those years. Every month, hundreds of letters went to pros, superintendents, managers, club officials, owners and manufacturers with queries that brought in useful article material.

What was needed in new clubhouses, according to those surveys and articles, were light, well ventilated locker and shower rooms, lockerrooms that didn't look as monotonous as jail cells, attractive and adequate locker and dressing rooms for women, better arrangements for food storage, cooking and serving and for clubhouse cleanliness.

GOLFDOM certainly made pro

shop design, construction and location an important part of clubhouse architecture. Considerable study was devoted to why or why not the pro shop should be in the clubhouse or in a separate building near the first tee when pros, club officials and architects began giving the pro shop long overdue attention.

In the early 1930's, the magazine kept hammering on modernizing pro shops, which had outgrown their place in a corner where a club-making bench got most of the little light available. A first grade shop was an indication of the club's class. During that period, the Walter Hagen Golf Company ran monthly four-page inserts in the magazine showing illustrations and plans of attractive pro shops. Hagen salesmen had little trouble in getting pros to make prominent displays of their clubs in shops which were pictured in the campaign.

Chemicals were becoming increasingly important in course conditioning. The articles by B. R. Leach on arsenate of lead as Japanese beetle control and for earthworms began in 1927 and ran in four following issues. The Department of Agriculture, the state agricultural colleges and experiment stations, the Green Section and manufacturers had been working on insecticides and pesticides for golf course superintendents, until GOLFDOM got across the news these new chemicals were effective tools, urgently needed by the progressive, practical man in charge of a big investment, a golf course. Men who had come up with on-the-job education, rather than with collegiate preparation and had become superintendents, soon adopted the chemicals.

There was an interesting balance between the men with writing experience and superintendents, pros and managers who were making their debuts in print with direct, concise, common sense stories that gave each issue a liveliness and reach to where the work was being done.

Dr. Burton Musser was one example. He told of Penn State's work in developing new grasses, which are among the top grasses now. The lead story in the September, 1927, issue was entitled, "Fertilizer's Share of Budget Is Important," by

C. A. Tregillus, who had been head of the Royal Canadian Golf Association's Green Section. He came to the U.S. to take charge of A. D. Lasker's magnificent private course at his Mill Road farm near Lake Forest, Ill.

Experimental turf plots were maintained there under the supervision of Tregillus in collaboration with John Monteith, Jr., head of the USGA Green Section.

War years were heavy with work and thin on money for GOLFDOM. Its articles even pushed golf at military installations. Golf was especially valuable recreation in areas remote from cities. Thousands who were active golfers after World War II learned golf as men in uniform. Providing facilities at military hospitals was a work in which the PGA and the national and regional superintendent associations were engaged. These programs had GOLFDOM and its staff participating energetically. There were campaigns for collecting used clubs and balls for use by military personnel in the United States and overseas and for collecting balls to be reconditioned and used for civilian play when rubber was not available for new balls.

Problems with keeping courses operating were numerous, complex and pressing. The magazine functioned in valuable ways to pass around resourceful solutions to the difficulties.

Almost 400 U.S. clubs were war casualties. Fewer than 100 were clubs having 18 or more holes. The war years clearly showed golf business was something distinctive and coordinated and not simply a casual combination of golf teaching, course maintenance, pro shop attention and clubhouse food, drink and locker service.

In years immediately after the war, financial affairs, rebuilding memberships and rehabilitation of courses were featured editorially. Organized education from caddies up provided many stories. The short courses in course management that were conducted by state agricultural schools led the golf schooling movement. The hotel schools at Cornell and Michigan State, particularly, began supplying compe-

tent young men to club management.

PGA sections had many spring business schools of a day or two, which eventually developed the association's excellent week of schooling during the winter. GOLFDOM saw great promise in these classes, originally intended for assistants, publicizing them so strongly, they began to attract Class A professionals for refresher and updating study.

Officials at private clubs were having their own problems with their businesses. They tried to delegate club executive responsibilities as much as possible. The house manager was handy when the monthly board meetings were held. That's how the general manager idea got its starting impetus. In the '30s, GOLFDOM carried stories about what club department heads ought to learn from the club monthly statements. A story by John Brennan, recently retired general manager

at Oakland Hills CC, Birmingham, Mich., told of the revival of the club after the war. He was made general manager and related how the job would have been merely a title without the eager cooperation of superintendent Herb Shade and pro Al Watrous. Oakland Hills continues to be a first class exhibit of efficient management today by a closely knit trio of department heads.

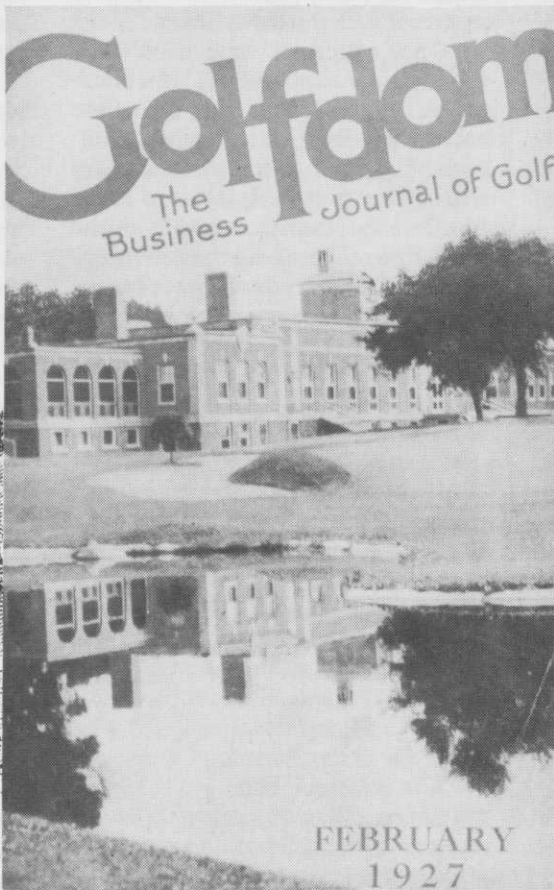
Of considerable interest were articles showing the development of fairway watering systems from the hose installations of the '20s and '30s, then after the wartime halt, the progress of the hoseless systems until today's sophisticated installations, substituting for rain and helping to raise golf turf standards beyond the imagination of early golfers. The steady progress of landscaping of courses and clubhouse grounds was also featured in the editorial program. It has paid off richly. The men responsible for the looks of the golf course can take

credit for having contributed to the beauty of this nation more than any other sports.

These stories were informative, necessary and resourceful. They worked because they focused on the business. It was fun, getting GOLFDOM to work for golf business and all the great people in it.

We look over the shoulder into a mirror and can see plainly a future for golf business, busier and brighter than the years growing into this publication's 50th birthday. Those running GOLFDOM in the time ahead appear to us to be smarter than we were. The young people who are new in golf business now seem to have a lot more basic training than their predecessors, who generally learned, and learned well, the hard and slow way.

The country and the populace with all the worries and strains of a concrete and steel world of too much malice and greed needs golf as a life-saver. □



Herb and Joe Graffis, right, founded GOLFDOM in February, 1927. Now both in their 80s, the Graffis brothers have been a constant spirit in making this publication a viable and necessary partner to the industry. Although, many in the business are unaware of it, the Graffis brothers and GOLFDOM had a lot to do in founding the CMAA, GCSAA and the National Golf Foundation along with helping to make the PGA into a business organization, rather than the social group it set out to be in 1916.