



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

New PGA President Don Padgett

Admittedly, Don Padgett was a late starter in the golf business. He was 21 before he even picked up a golf club. In business, though, longevity is no indicator of success and as Don Padgett just gets into his 50's, he starts a new job as national president of the Professional Golfers Association of America.

A native of New Castle, Ind., Padgett started his career as the golf professional at the American Legion Golf Course there in 1949. He left in 1952 and headed for Green Hills Country Club, outside Muncie, Ind. After more than 20 years at that facility, he moved on in the fall of 1975 for the famed Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Ga., as that resort's director of golf.

Padgett served a record three terms as Indiana PGA president: 1959-61, 1966, and again from 1969-70. In 1971, he became a regional vice president of the PGA. The Hoosier native eventually ran for national PGA treasurer in 1973 and won.

Recently, Padgett sat down with GOLF BUSINESS Managing Editor Nick Romano, also a Hoosier, and did one of the most in-depth interviews dealing with the trade and the association ever given by a national PGA president.

GOLF BUSINESS: You have been quoted as saying that employment will be the key issue in your administration. There are still many paying PGA members who can not get a job. What are your immediate plans to change that situation?

Padgett: We have Dr. Gary Wiren working almost full-time on jobs and club relations. We had a job seminar in Arlington, Tex., March 21-23. We asked every section to send a representative, to be paid for by that section, to discuss the clubs in the business that don't have golf professionals and how to contact those people and tell them the PGA story. We're going to try to get clubs that both you and I are familiar with that do not have a golf professional.

With the golf boom sort of easing off a little, some of those people may think, if we're going to have a club 10 or 15 years from now, we'd better have some new players. You are not going to have new players unless you have someone there to teach them and to get these people's youngsters involved in the game. So we're going to make an effort at clubs that don't have golf professionals to invite them to have some professionals go and play with them and try to emphasize to them what a professional really means to a club.

The Club and Professional Services program is at least a year old. Has it been a success for the PGA and is the message of the association getting across to those who do not hire PGA professionals?

Bill Blanks has laid a lot of stones for Gary. Of course, we have simply switched Dr. Wiren from education into a related subject, which is employment, and he's been carrying on and does have some new ideas. We also expect to get some ideas out of this employment seminar. We are fully aware of how many clubs do not have golf professionals, and we think it is probably a poor fiscal policy for them in reality.



Why do you think the PGA professional has met with resistance from daily fee operators, when it comes to hiring?

I think that anytime we're sort of fat cats and our tee times are full, we say "Why do we need it?" I can bring anyone in to sell merchandise. So they decide they don't need anyone. Now that we have a leveling off, they may take another look at the idea of having someone there available to teach and to promote that facility as a center. Most people start to play golf at a daily fee or a municipal golf course. Now, they are trying to upgrade those facilities to keep that guy from going on, because they are probably a little tired of being a feeder for the country clubs. So, I'm sure if they think of it in that respect, you'll see in a few years a good many of those courses having professionals on their staff.

Why has there been a continued insistence from the PGA leadership over the last few years to have a national headquarters, including several golf courses? Some PGA members have vocally opposed such efforts, saying the association should not be in the golf course business. What are your views?

Well, it goes back a good many more years than most people would think. It goes back to almost 1959, some place along in

there, when the delegates at the annual meeting voted that we ought to own golf courses. They voted a building fund, they voted that we should leave the Dunedin, Fla. area, which of course we did.

The latest development doesn't mean that we'll own a golf course, doesn't really mean that we're in the golf course business. It means that the PGA name is on a golf club and we will have certain rights to use those course. It also will mean that we will have our office and we will own it, and it will be a building that we also will own. So I don't consider us in the golf course business. Now, you're going to get most of your opposition from people who think that if we're in the golf course business, if we lose money, it's going to cost them money. We all understand that and I have to say that if I lived on the west coast, I probably wouldn't care if they ever had one. I'm sure that if they were building it on the west coast, I wouldn't spend any of my money out there. So we don't intend to.

Do you think that the PGA is leaning more towards its eastern constituency?

No, I really don't think so. You will find the election of Joe Black as treasurer a pretty good example. If the right guy comes along at the right time, no matter where he is from,

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he'll be elected. The biggest problem is someone thinking that it doesn't take some time to be elected. I think that probably proves in Joe's election. That's probably the second or third time Joe has run. Anybody can be elected an officer of the PGA from any point in the country. Delegates will look at their past performance on the floor at the annual meeting. They will look at what the guy has stood for policy-wise, and if we don't scare him to death, he'll probably get elected. If he doesn't, it doesn't make any difference where he's from. We're fully aware of committee assignment, that type of thing, being involved in the west. They may not think the annual meeting is important, but it's one of the most important things we do. We've been trying to take it to the west coast. We've also had several things out there: workshops, schools, and the likes of that.

There has been much interest in the plans for the permanent PGA complex. Is there some assurance from the new developer, Lllwyd Ecclestone, that his efforts will not fall through like those of the former project backer, Floyd Voight?

Mr. Voight had a tremendous amount of things going against him, with the economic climate in the country the way it's been the past 2 or 3 years, especially in Florida. We all hoped he would really put this thing together, but we ran into some things that no one could foresee. Traveling up and down both coasts of Florida, it's obvious what has happened to developments. Some of them are selling at 10 and 15 and 20 cents on the dollar. Some are only half built and won't be for some time. So, it's something that Mr. Voight ran into, and you know a lot of our PGA members are very liberal with other people's money. Mr. Voight, I'm sure, spent a good deal of money involving the PGA of America. And nothing came of it.

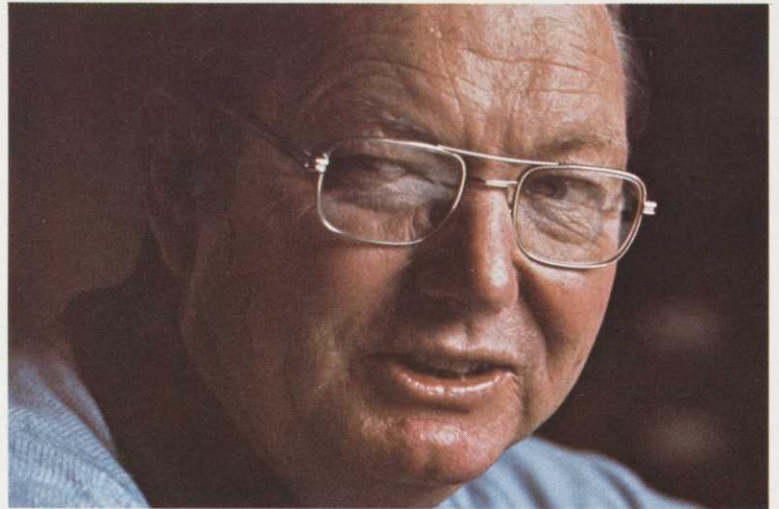
Now, the difference with Lllwyd Ecclestone, is it is 2½ years later. You have a young man who has a track record in building. Anyone who has seen the old Fort Cove complex and John's Island and Lost Tree would understand that Mr. Ecclestone and his father know considerable about building. Also, although I'm not privy to Mr. Ecclestone's financial details, I'm sure he is a very substantial young man.

Is the headquarters the number one priority, or is the employment problem?

Well, some people think you've got three or four things on priority. In fact, I asked our staff early in January what they thought our priorities were, because sometimes people have different ideas. The headquarters was one of two. Most think of the headquarters project as an irritant now. They would either like to do it or not do it. I'm not so sure I don't feel the same way.

“Pro-only” suits have been pending in the courts, and some have been somewhat settled. If sporting goods dealers were to obtain pro-line equipment on a national basis, how injurious would this be to the PGA pro?

I'm not sure professionals do a very good job in trying to talk price when a guy probably isn't going to buy another set of



clubs for 5 or 6 years. For him to go down and talk to a salesman who doesn't really know about the shafts and the weights and the head and different things is foolish. Walk through the PGA Merchandise Show. Pros even get confused by the time they get through. So, if pros have some problems understanding all of the features, I don't know how a man or woman could go to the store and say, “I want a set of golf clubs,” and put that much money down without having some professional advice. Secondly, I don't think anybody could really and truly sell equipment for less than the golf professional. In most cases, pros are not involved in rent, property taxes, and a lot of things that a sporting goods guy is. I think retail competition is a boggy man in most cases.

Some professionals have charged that certain manufacturers are already selling to sporting goods stores. This would be further backed by studies in that industry indicating that 10 percent more such outlets are getting and selling the equipment than were a year ago. With your experience, do you believe that the manufacturers are talking out of both sides of their mouths?

Even though we lost the original Golf City case, and it is pending on an appeal, I don't talk to the manufacturers about what they do with their equipment. In fact, I don't believe that the PGA ever has. Years ago, people may have talked about what is good for the golf professional and if there was anything they could do about it. Under the anti-trust laws, there's not.

I do know that there have always been such outlets. In 1955 or 1956, a professional called me and said that a certain store had asked him to sell them golf balls at 10 over and if he didn't do it, someone else would. He asked my opinion. I said, I have no opinion on that. I think everyone has to do what they think is right for them. We are not basically a controlled organization. It's not really part of our function.

Didn't the PGA have a manufacturers' advisory board at one time?

Yes, we sat down and chatted with them about repairs and speeding up delivery and freight and who would pay it. Those things have been discontinued because it had been

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misconstrued that we were having meetings with the manufacturers to control basic merchandise. We understand that even though we have sent letters advising them of price fixing and trying to sit down and talk about it, we can't do it. If I go into a meeting and someone says anything about pricing or what a price is, or what it should be, I walk out.

There have been some cases in the past of professionals liquidating their inventories at season's end and selling the rest off to sporting good stores. In view of the legality of the situation, has the PGA sensed this happening? If so, is there anything the association can do?

What if a fellow loses his job? He's got \$15,000 worth of merchandise that's at least a year old in most cases, maybe more. Chances are, if he is losing his job, he's probably not been selling anything and maybe he's not a good merchandiser and maybe he's not that good a professional anyway. The manufacturer doesn't want it back. I don't want it. What he attempts is to get a price for all of it. So they are going to do it, and there is nothing illegal about it and there is nothing the PGA can do about. Happens every day. I'm sure there are people that buy only at liquidation sales.

Does the association plan to make any public move to back efforts in individual states for greenbelt legislation? Since so many PGA pros are employed at private clubs, which seem to be under the most tax stress, would this be the way to go?

Individual PGA sections, in most instances, run their own ships unless they are in direct violation of the PGA's national constitution. A lot of the sections do things that we aren't aware of, and I'm sure some are involved in that area. We go at it from a national standpoint. Our Executive Director Mark Cox is in contact with National Club Association's Jerry Hurley on this type of thing. Club taxes are as important as anything in this industry now. We have a lot of people who would like to soak the rich and go get that country club. If they checked the land value around that country club before it was there versus what it is now, and what the government really gets in taxes versus before that facility was there, most of those do-gooders would be a little less vocal. This country was not raised by money coming from the bottom up. The PGA is vitally interested in it, but I think that's a function that other organizations do an extremely good job on. The National Club Association does a good job. Your magazine was one of the first involved in that area. I think that a well-planned attack on taxes through magazines such as yours is essential. Your predecessors, the Graffis brothers, brought that out years ago. We'll support all efforts and lend our name and our members input to them.

How important is the player/teacher aspect of the club professional's life, as opposed to that of being a merchandiser?

I think the player/teacher aspect is probably a little overdone. Some of us go to extremes in anything we do. The golf professional did the same thing. He needed an extra source

of revenue to keep up with what he was doing. You can't trade in a shirt and you can't trade in a pair of slacks — it was a market that was perishable, but a good market. Most pros know that at good clubs they must have well-trained assistants that are doing a lot of the merchandising. Most golf professionals understand that the head pro is the one that his members want. That's not possible in all clubs.

If anything upsets me, it's the assertion that the PGA is not doing enough for junior golf. The first junior tournament we had, there were 15,000 entrees, more than any tournament in the world last year that I know of. If anybody is not doing a disservice to junior golf, it's the PGA professional. You go out on the tour or into the colleges and find out where those guys come from: they come from a PGA club professional. Those municipalities and those privately owned golf clubs that are concerned, those are the ones that don't have a junior program. Not the ones that hire a PGA professional. We have some statistics on that from a questionnaire to 2,200 members, which is the best response we ever had on any mailer or questionnaire we ever sent out. From that you would see what the PGA professional is really doing from a teaching standpoint and a promotion of the game standpoint.

You have indicated that club professionals should have a better opportunity to play in national events sponsored by the PGA. How will this program be accomplished and what will it entail?

I think we have gone as far as we should in limiting his ability to play. The tour is not the same tour as when pros used to be able to go out and play four or five events, then return to the club to work. We have been able to preserve the right for our best club professionals to go out and play when they are playing their best. The new qualifying portion for the club professional championship, the section champion, and for players from that section is good. The top 25 can go out and play for a year and the 26th through 50th

Padgett, left, talks over the art of putting with his two assistant professionals, Vince Green and Jeff Williams.



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guys can play some events. That gets our best club professionals out there. The tour is for quality.

Over the last few years, there has been a growing interest in the general manager concept. Professionals, superintendents, and club managers are seemingly in competition for such positions. How do you view the concept, and is it good for the business?

Unlike some people, I think it’s for a club of a certain size and a club of a certain volume. With the general manager, if he has the authority from the board of directors to basically run the club, it’s probably the only way to go. The biggest problem with the general manager concept is that there are so few clubs that really and truly can have that. General managership can have four people: the general manager, the manager, the golf professional, and the superintendent. But that’s really not what most people are talking about. They’re not really talking about a general manager. They’re talking about one guy controlling the other two. Not one guy controlling the other three. If a club is only trying to save some money and decides it’s going to name one of those three a general manager, they can name him, but he really isn’t. He’s a pro acting as a general manager, if he retains the golf shop.

I don’t think there should be anyone anointed with the right to be the general manager. Several years ago, in a meeting with the club managers association and golf course superintendents, the PGA of America was ready and, I think is still ready to say in principal that any of those three could very well be a general manager. The club managers aren’t going to make the decision, the superintendents aren’t going to make the decision, and the PGA isn’t going to make the decision who’s going to be the general manager. The management of the club is going to determine on an individual basis who they would like to have if they want that concept.

As part of its education program, the PGA began a seminar addressing itself to the GM concept. Will this continue as part of the overall program and has it or will it be implemented in the business schools?

That shouldn’t scare anyone. We have people who are highly successful who are general managers. They are well-rounded people. A golf professional who only knows how to play golf, only knows how to teach and merchandise, does not know the golf business. Several years ago, by a one-vote margin, the simple course in turf management was inserted into the PGA’s business school course. A golf professional to really have the compassion for his course superintendent that he ought to have, who is his dear friend in most cases, has to know some of his problems and at least know just enough to intelligently discuss it with him. I look at these management seminars in the same way. A professional may never use it, but if he’s got it and that type of thing becomes available, the PGA would be remiss if they didn’t offer that type of education.

Recertification has been a hot issue in the PGA since its inception. Last year, President Poe predicted that a large number of pros (maybe 1,000) might not be recertified. What are the current figures on those that didn’t make the grade, and what is your feeling on the program?

The last count we had was in early January, and 660 had not recertified. By the time the figures are fully in, I expect that to be lower. We’ll have people that we personally appointed, a review board for recertification, and it certainly won’t be a pardon board or anything like that, but it is conceived by the executive committee and we’ll look into each case that is referred to it. You’ll find there are people who between now and September 1 will recertify and pick up the nine points they need for the next 3 years.

I think recertification is good. It says to a member at a club that my golf professional is interested. The PGA does have good programs — we were recently accredited. There had been those who scoffed at the PGA programs, and it probably won’t change their minds, but at least it gives less credibility to their story that they already know it all. And I’m sure they don’t.

Will those put into Class F eventually recertify, or will they stay in F, then drop out of the PGA? Why not just drop them from the membership in the first place?

We thought we would have problems in simply not giving people enough ways to be recertified and giving them time. I don’t think the executive committee ever spent more time on anything than it did on recertification, and that’s including the home site. The biggest problem, talking about a country of laws, we feel like we are going to give everybody due process. They are going to have every way in the world to be recertified. Those who are not recertified can’t really look at the PGA and say we were unreasonable. If a guy is half-way active he can be recertified so easily, it’s unbelievable. We’re only getting complaints from guys about my age, I guess, so I understand what they are saying.

Do you think increasing dues at private clubs is a continuing trend or will it bottom out? If not, will it eventually cripple the industry?

It is a continuing trend. Whether it will bottom out, I don’t really know. I think it’s very prohibitive now to start a country club. Most of the new starts now are in housing-related developments. I think most of the country clubs have far over-built their facilities on intent. The clubs, in most instances, are mismanaged, and they can’t be managed by a board of directors that meet once a month for a couple of hours. Most clubs don’t want to let the reins go and let capable management come in to run their clubs. Most of the best-run clubs or golf facilities in this country, in my opinion, are those owned and operated under the private free enterprise system.

Your executive director, Mark Cox, has said the club professional should be the golf promoter at his course or club.

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Is there anything the PGA plans to do to boost the effort of the pro at his own club?

Yes, we have some ads that don't have the final approval yet, but will emphasize what the golf pro really does at his shop. The golf pro, in most cases, has been there 10 or 15 years, and people expect to see him when they go in, and they don't really stop to think about what he really does. He is almost a father-confessor to the juniors. The ladies association, in most cases, has the pro as its advisor and if they have a problem, he takes care of it. The men's association is the same way. The teaching he does, the buying of merchandise he does, he oversees most of the golf car operation. If they have a driving range, he's in charge of that. If they have starters, rangers, and caddies, he's in charge. If you think about it, he has many hats. He crosses over into many departments of the golf field. So, he basically is involved in the whole program. The pro's story is not told as well as it could be.

Would it be a good idea to have 60-second spots on TV during the tournaments to explain who the pro is and what he does?

First, the PGA tour is a division of the PGA of America. Their policies are set by a 10-man policy board. Which, of course, is the three independent directors, the four players, and the three PGA officers. The promotional time available to the PGA tour is similar to that of the National Football League. That is at the discretion of the commissioner and I don't know that we have talked to him about using those, except for National Golf Day, in the past. Ordinarily, the commissioner uses those for charitable things like Palmer and his charity, and Jack Nicklaus', and in terms of player championships. I wouldn't think he would be totally against that type of support, but we would have to explore it.

The National Golf Foundation's Don Rossi has said that the junior golf programs in the nation are inadequate. Do you agree with this?

No, I don't agree with it. I think they are inadequate at facilities that do not have PGA club professionals. I believe and am not too bashful about saying that I believe club professionals should donate their time to YMCAs, the YWCAs. There are a lot of our club professionals that go to the schools and have donated clubs to them. Sometimes the schools are a little backward in inviting outside people in to teach something they don't have on their curriculum. They prefer to feel they are fairly well-rounded.

I would disagree with Don Rossi in that I would say we could do a better job in certain areas. But I don't believe that junior golf programs at PGA club professionals' facilities are inadequate.

Do you think enough young people are taking up the game?

No. There is no question that there are not enough.

There is tremendous senior golf in this country. I think the biggest problem in golf goes back to almost a social thing. Right after World War II, the in thing was to try and make some money and get to belong to a country club and be a part of it. That's not it now. A lot of people don't want to do what their parents did; their goals are different. I think the clubs have an image problem. Now it's for the whole family and there are many things to do there. I really believe speeding up play and making courses more available for the kids to get out on will help. Years ago, the PGA in cooperation with the NGF made some films involving teaching. You are aware of some of our seminars where our best PGA instructors have been to teach mostly physical education people throughout the country in the fundamentals. I think that a person not skilled in technique has a difficult time in teaching. That's controversial to people who say, "I am a teacher, taught to train and teach. You give me a certain thing and I can teach it." I don't think so — you might be able to teach it, but to hold the respect of those you are teaching might be more difficult. We are doing that already. I have no objection for someone to start and wet the appetite of young people in the universities, grade schools, and all the way up — as long as they do not say this is the only way to do it.

Recent figures from the NGF and some of the manufacturers have revealed that the number of male golfers in this country has been in a stagnant situation, with no significant increase. A study by the Nielsen Co. showed that the total number of golfers has decreased 3 percent over the past 3 years. Do you sense a decline in the game's popularity from a business standpoint (not from a spectator's standpoint, as in TPD golf)?

There probably is a very minute decline. We have had a leveling off. I think slow play has created as much of it as anything. Everybody has different viewpoints on that. We have a great problem in taking so long to play, almost an entire day away from home when you have to go play golf. I think the different magazines, media, can help on slow play and I know that at Callaway Gardens, we're really working on it. Some of the things we're doing have shown dramatic turnarounds in getting people on the golf course. Some people accuse you of being commercial, but you're not being commercial, you're trying to save those players who love to play from those few who feel like they can play their way and are entitled to do anything they want to on someone else's property. I think slow play has hurt us.

Will the PGA someday merge with the LPGA or take LPGA members into the PGA?

As you know, the LPGA basically has a teaching division and a players division. I have no objection to LPGA members or women who want to come into the business. If you're talking equal opportunity, that's what it should be. I think they should be able to go to the schools, pass the playing test, do the same thing that our apprentices have been able to do. We would be delighted to sit down and talk to them anytime they like. □