

Winter School Is a Business Gamble



Bob Macdonald's Year 'Round Golf School at Chicago.

IN the northern and central states, when the season draws near its close, a majority of the professionals find themselves looking toward the coming winter with uncertainty. Some will be fortunate enough to hook up with southern or California clubs for the winter season. In this respect there is an ever increasing demand for winter-season professionals due to the many new courses constructed in the past few years in those districts where "summer spends the winter" and to the greatly increased volume of transient golf trade which is helping to support these projects. Clubs having their big season during the winter can pretty well take their pick of the professional field for there are more than enough pros available and anxious to get winter locations.

As a result, many of the northern professionals are compelled to open winter schools even though past experience with winter schools conducted by professionals has not been anything too delightful. The

What about the winter school? Not very many pros can tell of profitable and pleasant experiences with these indoor propositions in the "off" season and we advise the pro who contemplates such an enterprise to stop, look and listen before proceeding. The picture is brighter when there is enough space for an indoor putting course, but even then the expense, hard labor, responsibility and necessity for attractive and continuous solicitation of business is such that it's out of line with the usual profit.

pro finds himself with far more overhead than he is accustomed to carrying, he is forced to go out to get patronage, and on

every hand he must contend with business problems that bewilder and baffle him. The result is that the great majority of pro indoor schools are fortunate to break even.

Despite the many discouraging experiences with winter schools, there have been plenty that have provided professionals with substantial incomes during the off season. The reason for success is simple and thorough business management, starting with energy, persistence and resourcefulness in the solicitation of business.

Choose a Convenient Location

Naturally the location of the school is paramount. In the larger cities locations near popular luncheon places, neighborhood centers and parks having municipal courses have demonstrated their value. Short term leases (usually on space that has been vacant for some time) are attractive to real estate men because the indoor school, if properly run, attracts the best class of retail trade, and is therefore a desirable feature for any good business center.

In the smaller cities the location does not demand the same careful selection as it does in the city, as the establishment may be reached easier by patrons from any part of the community.

It is wise, no matter what size the town, to pay a little more money for rent than to face the utterly hopeless proposition of trying to make a school successful in a cheap, run-down, dark, and otherwise unattractive location.

When the professional decided to open an indoor school, the first thing to do is to get in touch with the members of his club by letter, telephone, or in person. Many members of golf clubs go through the entire golfing "off season" without knowing that their home club pros are conducting winter schools. During the summer, these average golfers are too fond of playing to take much golf instruction and the winter affords them their only acceptable opportunity for golf tutelage. A letter calling their attention to the opportunity the school affords to make proper form a habit will draw business.

Letter Offering Free Work Out

Here is one letter, sent out to a list of club members by a pro whose only complaint last winter was that his school kept him too busy from 10 a. m. until almost 11 at night:

"Dear Mr. Smith:

You and your family and friends are

invited to visit the indoor golf school I have opened at 162.....St., just a few doors from the.....L station.

The indoor golf instruction idea has been demonstrated to be basically sound; it certainly is the most practical and convenient manner in which the average golfer can improve his game. Practice and instruction are one of the best winter ways of keeping fit. In the summer you know how hard it is to practice when the desire is always so keen to get right out and play.

My three nets and interesting little putting course will give you a lot of pleasure and add considerably to your golfing ability. Why not accept my invitation to make use of them this winter.

For club members I am making special rates on 10 lessons and also on use of the nets and putting course by the hour. But before we go any further into detail about these rates I want you to come up and have a little workout "on the house."

Hope that I will see you soon.

Sincerely yours,

....."

This letter got a fair volume of business from people who were good boosters for the pro and his establishment. He placed a number of cards around in the lobbies of the neighborhood apartment hotels and spoke before several women's clubs on golf as exercise, as well as a social asset, for women, stressing the reducing value of golf exercise.

Attracting Women Patrons

This was one of the most productive business getting stunts he pulled. The women trade filled in the hours of the day when it was almost impossible to get any patronage from men. He started out full of hope that golf would work out as a reducer and found to his joy, as well as that of his women patrons, that steady sessions of pivoting and swinging do a lot of good in reducing the girth. By the way, this particular aspect of golf instruction is far too lightly passed over by pros. It is making many people rich. Reducing is a mania with thousands of women.

Lessons for Christmas

Experience of the majority of pros indicates that the indoor school business does not get going at a profitable gait until late in February at the earliest. Several of the more resourceful pros from whom we have received pointers on the successful conduct of indoor schools tell that they started business earlier by advertising courses of

lessons at their schools as Christmas gifts. Window display cards, letters and circulars stuck in the neighborhood mail-boxes, giving details of a Christmas gift lesson deal in one case was directly responsible for 41 series of lessons at \$15 a course. These Christmas gift lessons were followed frequently by supplementary lessons that brought the pupils right into the spring. They also resulted in bringing a number of the pupils' friends into the schools.

Don't Work for Landlord

The most general cause of complaint about indoor schools comes from excess rent. Very few pros that GOLFDOM has interviewed on indoor school experience can say they paid a reasonable rent. In most cases, the pro takes for his indoor winter school space that has been lying vacant for some months. He should not be compelled to pay rent as high as that which might properly be paid by a permanent tenant. The indoor school draws a good class of people to the building—people whose trade is desirable to the other

tenants of the building. For this reason it has an advertising value that helps to get the building filled with permanent tenants.

The pro should bring these facts to bear in arguing with the landlord about the rent. Rather than run the risk of paying rent that will leave him no profit for his labor during the winter, the pro had better stay out of the indoor school business. He may be able to make some arrangement with the landlord for rent on a percentage of gross business basis, but this takes keen figuring and trading.

Tie Up with a Hotel or City Club

Hotels, that usually have plenty of space available and are anxious to increase their restaurant business, offer a good field for winter locations for the pros who will sell the idea of conducting the school at a nominal salary and 100% income from lessons. City athletic and fraternal clubs also have many good berths for pros who are capable and get on the job quick. In a number of cases, the pro must sell the idea to the club, but, when he does get the idea across, his problem of winter placement is very satisfactorily settled.

Pointers on the Construction and Upkeep of Sand Greens

IN the south, a properly constructed sand green is cheaper to maintain than a turf green. Of course, sand can never be as popular as grass with players in general because of the fundamental weakness that sand greens, after a rain, are hardly in playable condition. A minor objection is that all shots to the pin must be run-ups; a pitched ball will rarely hold.

But other than these two defects, sand greens can be made to satisfy the most exacting member, particularly in the south and in arid districts where good turf is difficult to maintain. The two important factors to be watched are careful original construction, and constant, painstaking grooming.

When constructing sand greens, it is most important that a good thick layer of cinders, oyster-shells, or other coarse material be laid down in an excavated area somewhat larger than the contemplated green. This is to assure proper, rapid drainage of the surrounding subsoil. If the green is to be constructed on a slight elevation so that tile may be used effec-

tively, by all means install it. Of course, if there is nothing to drain into, the tile is useless.

Over the cinders, which should be tamped down as level as possible, next goes a layer of clay four to six inches thick up to the level of the surrounding turf. This layer does not extend to the limits of the cinder base, but is the exact size of the contemplated sand surface.

Smooth down the clay until it is as level as a table top. Remember that the sand layer, which goes on top of the clay and forms the putting surface, is very thin and the smoothness of the clay governs the smoothness of the green.

Use beach sand or washed sand for the top layer. Many clubs are in the habit of using "river sand" dug from convenient banks on the club grounds, but river sand generally contains a large percentage of clay and makes the greens sticky and hard to dry out after a rain. Beach sand is generally free from this clay and should be used if available. If not, wash the river