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Golfdom

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A Manufacturer Looks at Golf

THE author of this analysis, a prominent golf equipment manufacturer, has watched the spread of golf from its infancy in this country to its present popularity and so is well qualified to point out how inadequately we are equipped to accommodate the potential millions who would play golf were more courses available; to describe how a small town can acquire a golf course easily and economically; and to bemoan the present-day tendency of many golf course promoters to introduce their projects without sufficient thought for the future.

THOSE of us who sit back and contemplate the steady strides the game of golf has taken and is taking throughout the country, take this growth for granted without questioning how it came about.

Nothing progresses without a reason. We know the effect, but seem to have neglected studying the cause. Apparently there is nothing to worry about in the future of golf, as a game or business. It seems destined to continue its very merry way for some years to come, much to the joy and profit of those engaged in golf as a business and as a pleasure.

But like all things, there is an end. Not an abrupt end, perhaps, but a slow, gradual demise that will be very annoying to those of us who wholly or in part depend on golf's continued popularity for our daily bread and shoes for the baby.

Golf will not die in a year or two. If it decides to slump off, it will take many years; but from the moment it decides to quit growing the 30 or 40 per cent we now so complacently anticipate, the pinch will be felt. Of course, we don't expect any slowing up to occur. How can it with the thousands of golf courses and the millions invested in this grand game? We might well ask that question, for therein may be our answer to the future popularity of the game.

Golf is popular because facilities for play are provided for the so-called masses. Golfers themselves individually or collectively did not develop golf as a game in this country. It is our courses that have made the game. The courses develop the golfer, and not vice versa. Ample facilities for the game will keep it popular, more courses will make it even more so.

While there are thousands of golf courses in these United States, a little "look-see" at a golf map will disclose that there is room for thousands more. How many small towns of 500 to 5,000 population have golf courses? How many large class-A cities have adequate facilities for the thousands who flock to play but can't obtain a starting time. The answer is—very few—much in the minority.

Take the state of Ohio. There are 7 class-A cities with a total population of 2,000,000. There are 51 private and 18 public or semi-public courses. Suppose an average of 800 people (this is more than actually use one course) could play on each course throughout the year. That is just 2½ per cent of the aggregate population. Now for the small towns.

There are 559 Ohio towns with a population of from 500 to 150,000. The total population is 1,800,000. In these towns there are 65 golf courses. This is one course to 8½ towns or 27,000 population.

Yet Ohio is not a backward state in golf. On the contrary, it is quite up with any of them, so this analysis is good for nearly any of the 48 justly-celebrated states. The figures might vary, but the percentage would be about the same. We seem to think the whole country has gone golf. It has and it hasn't. Our own personal friends have and that creates the illusion. Those folks we don't meet in our walks of life haven't taken up the game, but they are willing if shown the way. The way is simple—more golf courses and less expensive investment in the individual player's equipment. Golf courses are the real need, however. The amount necessary to invest for clubs, balls and a bag is already low enough and presents no great obstacle to the teeming millions, nearly all of whom can afford an outfit.

Small municipalities like to ape big ones. Less prosperous folks are anxious to indulge in the sports and pastimes of the wealthy. The factory boys and girls and the rural inhabitants want to own and use a set of golf clubs, just as their banker, doctor, lawyer and landlord. Just look who bought the automobiles and why. Good roads made that the nation's first business. Good golf courses and lots of them will make golf the diversion for old and young. What with autos to get there, short working hours and steady employment at good pay, it's a cinch!

How to do it? That's also a cinch. As in everything else, it is a case of "showing the way." Small towns have plenty of nearby land, idle acreage that is ideally suited for a golf course. Small towns have money too, or can get it by issuing bonds to be taken up by the local inhabitants. Bankers and real estate men, knowing how values increase in the vicinity of golf courses, will help the project along. The right sort of propaganda to the local folks will get their approval of such an issue—and we have another golf course. The cost is from \$25,000 to \$100,000.

Philanthropically-inclined residents often donate the land and sometimes the completed course to their townspeople who, in turn, give the donor's name to the course and perhaps erect a monument. They should do both in sheer gratitude. If such a citizen can be found, the community is lucky indeed. Sounds simple and is simple.

All these city fathers want is guidance.

It's up to us who look on golf as a business to show them the way. No one outside of the industry is going to do it for us.

There are enough figures to show that community golf courses pay for themselves and frequently return a profit to the city. Private-fee courses have generally been profitable in larger centers. This is valuable ammunition and we should use it.

As has been stated, the golf business is on the increase. It undoubtedly will continue on the increase for several years; exactly how long, is a matter for conjecture. We can help it along now and thus make sure of golf's permanency. A few see's planted here and there will sprout into fine golf courses and more golf business.

There are many new golf courses either ready for play the coming season or in the process of organization. Not all of these projects are what might be called "on the up and up." Many are purely promotion schemes of one variety or another, designed not to provide a golf course for the membership and the industry, but rather to line the promoter's personal pocket. This type of promotion sours the public on golf course projects generally and we can ill afford to allow promotion schemes to operate without restraint. In time, it may be looked upon by our potential customers as a sport and business worth avoiding.

What can be done to prevent this attitude? Not much as matters now stand, but if there were a bureau or clearing house where reliable, authentic facts and figures were available to interested individuals, municipalities and the like, many dollars as well as the good name of golf would be saved.

Perhaps those vitally interested should organize a department "for the propagation of golf courses." A good smart fellow at the head to help the communities see the light will earn his keep in a short time. The expense should be borne on some pro-rata basis by all producers of golf equipment. The large and the small firm will then benefit in direct proportion to their position in the trade.

A little careful planning now will save much work later.

Not a hard plan nor an impossible one, but certainly an urgent one of sound merit.