

Some Slants on Operating Pay-as-You-Play Course

By "THREE SEAS"

IN CONSIDERING the successful operation of public and semi-public courses the basic points to be drawn out are: the difference between straight fee courses operated on a basis of the fees to pay for the course upkeep and profit and a golf course being run on a fee basis to enhance the value of surrounding property as a real estate proposition.

The primary object of a daily fee course is to get in as many fees as possible. It usually has to buck the municipal courses where often workhouse labor is used and the question of profit is not considered so much as politics.

Promote Private Club Idea

The answer to this competition is to endeavor to make the staff give the players the impression that your course is a private course. Treat them as if they were visiting members of a club. Don't let your registry have a ticket system, a sort of "here's your ticket where's your money" style; have them register in a book, have a duplicate green fee receipt book, like a private club, have a boy get their clubs and ask if they want a caddy and arrange starting times for them. On Saturdays, Sundays and holidays don't take their money until they have seen the starter and know how long they have to wait. If they have no starting time, make sure that your registry clerk courteously explains why, to save them disappointment and delay. Give them free service such as an occasional piece of whipping on a club, adhesive tape, and free checking of clothes.

Regarding booking of times for starting, don't charge extra but try and give the same players the same times every Saturday, Sunday and holiday. Run a handicap board and in no time you will have quite a number of players who will look on the place as their own club and talk it up saying "we have no trouble at So-and-So course. We have small tournaments; we have our own starting times, etc. etc."

Do not worry if some times they miss a starting time, there are always some players ready to fill in. Too much care cannot be given to getting a satisfactory starter, one who will listen, say "yes," but still go on being scrupulously fair on starting. Never allow the starter or registry clerk to have words with a player; let

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them bring them to the manager and let him thrash the question out. This service is not much and not hard to give, but so strongly marks the difference between the average municipal course and yours that you can get much higher fees, consequently a better class of player and naturally a much easier kind to handle.

Keep on the Job

The manager, especially if he is the pro, must be on the first tee or office at all times that are busy. If he is the pro, the players always need him and he can cement a great many friendships right on the job. He must be careful not to undermine the starter's job by allowing favoritism in starting or upsetting the registry clerk by trying to get special friends on the starting sheet.

Ticket Policy

To further create the private course idea I am strongly in favor of straight day tickets up until two hours before darkness when half fees should be charged. Then the only time when eighteen hole tickets should be issued is before eleven a. m. Saturdays. It is better to get fifty cents extra for a day ticket than an eighteen hole ticket. I find that ninety per cent do not play more than eighteen holes, especially on Sundays. Copy the private clubs and do not allow women to play Saturday afternoons and Sundays and holiday mornings. The writer has found this works very satisfactorily, so much so that in one case the players got together and purchased the course.

A last maxim: *Never* try to mix yearly members with fee players on a straight fee course. The yearly members will ride the fee players ragged and cause endless trouble and dissatisfaction.

The Real Estate Deal

The real estate course is a much more delicate matter. Here is entirely a different proposition. If it is called a Public Course, people will not buy around it because it is a public course. Still you have a golf course representing a big investment and upkeep and you must try and make it run itself. However, your golf club is primarily there to sell your land. You must not expect to sell property and still take in as much as a straight fee course. Experience has shown me that around 2,000 players will play free in a season on such a course in metropolitan territory. Lot-owners, salesmen, prospects, members of the company, etc., are "dead-headed."

The best way to handle this question, I believe, is to run the course open one year, then get your regular players and choose 150 to 200 and sell them a yearly membership in the fall, payments strung out until May 1st.

Close the course rigidly on Saturday afternoons, Sundays and holiday forenoons and members can book starting times 24 hours ahead, weekdays if necessary. Close the course against outsiders at the discretion of the manager. Particularly have a special locker room plainly marked "members only."

Do not try to push Real Estate down their throats every time they come to play



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but try and give them the taste of a real private club. In two years threaten them with making it completely private. They will realize then what they have to go back to and will make strenuous efforts to try to remain a member.

Picking the Pro-Manager

Fee course owners, I am afraid, do not quite realize the value of the first contact. A pro manager who can run the whole club can be had, but a man of this calibre is not to be had cheaply. However, he is the cheapest investment the owners can have. His knowledge of golf, his knowledge of golfers, his knowledge of buying supplies, etc., his habits of being on the job at daybreak until dark and taking his vacation in the winter, are different from those of the ordinary individual.

There are some pros who will take a gamble on results and they are by far the most satisfactory. Let your man see the district, the course, its accessibility to the city, then if he knows his job he will make a proposition of just a living wage plus a percentage of profits over the 6 per cent interest on investment, upkeep, taxes and depreciation. Remember he does not get any share in the appreciation of land value, and this should be taken into account when fixing terms with him. Everything should go in: shop sales, percentages of assistants, teaching, club-cleaning, repairs, profits on soft drinks and candies. This item alone is worth between \$3,000 and \$4,000 profit a season. Don't set up elaborate catering; just practically a barbecue stand is sufficient for any fee course; if they have enough money for big dinners they have enough to belong to a private club.

The manager should have personality enough and push enough to belong to as many social clubs as possible and get these clubs and every convention and fraternal organization to hold tournaments at the course, by making them special terms for certain slack week-days. If they want a dinner later, have a city caterer do it for them and give the caterer what facilities you can.

If your Pro manager is doing his best give him as much leeway as you can, he probably knows the job better than you do anyway. Remember he has no control over the elements, he can't make green fees on wet weekends.

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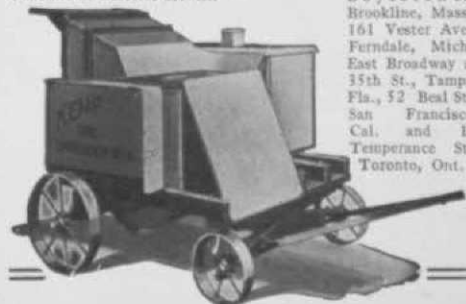
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