

Miniature Courses Active Factor in Golf Business Trends

By HERB GRAFFIS

IN ONE year the influence of the miniature courses has registered as a major factor, not only in the development of the golf business but in other fields of amusement. The movie business, already hit hard by the expense of wiring the houses for sound and a raft of pictures so poor that even the standby mob of moron customers gags and loses interest, has decided to join the army and many houses are putting in a few putting holes in their lobbies. It is reported reliably to GOLFDOM that two of the big movie chains are contemplating making putting courses standard items of house equipment. One of the well known movie chains is busy looking over locations for a number of indoor golf plants and according to present indications will put indoor golf prominently into the scheme of this winter's entertainment.

This promise looks good to the pros. The southern jobs that amount to much are fairly well tied up and those that are usually available attract a gang of applicants, many of whom are so anxious to escape the snow and cold for the winter that they work for scarcely enough to get them by. With good instruction and management jobs springing up from this new phase of the miniature course business a lot of the boys whose business urge is stronger than their wanderlust ought to be able to get themselves profitably fixed for the winter. The chances are that it will be a great thing for the pros, not alone because of the money it will mean to them, but because the contact with the methods of good showmen is something that will educate the boys in a department where they, generally, are "not so hot."

Some of the professionals who have made connections with the popular Tom Thumb and other miniature courses this year have done very well. These patrons of the nursery all are anxious to graduate into the high school class as golfers so the instruction nets in connection with the miniature plants are doing a long hour

business. The convenience of the establishments is bringing many advanced students, members of country clubs, into the miniature course establishments for instruction. In that respect it may mean a reduction of the club pro's lesson income, although the danger is remote, for the pro's big problem is to get his members interested in instruction rather than worrying about who gives it. The home pro is bound to get the big bulk of the business.

But Is It Golf?

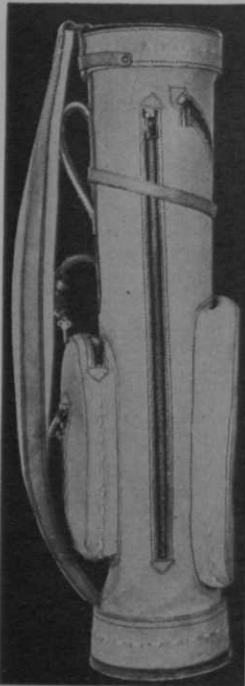
When the Tom Thumb racket made its sensational debut in the south under the auspices of a clever northern capitalist, a lot of the skeptics in the golf business dismissed the stunt as a flash in the pan. Some of the boys already are talking about the idea having run its course. There will be some of these miniature course owners who will flop, certainly. Poor locations, excessive competition and the notion that the only action necessary is to install a course, sit back on the base of the bunzoon and watch the dough cascade in, are factors that will account for many fatalities. It is highly probable that the Tom Thumb people soon will announce new designs for holes, thus maintaining interest in playing the courses. The big shot in the Tom Thumb Co., a quiet, shrewd golf nut whose personal cut during the first year of the business exceeds \$1,500,000, is one of the fellows who entertains no delusions about this vest-pocket outfit being golf. It's a game all its own, making a dent into the billiard, pool and bowling alley business. Being little bastard brother to golf, due to the mamma of both being the putter, is nothing against the game in these days of a loose moral code. The little guy with the bar sinister is furnishing a lot of help to golf.

One place where the miniature courses have given the golf business a direct and decided impetus is in the manufacturing business. Putterers, at least they call them

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by that name, are hard to get for the minny courses. There is at least one moribund golf ball manufacturing company that has been put back on its feet by the demand for balls for these putting courses. The remade ball companies are doing a land office business in the new field and the age-old complaint of caddies stealing balls to sell to the second hand dealers has taken on new volume due to the lure of a bull market's prices for the contraband rollers.

Putt With Brooms Is Better.

Some of the putters being used at these courses are tragic or comical, according to the way you look at it. Getting one introduced to golf by deluding them that these nondescript weapons are golf clubs is taking money under false pretenses. The miniature course providing its players with decent equipment is protecting its future. Putters that are real clubs, balls that are round and clean and a selection of the right clubs for men, women and children, gives evidence of a real business establishment.

Listen to what one of the honest, foremost manufacturers of golf equipment has to say about miniature course putters. He talks without malice for his own product is in demand up to the limit of his factory capacity. He tells GOLFDOM:

"If this new crop of golfers is going to get into the game properly and really get actual practice and preparation for the legitimate game on a larger course, it is necessary that they work with the proper tools from the beginning. We have had brought into our office specimens of cheap putters such as are used on a great many of these courses, that, I am sure, could not help but be a detriment to the development of one's game. I think that far better results might be obtained if many of the players had broom sticks attached to horse shoes to use instead of some of the putters that are offered them at some of these Tom Thumb courses. Some of the clubs that have come in here have had absolutely no balance, the shafts are bent and whippy, and it would be impossible for anybody to develop any amount of skill through their use."

Lure of the Lights.

When the dope got around that 60 per cent of the play on the miniature courses was at night, owners of full sized fee courses started to think deeply about the

matter. The private courses—most of them—are still numb to the discovery.

Nine holes of each of several fee plants have been illuminated and the results, while leaving room for improvement, are so satisfactory that night golf looms as one of the big draws in 1931 entertainment and sport. Illuminating engineers are working out installations that will make the ball easy to follow and find, with an initial and operating expense low enough to make the lighting plant a good investment. Minor league baseball has been using night lighting with great success this year and to forecast that night golf will be prominently in the pastime picture next year is simply stating a foregone conclusion.

Where the private clubs have been overlooking a hunch is in not lighting more of their practice putting greens. The clubs usually are trying to attract more dinner business, and this night use of one of the course details has been proved to be valuable as a magnet, according to the lesson from the miniature courses. Even if the increase in dinner volume is not large, there may be expected a reasonably good use of a night lighted putting green at a private course and a consequent boost in the volume of beverage business. Look over any club statement, note the profit rung up on the beverages, and you'll see that this business deserves all possible encouragement.

Installation and operating costs are not out of line for illuminating a putting green and those clubs having such installations are finding them very popular.

SUPPLY HELP IN CLUB REFUSE DISPOSAL PROBLEM

NEW YORK CITY—Seth Sales Co., 62 W. 14th st., is booking many golf club orders for its "Burn-All" incinerator which is available in three sizes: the smallest with a capacity of 2¼ bushels, selling for \$32.50, and the largest, having 8¾ bushels capacity, selling for \$92.50. The device is for outdoor installation. It is odorless and spark-proof. It quickly disposes of garbage, refuse, rubbish, leaves, and other combustible material.

JUST because one fertilizer smells worse than another is no sign the former is any more efficient. Buy your fertilizer on the basis of your turf needs as established by an analysis—never mind the odor.

CONTROLLED COMPETITION

is the life of business . . . uncontrolled it may mean disaster . . .

No pro would think for a minute of permitting another competitive shop to be established on his course. Outside competition is bad enough. Inside competition . . . is worse.

Yet unintentionally the pro is doing this when promiscuous playing of unmarked balls is the rule rather than the exception on his course.

While a small number of these orphan balls may find their way back to the pro who may think this re-sale business is profitable . . . several hundreds of them have a habit of going from caddy to the gyp dealer, or worse, directly to the players. Thus the pro loses both ways . . . on new ball sales and the resale of orphans with its questionable profit.

The minute any pro enters the re-sale game he must match wits with every caddy and most golf players. Some rules are helpless when human nature asserts itself.

But FULNAME MARKING with a working majority of members using it under a system that assures them its full benefit, not only puts the golf ball business of the course under control of the pro—it eliminates *inside* competition—directly benefits every player and the game itself.

Another thing . . . discount hounds never kick when you ask them full price for FULNAME MARKED balls. Remember that.

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