

How Club Service Helps Pros Increase Profits

By WILFRID REID, WILLIE OGG, JOHN INGLIS
and CHARLES HALL

ANY business that makes the most of its chances for profit plays up the money-making opportunities in the departments that represent something exclusive in the establishment's service.

So, in view of the pros' generally close attention to possibilities for increasing sales and net income it is not a sensational piece of news to tell you that some of the wisest lads in the game are setting plans for a very energetic development of the club-cleaning department as a sales feeder.

In this club-cleaning business the pro has the store competition stopped dead. Probably the only big mistake about the club-cleaning operation as done in the shops of leading professionals is calling it club-cleaning instead of club-servicing. With the chromium and stainless steel heads and the steel shafts there may be some who think the club-cleaning department as it now is conducted is on the down-grade. That's a baseless fear. So long as there are human beings making golf clubs and playing with them there always will be attention required by golf clubs. The grips need attention; the shafts need care even if they are steel, and if the stainless steel head is of the grade of hardness that is best for a golf club it certainly is going to need some repair touches that must be given by an expert hand.

There are a lot of the boys who take this club-cleaning business just as a matter of course, and that's where they are guilty of sleeping while a winner is walking by. When you get the honest close-up on a lot of pro incomes you see that the club-cleaning income frequently is the pros' net profit for the year. A dumb kid, without proper supervision, working on club-cleaning can mess up more of a pro's reputation as a business man than you'd think off-hand. But some bright laddie can be

one of the best little business-building assets the boss could have. For that reason some serious study of the club servicing is to be highly recommended. In the first place, the pro probably will find, as Dave Livie did, that the cost of cleaning clubs is a whole lot more than it used to be before the matched sets became so popular. And they'll probably learn, too, as George Sargent did, that it costs a pro about 50 cents a club in free service given buying members.

GOLFDOM has asked some of the leading lights of the pro business to give their slants on club-cleaning so the other boys would get launched into deep thinking about what added money might be made out of this phase of shop operations.

We'll start off with what the veteran Wilfrid Reid of Indianwood (Detroit district) has to say. Will is serving his thirtieth year as a pro golfer this season, and knows his stuff. Incidentally, this writer will say that Bill's successful presentation of Indianwood's invitation for the 1930 Western open was one of the neatest, commendably concise speaking stunts we've heard, and a rightly timed, impressive bit of work in promoting pro recognition.

Reid says:

Golf clubs properly cared for are always a big factor in any club, and often either make or break the standing of a professional with his members. During my six and one-half years at the Country Club of Detroit, possibly one of the most important professional positions to be held, 95 per cent of the members were older golfers, therefore educated in their likes and dislikes, and versed in all the tricks of the game. Never during my entire period did we receive "a solitary complaint" from the club members pertaining to club cleaning and general upkeep.

My *modus operandi*: I kept one good club cleaner solely for cleaning clubs.

He was charged with the entire care and responsibility of all clubs—not only to keep them clean, but to keep each rack where the clubs went (the pigeon holes) clean also—and the floor, too, every day. This was inspected at least twice a week by myself. I would look through every set of clubs. If dusty, would call same to his attention. It is well to have the buffer in a separate room so that the club rack room is free from dust, etc. Whether the clubs were used or not they were cleaned at least once a week. All wood clubs were shellacked at least once a month—and the faces of the clubs (wood clubs) cleaned off with a sponge or *damp cloth* (never *filed* unless asked for). All loose strings or other little trifling jobs, filing down dents from stones on the niblic or other clubs, loose brass plates, etc., would be done at once. Minor repairs were included in my charge of \$1.50 per month—and we would have as high as 350 sets and as low as 280. It is necessary to prepare a big list, alphabetically arranged, so that all A's or B's or C's are registered opposite the rack number. For instance, Mr. Abbott, may be No. 1, or another form of running this rack number is to give each member the same number in the golf shop as the number of his locker in the clubhouse.

With the number of steel shafts now in play, oiling shafts is not so important. All hickory shafts were oiled and shellacked every month at least once; just a drop of raw linseed on a duster and a few drops of shellac, and rubbed into shaft until warm will act as a preventive against rain and weather.

All wet clubs would be thoroughly dried on entering the shop—but would not be cleaned or oiled and shellacked until the following morning, being given time to thoroughly dry out. Same with golf bags, umbrellas, etc. After a few weeks of cleaning the clubs take on a shine with rag buffer and are easy to keep—once this stage is reached.

Cleaning Is Pro's Ad

It is a good investment for any member of the club and a great thing for the pro.

It keeps them both constantly in touch with each other and from the pro's angle "It is a very silent appreciation of good will towards his members to see that each set of clubs is well kept." Any member who has a spark of golf intelligence always will appreciate a good looking set of clubs. Inwardly every golfer has the idea "that he has the only set on the earth." It is well to keep them in this frame of mind, and cleanliness is the first step towards the greater godliness and the A. B. C. of all begin-

ning in golf. You can well imagine the frame of mind of the golfer who really prides himself on his clubs, when, on arriving at the first tee—he suddenly discovers half his clubs are only half cleaned—rust on the edges and a few tell-tale strings dangling down his shafts.

Now you will see my point. This member's good will has probably been greatly lessened in that one minute. His general inner man is equivalent to a very stormy sea, consequently his game suffers, so does his caddie and possibly even his home. And this leads to no end of trouble.

Works on the Players

I have known very celebrated golfers, but more celebrities in other walks of life; prime ministers (Mr. Asquith was a pupil of mine) ambassadors and even presidents. These men appreciate and often have expressed themselves in words which went to show and prove "why they were really great men." Not even the clean iron clubs would escape these men. On one occasion with a former British premier playing over my old course at La Bontie, France, this gentleman's words on the first hole were, "Wilfrid, if the condition of my clubs amounts to anything, I know there are no better golfers"; meaning that they were so clean, so well polished and groomed it would put him among the highest class of golfers. Unfortunately he *was not* quite able to play up to the standard of his well kept clubs. Nevertheless it was a great feeling to begin with.

"Charge on Monthly Basis"—Ogg

One smart slant on avoiding all chances of misunderstanding in club-cleaning and leaving the way open for a complete job of good-will building, comes from Willie Ogg of the Worcester (Mass.) C. C.

Bill remarks:

My club-cleaning boy's job consists of cleaning the iron heads with the regular wheel and the wooden heads with a wire wheel. This wire wheel takes all dirt off the wooden club faces without in any way altering the face although it gives the appearance as if they were re-faced. He must renew strings as soon as they show signs of wear and not wait until they come off; shellac wooden heads and shafts periodically, and get authorization for needed repairs from any member who happens to overlook same.

I may say while on this subject that I used to charge \$1.50 per month for this service and had no end of trouble with that method of charging. Some members would take out their clubs or bring

them in in the middle of the month and demanded rebates because they were not in the shop for the calendar month. We also had trouble during the summer keeping track of when sets were taken out and brought back. The monthly system would work all right if members did not ask for rebates, but humans are not built that way.

By introducing a system of yearly rental of shop lockers and charging a flat rate of \$10.00 per year I eliminated the rebate question and nearly doubled the club-cleaning business. It is a much happier arrangement for all concerned and avoids friction.

I think this method of charging for club-cleaning is now being largely used throughout the country. I have used it for the last four seasons and no doubt some of the boys have used it longer than that. I thought I would mention this phase of club cleaning while on the subject because someone might read this who might be charging on the old monthly method and having troubles with it the same as I had.

Educate Boys to Sell

Charley Hall, pro at the Country Club of Birmingham (Ala.) has a good idea slated for use this year. He plans to give his club-cleaning boys an inducement for building business. This strikes us as being a hunch that may work out to be great for the pro and the member as well. The kids certainly ought to know just what shape the player's equipment is in and be prepared to put in some acceptable ideas for making sales. Undoubtedly supervision and education will be required before Charley gets this plan working smoothly as the boys who are inclined to be a bit over-eager to collect some commission can get the shop in wrong, unless the boss has the situation well in hand.

Hall summarizes his club-cleaning plan:

My instructions to my boys are:

1. To know each member's name and so address him in a firm, polite way.
2. That just cleaning the iron clubs is the smallest part of his work.
3. I try to impress on the boys if they will pay attention to the little things that go wrong such as strings, loose heads, heads out of line, bad finish on wood heads, and bad grips, the member will realize the service he is getting, which is the groundwork for new sales as well as a long club cleaning list.
4. This season I am going to give my club-cleaning boys commission on sales they make.

Too much attention can't be placed on club-cleaning list at this time for I am sure most of the professionals see a great battle ahead with the many nickel alloys in heads coming on the market at this time.

Protects Pro Business

J. R. Inglis, pro at Fairview G. C. and president of the Metropolitan P. G. A., is a strong advocate of using the club-cleaning department as a defense against store competition.

Johnny comments on club-cleaning:

The club-cleaning matter is one that should be thoroughly studied and developed by the pro. To my mind it is one of the major assets of the pro's business. By taking good care of the clubs the pro makes friends of all his members and gives plain indication of his interest in the good condition of their playing equipment. The members, in turn, feel obligated to their pro and only a very small per cent buys clubs in stores. In my club this number is less than one per cent.

I make it a point to see that no club ever leaves my shop with strings hanging loose or with mud plastered over the faces of the woods. In the case of minor repairs they are handled promptly without expense. When major repairs are needed I have a tag advising of the needed repair attached to the club needing attention. This results in many sales of new clubs as well as a good repair business. The practice avoids the slightest suggestion of "high pressure" selling and works wonderfully well because it shows the member that the pro is taking a personal interest in the member. I am careful about having the boys keep the wooden heads and shafts oiled and shellacked for this arouses the favorable comments of the members and it is first class advertising for my shop.

I charge by the season instead of the month, and in this way escape a lot of bookkeeping or misunderstanding.

Mrs. B. R. Leach, wife of the widely known turf authority, died at Riverton, N. J., from peritonitis January 3. The fatal illness developed as a result of the birth of the second daughter in the Leach household.

The many friends of the bereaved husband extend to him their sincere condolences.
