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Early Signs Point to 1931 as Golf's Biggest Season

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ENOUGH of the 1931 golf season has passed in review to justify a reasonably definite advance appraisal of the entire parade. Summarizing the findings: 1931 promises to give 1930 a close run as the record year of the golf business. With an even break in weather conditions from now on, there are other indications that point to 1931 as the banner 12 months of the game's commercial history.

Only one factor threatens the situation. Exposure to the current national practice of planting the fawny snugly and then setting up a wail for the government to "do something" may wilt some of the weaker minds in the business, but no extensive development of this yellow fever may be expected from the present personnel responsible for club operation or from the manufacturers of playing and maintenance equipment.

Early Start This Spring.

Right now the golf business is envied by almost every other business in the country. Although we have had more than the usual rain this spring, the total rounds of play at representative courses in 20 different localities is approximately 5 per cent greater than at the same time last year. The mild winter and early spring accounted for the increase.

The rain has made the grass fairly jump out of the ground. This has meant rush

orders for mowing equipment. Some of the clubs thought they were going to be able to get through the year with equipment patched up to the last extremity. Heavy service on the established turf resulted in a quick break-down of the worn equipment. It is almost impossible to get serviceable second-hand mowing equipment. More exacting standards of the smaller clubs has provided a big and lively market for this used equipment this year. Now that the smaller clubs are not able to pick up this equipment with a couple of years of easy service left in it, they are passing the hat among their members, thus raising the cost of the new equipment they need, rather than by incurring the risk of a club deficit.

All this pounding away at the chronic annual assessments of golf clubs has begun to show benefits. The clubs are paying now for what they buy, or they don't buy. From a fairly extensive personal survey GOLFDOM advances the opinion that golf clubs generally have more money in the banks right now than they ever have had before. Previously we have cited the estimate that golf club interest charges in 1930 averaged approximately \$1,000 less per 18-hole club than they were in 1929. This is a saving of about \$2,500,000 a year that was made possible because the clubs are beginning to operate on a business basis and are not going wild on capital expenses of alteration or enlargement,

passing the problem of payment on to succeeding administrations.

Don't Curtail Too Boldly.

There is a peril of this thrift business being overdone by the usual golf club violence of extremes. The clubs that have satisfactory membership positions these days are the clubs with good courses, adequate and inviting clubhouse facilities and pro shops that are service stations for the members. Curtailment of the operating costs of any of these departments often is reflected promptly in an unavoidable let-down in operating standards. Such a lapse is fatal to the membership campaigns. As a matter of fact, study of the membership situation in metropolitan areas has suggested the possibility that there is a membership limit beyond which the average club cannot go without assuming almost certain operating losses under existing standards.

About five years ago the active membership at the average 18-hole metropolitan district club was from 180 to 220. A membership of from 225 to 275 constituted the entire roster. Now, with most of the men members active and a lot of women playing, the clubhouse especially is not able to give each member the individual attention they have been led to expect without having a big and expensive force of waiters or waitresses, idle a good part of the time. The managers are up against it in the matter of getting high class, emergency help at the clubhouses. There's where a lot of the clubhouse deficit originates.

Menus Due for Shake-up.

Food prices are lower, but just as long as club officials and a minority of voluble members insist on the preservation of a generally obsolete tradition of "club" service standards and menus, the house manager hasn't much of a chance to operate at an even break. Even the barbecue stands are cutting down house lunch business, and with a fair volume of this business the club has one of its best chances to serve good food at low food cost. Revision of the clubhouse feeding practices, in accord with the ideas of many experienced managers, probably will be one of the next advances in golf club business operation. It takes only a casual study of the business done by the cafeteria at Olympia Fields (Chicago district) to make club officials and managers think about the prospects of menu and service revision.

Some of the clubhouse equipment makers have been complaining about golf business this year, but theirs is about the only woeful statement in the field. They attribute the lack of the customary amount of new business to the clubs spending the money on the courses. These clubhouse suppliers, however, have registered no kick about replacement business in silverware, china and linens. They say this is nicely above what would be considered a normal year's business.

Three years ago GOLFDOM concluded, after extensive investigation, that the golf courses were due for a general revision of maintenance policy by replacing the manual labor with machinery whenever possible. This conclusion was the result of hundreds of interviews with greenkeepers. At that time 18-hole club maintenance staffs were composed of from 13 to 19 men. This year, at clubs where competent greenkeepers have been allowed to mechanize their courses, one frequently will find excellent and thrifty maintenance with staffs of 9 to 13 men and a superintendent. The savings, in many cases, pay for the machinery the first year. That is the real foundation for the course maintenance equipment business being good.

Growth of knowledge about turf maintenance also has been responsible for a healthy increase in golf fertilizer business during the last 9 months. The greens end of the golf field has provided a shining example of spending to save that might happily be extended to other businesses.

Fee Course Business Good.

Daily-fee courses are having a very satisfactory play early in the season and expect that this will be a high-mark year despite the unemployment. The extension of the five-day week idea and the growth of women's golf is helping them a lot. In some places the prices have been cut, but unless the competition is keen and the finances in need of a sudden and temporary exhilaration, the cuts are not especially necessary, nor are they drastic. Comparing the cost of daily fee golf with driving an automobile, for instance, or even with the cost of attending an indifferently done movie at some ornate picture palace, is not doing any damage to the cause of fee golf by a long way.

The better grade fee courses in some instances are cashing in on the inability of some players to hold onto private club memberships, but this is not as extensive

as it might seem off hand. Private clubs in some districts are suffering losses of membership due to men who formerly belonged to two or three clubs are reducing their connections to one golf organization.

Generally this has been offset by a reduction in the initiation costs of metropolitan district clubs. This has brought a lot of live new members into the folds and their house accounts and transfer fees promise to far more than make up the loss taken on the initiation fee. Naturally there are complaints from those who bought club memberships two years ago for \$1,800 where the memberships now are selling at \$800, but they have something to show for their initial expenditure which is more than can be said about the market "investments" some of the complainers made.

Cut Prices Only Pro Worry.

The pros this year are doing a good business, although they have been held back by rain. Leading manufacturers are running at a gait that makes new production records seem certain, although they are catching hell on the lower priced clubs put out by wood-shed factories. Thousands of new retail outlets for golf goods have sprung up this year, and the salesmen in many of these places hardly know enough about golf goods to tell the buyer "which end of the caddie to grasp."

Although this ignorance is going to burn some of the new golfers and take some business away from pros and first class manufacturers, it will teach the buyers to go to well qualified sources of golf merchandise when they really want something worth while. From a number of well authenticated reports some of the newer manufacturers already are about ready to fold up. They go after the store business and here the first, last and middle question is "price" 95 per cent of the time. When the beginner in the business takes his line of junk in, figuring that he has the world stopped with his store price of 85 cents for an iron, the store guy tells him some other poor sap has offered him clubs for 80 cents per. The victim then says, "Oh, to hell with it. Take them for 75 cents each. I am getting out of the golf business."

Foremost manufacturers set themselves for just this sort of a break on the lower priced goods and although the quality golf goods business is split a few more ways than it used to be, all of the first class manufacturers are cheerful and active.

The merchandising situation is helping to make better merchants of the professionals because the competition generally is with such stuff that a pro can show his customers plainly and gracefully they are running the risk of throwing away their dough if they fall for the cut price trash.

Some salary cuts have been made in the golf field, but only by clubs that are in delicate shape and anxious to get quickly on the right financial basis and work out of the mire of heavy carrying charges they walked into some years ago when they were led astray by the delusion of grandeur. It is to be hoped that these minor cuts, made more on the basis of "principle" than for the money involved, will get the deserved compensation when the readjustment eventually is effected. There are comparatively few first class golf club department heads out of work for now operating abilities mean more to the clubs than ever before. Thus, it may be that this year when other businesses are sobbing and the golf business is good, may impress on the golf field the value of competent department heads who are given authority without uninformed interference that enables them to operate clubs on a business basis.

P. G. A. Championship Sept. 14-19 at Providence, R. I.

CHAMPIONSHIP of the Professional Golfers association will be played this year Sept. 14-19 at Wannamoisett C. C., Providence, R. I. Mutually satisfactory financial arrangements have been made between the Providence officials and the tournament bureau of the P. G. A. and plans already are under way to make this tournament the greatest in P. G. A. history.

With Boston, Worcester and Hartford right at the door and New York just a short drive away the Providence people have a good gallery territory. It will be the first major golf championship to be held in Providence.

Only those pros who have their national and sectional P. G. A. dues paid as of July 1 will be allowed to participate in the qualifying play for the P. G. A. championship. It is expected that this will result in the P. G. A. membership showing a record total by the first of July. The group fire and theft insurance plan of the association meant so much of a saving to the members that it was responsible for a recent spurt in membership. In many cases the saving exceeds the dues.