

Willie Hunter Makes Gold Mine

of Fee-Course Post

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AT THE request of GOLFDOM I went in quest of a story, a story telling how a professional carries on business at a modern daily-fee course. I betook myself to the adjacent byways and hedges, camera, pencil and other scribbled paraphernalia in hand, in search of my ideal. I didn't look very far. I used my bean instead of my dogs and the name of Willie Hunter at Montebello Park public course came hurriedly, but not too hurriedly, to mind.

Willie, a former British amateur champion and a golfer of great renown even among modern, high-powered professionals, was working at his bench when I dropped in. "What are you doing here, McCracken?" said he, using a name I use in much of my magazine work. "I hope you don't think I came to hold you up, do you?" says I. "Not that bad," he replied, "but did you ever hear about Sandy Mactavish being held up by three burly, brawny men one night as he was on his way home from a Caledonian soiree? After a terrific struggle and much rough handling and mauling the Scot was finally subdued and a dime taken from his pocket. "My God!" said one of the hoodlums, "what would have happened to the three of us if he had a ten dollar bill?"

The Montebello course was designed by Max Behr and is a marvelous test of golf for daily-fee players. It is kept up in masterful style. The cocoos bent greens are equal to the best to be found at most private clubs, but the fairways are a bit bare in places owing to the fighting nature of



Willie Hunter, former British amateur champion and conqueror of Bobby Jones in the 1921 National amateur, at ease outside his pro shop at Montebello Park Golf Club, California.

the soil. The clubhouse is ideal for such a place and many new clubs would do well to see the plans of Montebello.

Courtesy Is Cash

Willie Hunter has one of the most alert business minds in his profession and here are some of his thoughts as expressed to me:

"Business conditions at the golf shop of a daily-fee course are quite different from those that prevail at a private club and your customers have to be handled with even greater courtesy. The sales angle is totally different, I find. I have to get cash for my merchandise from the public links player excepting in rare cases, and in these rare cases I must know that my man is financially responsible. It is, alas, altogether too easy for some individuals to sign checks for merchandise or lessons, but it is a different proposition for him to remit when the bills come due. To overcome that and also with a view of helping public links golfers to secure whatever golf equipment they desire, I conceived the idea of a part payment plan

such as is in vogue in many business houses. In dealing with such customers I must know them to be financially responsible and their references good where they are employed. Usually I ask 25 per cent down and then payments of from \$5 to as high as \$20 a month, according to their salaries. I have made a great many happy customers in this way and these customers have brought me much outside business which I don't believe I would ever have had otherwise.

"Of course all professionals—all business people for that matter—realize there are bigger profits in high priced merchandise than in popular priced and it was with the idea of promoting the use and sale of the better class of clubs and balls and wearing apparel at my club that I really started the part payment plan. The result is that my clientele demands equally as high a brand of utensils as does the private club member even though the latter may be able to buy and sell the former many times over.

"True, all this calls for much bookkeeping but it is worth it. I do all my own bookkeeping at home and I have my own system of keeping books which is quite unique and which I believe I could sell for a considerable sum if I were so disposed."

Realizing I was being given some very unusual sales tips from Hunter, tips which might assist other professionals in a similar capacity, I kept asking him question after question. "Let's sit down and finish this matter," said he. Then I shot at him, "Do you handle any used clubs? I mean, clubs your customers want to get rid of and replace with new ones."

Old Clubs Make New Players

"Yes, I do," he answered. "No less than two-thirds of my clients bring me their old clubs as part payment and I never have any difficulty in selling them within 24 hours to beginners. It would seem as if this army of golf converts is endless. I sell them at a very small margin of profit—those I don't keep for rent sets. You see when a client wants to buy new clubs, he can't very well afford to throw away 6 or 8 old ones, can he? Most of the time when I have an old set on hand I put up a sign which reads, "Used set of clubs for sale inside." That sign works magic.

"Allowances on old clubs are guided by the amount of the sale in view and it is very rare I ever meet with objection to my proffered terms because I take pride in dealing liberally with such customers.

A discontented client can do a great deal of harm to a business like mine; on the other hand, a contented one can do untold good.

"The sale of bags at a daily-fee course is less remunerative than the sale of clubs for the good reason that most of the players carry their own bags and find the inexpensive duck or canvas bags the lightest to lug around. The average daily-fee player, at least at my club, lives in the hope of having a matched set some day. That is his dream because he is led to believe by the better players that a matched set is the thing to have. Any customer who comes into my shop and wants to buy any one club from a matched set is at liberty to do so. I rather encourage him for the very good reason that the moment he has that odd club in his bag, he will never rest until he is the owner of the whole matched set. That's human nature and the daily-fee golfer is a very, very human soul."

Scanning over the stock of clubs in Willie's shop I noticed no dead stuff. It all looked so clean and fresh and attractive that I ventured to ask, "How do you keep your stock so new looking. Every item of merchandise I can see from here is as clean as a whistle."

Merchandise Must Move

"That's easy," came the answer. "I won't carry any dead stock. Dead stock means dead business and dead business means no business. The moment an article fails to move within a reasonable time I feel I've bought wrong, so I take my loss. I cut the heart out of my cost, not my possible profit. I have a bargain rack outside my shop—you can see it there right under your nose if you'll take the trouble to turn around—where I put my "undesirables" and it is truly remarkable the quantity I dispose of in this way. This outlet takes care of stale numbers so I have little or no worry over dead material. A great feature and tremendous sales advantage, I find, is my porch outside my shop. I never put a club in a glass case. I found out my mistake in this direction when I was professional at Brentwood C. C. years ago. Why put them where they are not accessible to your member's touch and handling? This case stuff is, in my opinion, old fashioned and clubs put in cases often remain there like so many mummies on public exhibition. Crowds of players waiting to start off hang around my porch and handle these clubs and the



Hunter's "outdoor salesman," a club display on the golf shop porch. Starter's hut in background, first tee behind bushes at left. Pro-shop entrance is on extreme left.

results I get from this my best salesman are amazing. I would respectfully suggest this form of salesmanship to my fellow professionals, as I am confident it is tremendously profitable and carries no overhead. I wouldn't accept a showcase if you presented me with one.

"Daily-fee golfers do not care to enter the shop of the professional because the moment they do, they feel obligated to buy some iota of merchandise. My records show that only 20 per cent enter my shop and a great many of those are usually personal friends who come in to say 'howdy'.

Promotes Tournaments

"The Montebello golf course is, as you can see, located in an industrial section and I make it a point to keep in close touch with the officials at all the big plants in this neighborhood. Two years ago I started what is known as the "Industrial and Commercial Golf League." Last year we had no less than 25 teams of eight men each play through the season at the Montebello course and the results I received therefrom in a business way was most satisfactory and greatly swelled my sales not only in the shop but also in the sale

of lessons to the ambitious competitors.

"The existence of the league at once added a matter of 200 new faces to Montebello and the beauty of it all is that these 200 fellows are 100 per cent golf players who take part in weekly tournaments staged by their own organizations and also by the Montebello management. The golf league is made up from oil companies, railroad companies, electrical, lumber, automobile tire, steel, printing, paint and municipal concerns in the neighborhood and the enthusiasm that prevails while the matches are being played is astounding to say the least. The organization of this league, I found, proved most beneficial to my business for the very excellent reason that it put me in closer contact with the members of each team than it would be possible otherwise to do so.

"To secure the maximum of business at a daily-fee course I maintain the professional must get into the closest contact and intimacy possible with all of his clients and thus be in a position to impress the truism that better and less expensive merchandise can be had in the golf shop of the professional than at any department or cut rate store."