

# Club's Three Salaried Officers PROFESSIONAL — MANAGER — GREENKEEPER Should Become Matched Set Team

Says ALEX PIRIE

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**G**OLF club operation cannot be immune to the general upheaval and revision of policies that business generally has been experiencing for the last 18 months. The managers, professionals and greenkeepers must take into most serious consideration this basic fact: They are intrusted with the business destiny of their clubs, but unfortunately too often have merely a small speaking part in the formulation of club policies. This situation I think is recognized by all the thoughtful department heads of golf clubs. To such men it must be completely obvious that to keep the present uncertainties from handicapping our individual developments and those of our respective businesses, we have urgent need of unity between the manager, professional and greenkeeper. Individually, none of the three of us is going to carry the weight with our club officials that the three of us would have collectively on a foresighted, sound and harmonious program for the good of the club.

Some of the professionals and greenkeepers have been, I think, unduly exercised at the interest shown in the developing trend towards general management. I will confess to having held, for some time, a suspicion of the danger of this idea not alone to me and other professionals, but to the clubs. My opinion has been altered as I have seen that I had based my former belief on an unwarranted ballyhoo of general management.

The idea of general management that first got around among professionals and greenkeepers is that the house managers intended to be "the works" and that the professional and greenkeepers were to be as errand boys with the inevitable curtailment of pay and opportunities for advancement. The golf club officials have been interested in this general management idea

for the simple reason that they have been desperately looking for some cure-all that will remove the agony of the annual deficit.

The greenkeeper and the professional bear some vague rumors of what is going on about this general management affair and are disturbed by the suspicion that their associate, the clubhouse manager, is arranging to "frame" them. I don't cite this as the general actual performance, but I do maintain that there is enough basis for my statement to show that it is marrying the smooth operation of golf clubs.

## Who Is Qualified?

When we get right down to this general management policy, it is difficult for a frank and informed man to conceive of any reason why the clubhouse manager or steward should be put into this position of terrific responsibility simply because he is acquainted with restaurant and house operation, which, after all, is but one detail of running the club, and not the essential one, at that.

Consequently, we come to the point where we all must admit that this general management idea, if not given the basis of harmonious and efficient co-ordination of each department, is a peril to the clubhouse manager as well as to the pro and the greenkeeper. Since this general management idea has been given publicity that there are hundreds of good business executives—at present the victims of the industrial situation—who are anxious to get positions as golf club general managers outranking the present clubhouse manager, the pro and the greenkeeper and really having less qualifications in this intricate, peculiar business of running a golf club.

The big problem of the pro, manager and greenkeeper associations, is to get their members to think of their problems collectively without having personalities dis-

turb resultful deliberation. That is exactly the problem of the department heads at each country club in the United States. By this I don't mean that we haven't teamwork and a lot of it at country clubs, because we have. One of my finest and lamented friends, the late manager at Old Elm, was a man who meant a lot to me in my work and I am vain enough to say that I very earnestly did everything that I could contribute in my small way to his success in a very unusual and difficult situation.

Our club is not representative. It has a very exclusive membership of wealthy men and our problem, while not those of handling heavy play, are made just as trying by the perfectly pardonable insistence of our members having absolutely everything absolutely right.

### Figures Show Harmony

At the average country club you can almost invariably tell that harmony exists between the professional, manager and greenkeeper by looking at the annual financial statement. When you see clubhouse volume and operating expense that is laudable, you are almost certain to find behind that picture the enthusiastic teamwork of the professional who is active in conducting events that draw play to the course and running these events off at a time that will fit in nicely with the kitchen and help facilities at the club. Furthermore you will see the work of the greenkeeper in maintaining his course in such condition that it attracts the play of members and guests, and whose purchasing is done with such a keen appreciation of exactly what is needed that he contributes greatly to the financial showing of the club.

After all, it unfortunately is the case that the restaurant deficits of country clubs are the sore spots with officials. Anything that possibly can be done by the pro and greenkeeper in attracting to the clubhouse a volume of business that will give the house manager a fighting chance for a good showing is a consummation devoutly to be wished by every country clubhouse manager in the nation.

In the golf club business we have, I believe, the greatest department head annual labor turn-over of any activity that is supposed to be a business. You know how many good managers are looking for jobs today. Good pros and good greenkeepers, too, are suffering from this situation. We can talk about the details responsible for this, all we want, but I am

satisfied that when we get down to bed-rock we will find that an important factor in the origin of this unhappy condition is the lack of understanding between managers, greenkeepers and pros. If they would talk over each other's problems on a considerate basis they all would be in a position to be of mutual help in "selling" each other to the club officials and members with whom they are in most intimate contact.

### Tells Pros' Case

There is a thoroughly unfounded belief among many club managers that the professional is reeking in wealth acquired from pro shop sales. The manager may see the sale slips coming through and he sees the pro completely arrayed like Solomon in all his glory as the selling front of the pro business. But the manager doesn't see the expense side. A gross profit of 33% in a short-season specialty business would be a hopeless picture to the best of specialty shop retailers. However, this is the pros' usual gross and out of it must be paid his assistants, very heavy fire and theft insurance rates, the costs of balls snatched but not signed for by members in a hurry, the cost of playing, dressing and otherwise putting on the front that is expected by a pro these days, and innumerable other items. The lessons at 18-hole clubs average less than two per member per year. Do you wonder, then, that many professionals are seriously concerned with their merchandising problems and consider themselves lucky to get by with only a little more than the annual profit represented by the club cleaning income?

The difficulty of operating a pro shop at a good merchandising profit is attested to by the annual statements of golf clubs that have tried the experiment of operating the shops themselves. Only in a few cases do I know of clubs that really have received any appreciable net income from such operation and in these cases it has been directly and entirely the result of the most intense and constructive cooperation between the professionals, managers and greenkeepers. We professionals have our internal problems that are just as bewildering and disconcerting as those that managers have to contend with. One of our miseries is that number of boys who can shoot a fairly respectable game and will take a pro job at any income at all simply to have the privilege of playing golf and of being called a professional.

Their pitiful lack of qualifications is costing the clubs money, but in the tedious period it is taking for club officials to realize this, many competent and conscientious professionals are being penalized.

### Club Operation Perplexing

The query of a friend of mine comes to me as I consider the general method of golf club operation. This young man says he wonders how he can be so smart and so poor and others be so dumb and so rich. I have heard a lot of the performance of the eminently successful business men as golf club officials and I want to tell you that it frequently makes me think that club managers, professionals and greenkeepers are financial and executive geniuses by comparison. I often think that one reason why Old Elm is so smoothly and satisfactorily run is that our club very seldom changes officials. We have had but two presidents since the club started. Death took our first president from office. There is plenty to make me believe that I am working for the smartest aggregation of business men in Chicago, possibly the greatest confirmation would come from the income tax authorities. However, I see particularly vivid evidence of it in the fact that these men realize that as competent as they are, it takes one of their number a good many years to learn the job of becoming a golf club official.

Other club department heads are not as fortunate as I am in this respect. They have an almost annual turn-over in officials, each official with new untried ideas. The result is that the manager, the professional and the greenkeeper are held accountable for the unfortunate outcomes of these experiments that are forced upon them.

One by one we cannot successfully correct this evil that is costing our clubs and ourselves so much money, but collectively we department heads can raise our voices in definite constructive criticism so that we will bring into the country club field the stability and soundness of operation that it very plainly needs.

### Matched Department Heads

We have seen scores of golfers all over the country bettered so materially by the matched sets of woods and irons that have come on the market in the last few years that we can draw a parallel. The matched set of the manager, pro and greenkeeper

playing for the golf club is certain to result in a substantial improvement in the organizations' score when the annual statement is compiled. The only chance any of us have of getting more money—and there are thousands more of us underpaid than overpaid—is by eliminating the costly and senseless frictions that are either the result of festering misunderstandings or of temperamental deficiencies that incapacitate a man for proper service as a golf club department head. In the latter case, I don't know what to do. At my years one becomes rather reconciled to his inability to reform human nature. However, if I had anything to say, I would be brutal enough to "can" the man who can't get along with other honest, striving, competent associates. In the former case of unfortunate misunderstandings—if such exist at your club—a little tact, consideration, and possibly giving in a bit may bring about the energetic and sympathetic unity that is the only basis of advancement for all of us.

As a representative professional, I can say that I do not care how much money any clubhouse manager gets. He can get a hundred thousand dollars a year as far as I am concerned just so I get mine in proper ratio. But neither one of us will get the income that the importance of our duties warrant unless we put the club in a sound financial and operating condition. For that reason we all have to think of the club first and that is the real start toward the constructive harmony that each thinking department head is extremely anxious to see in golf club operation.

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**"MEMBERS** must not buy balls from caddies." Nearly every club has such a rule. Why? To boost the pro's golf ball sales?

Not at all. The rule is designed to eliminate a great deal of the temptation on the part of the caddies to steal golf balls. If the members are no market for the boys' loot, the boys soon discover that disposing of stolen balls is more trouble than it is worth.

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**T**HE club anxious to attract caddies should provide a fenced-in caddy-yard in which they can amuse themselves until assigned work. A few pieces of simple gymnastic apparatus, one or two horse-shoe courts, and a pair of basket ball goals will help.