

Big Clubs Point Way to Cost Cut By Varied Membership Classes

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IN THESE times of mental and financial depression, we hear much about the high cost of golf. We hear of failures to balance budgets, of assessments to cover deficits, of loss of members because of assessments—and higher dues and more assessments because of a heavier burden on the fewer members remaining.

Many clubs, after years of successful operation, some of them with fine traditions, have become panic stricken and waived transfer fees and reduced the admission fee to almost nothing,—only to discover that low admission fees no longer impress the buyer. He has come to ignore first cost and to consider annual dues charges, the probability of assessments, and the liability assumed for funded debt.

All of which has suggested to the golfing public that perhaps private golf clubs are economically unsound. Most of them represent investments of from a quarter to three-quarters of a million dollars, and are essentially idle five days of each week and five months of the year. Someone has reminded Mr. Average Business Man that he carries an original investment of a thousand dollars or so, plus dues, plus frequent assessments, plus special sinking funds, plus his share of the interest charges on some part of a million dollars for twelve months of the year—and plays only on week ends and occasionally during the week for six or seven months. The golf-plant is practically idle nearly three hundred days each year.

What's the Distinction?

A *golf* club was originally presumed to be an organization devoted to the game of golf, with a membership limited to the capacity of the course on the peak days of play. Accommodations were usually limited to a small clubhouse, frequently occupied and run by the professional. They served light lunches and provided a bath. The dues until a decade or two ago did not average \$50.00 per year.

A *country* club, on the other hand, is an

organization in the country devoted to a diversity of sports, such as golf, tennis, bathing, trap-shooting, riding, etc., with a children's playground, and social functions including dancing, cards, dinner parties and general forms of entertainment.

Golf is not expensive at *golf* clubs, if they are strictly golf clubs. It is not expensive in *country* clubs, if they are strictly country clubs with an auxiliary membership and diversified attractions. Golf is expensive only in golf clubs that assume to combine the attributes of both the *golf* club and the *country* club in one organization.

The dues in modern golf clubs now average over \$200 per year including assessments necessary to balance the budget of expenditures. Dues are \$50 to \$75 higher than they were three years ago, while assessments are growing less popular and possibly less frequent.

The annual dues in country clubs are only about half as much as in so-called golf clubs because the cost of operation and carrying charges are not assumed by the limited number who can use the golf course, but are spread over three to five times as many members, each of whom contributes to the cost of the particular activity in which he is interested.

Few Simon Pure Clubs Left

There are not many golf clubs left in the metropolitan districts. Outside of a few easily distinguished by their low dues charges, it can almost be said they are limited to pay-as-you-play courses. Likewise, in a discriminating sense, there are but few country clubs, because while many of them provide a considerable range of entertainment and auxiliary sports, the expense is all borne by the golfing member.

A great majority of clubs are neither golf clubs nor country clubs. Although organized for golf they have undertaken the financial burden and assumed the functions of the country club. Because of the interest of the entire family in golf,

racketeering promoters have influenced these clubs into keen competition with each other to provide to an extravagant degree the social features of the country club, while their income is limited to the dues that can be collected from the golfer.

Solution: Non-Golfing Members

It cannot, therefore, be regarded as strange that golf is expensive in the modern golfing organization. This situation can in many cases be remedied. Almost any of the so-called golf clubs can extend its facilities somewhat, financing the cost of doing so from the sale of social memberships, and thus distribute the cost of operations among the requisite number to make the burden lighter.

A survey was recently made for data on large clubs, specializing in golf, but having social or non-golfing memberships for those not interested particularly in the game. It was disclosed that they were all ranking clubs, rating very high in prestige in their various districts, and yet their dues were less than half the annual charges in clubs that attempt to combine the social facilities of the country club and golf activities in one organization.

Information was sought from many clubs, among which were the following nationally known organizations:

Merion Cricket Club, Phila.—36 holes; 1,900 members.

Sunset Hill C. C., St. Louis—18 holes; 1,700 members.

New Orleans C. C., New Orleans—18 holes; 1,600 members.

Lido C. C., New York—18 holes; 1,500 members.

Los Angeles C. C., Los Angeles—36 holes; 1,550 members.

Olympic G. & C. C., San Francisco—36 holes; 5,000 members.

Boston C. C., Boston—27 holes; 1,200 members.

East Lake C. C., Atlanta—36 holes; 1,200 members.

Chevy Chase C., Washington—18 holes; 2,000 members.

Baltimore C. C., Baltimore—36 holes; 3,000 members.

Wilmington C. C., Delaware—18 holes; 1,200 members.

Philadelphia Cricket C., Phila.—27 holes; 1,850 members.

Philadelphia C. C., Phila.—36 holes; 1,300 members.

Dupont C. C., Wilmington—18 holes; 1,300 members.

Maplewood C. C., New Hampshire—18 holes; 1,500 members.

Capital City C. C., Atlanta—18 holes; 1,000 members.

Allegheny C. C., Pennsylvania—18 holes; 1,000 members.

Total courses, 24; total membership, about 30,000; average golfers per course, 400; average social members per club, 1,350.

Following is a list of the questions asked and the replies returned, which for obvious reasons cannot be given in detail:

(1) Do non-golfing members reduce the financial burden on golfing members? (2) Is there objection on the part of your golfers to social members? (3) Does a social membership affect the prestige or standing of a club? (4) What privileges are extended to such members? (5) What are the features that attract non-golfing members? (6) What is the initiation fee, and what annual dues? (7) Does the non-golfer own an equity?

Digest of Replies

(1) That social or auxiliary members reduce the burden on the golfer is shown by the fact that few of the clubs investigated charge over \$100.00 per year for golfing. None, so far as learned, is in financial distress and assessments are practically unknown.

(2) There appears to be no prejudice to social members on the part of golfers. One club, permitting play on week days at regular guest fees, said there was an occasional protest, but general satisfaction.

(3) It appears that large clubs with auxiliary memberships are well regarded in whatever district located.

(4) Privileges of the clubhouse are extended with all the social activities embraced, such as cards, dances, dining, etc. Children's playgrounds are provided, as is tennis, croquet, etc. Invariably a swimming pool is provided, and pronounced the strongest magnet for attracting young members. Regarding golf privileges, if any, there was a considerable variance in the replies. Some permitted no golf. Some permitted a certain number of games per year on paying the regular fees. Some permitted golf at certain hours, or on certain days at fees somewhat less than guest fees. Most of them, however, permit special members to play on the five week days on payment of regular guest fees.

(5) The attraction cited by the large majority was the swimming pool. If made

attractive with a suitable pavilion equipped with showers and lockers to avoid encroaching on regular locker room, canopy shades, lounging porches and soft drink parlors, it appears to be the strongest magnet. Tennis came next as a requisite. Cards, dancing and facilities for dinner parties were mentioned.

(6) The initiation fee for non-golfing memberships runs all the way from \$100 to \$500. The dues from \$3.00 per month to \$60 per year. The average initiation fee appears to be about \$200, with dues of \$50.

(7) The membership is usually non-equity, non-voting,—simply a privilege membership convertible into a regular with credit for its original cost. It may be transferable at 25% of the original cost, or not as desired, and depending on the amount charged for same.

Take Your Choice

The conclusion from this comparison of golf clubs attempting social activities and country clubs equipped for a diversity of sports is obvious:

If you want low priced golf, limit your facilities to the requisites of the game.

If you want social activities,—brass buttons on the doorman, "ritz," cards, dancing and other forms of entertainment, open your club to those who enjoy those diversions, and let them contribute their share to maintenance with golf privileges limited to week days or eliminated entirely.

You cannot furnish the forms of entertainment that go with country clubs to the small group who can play golf on peak days, without making the game expensive.

Auxiliary memberships constitute a most fertile field from which to recruit regular golfing members, much better than "season privileges" or "term memberships" which not only tend to lower club standing, but destroy the market for regular memberships.

Golf club members are supposed to be prejudiced against large memberships. They are not. Like everybody else, they like to go where there are activities—where the crowd goes. Large memberships are not objected to in city clubs, and in golf clubs only when congestion occurs on the course.

There are comparatively few places of attraction in the country designed and maintained for other than golfers; most places are simply roadhouses.

Regarding the salability of social memberships one point is usually overlooked: Not every person or family that is fond of

the country and appreciates a place other than the roadhouse or public resort for an automobile ride or dinner in the country—not all these people are interested in golf. If they were, the resorts and country dining places would go out of business. The cost of golf naturally limits its membership to those who join essentially for the game—little else is of special interest to the golfer.

A club member can probably nominate ten prospects for such a membership easier than he can think of one prospect who can be sold a golf playing membership. In other words, 500 memberships of this sort can be sold for a given amount—say, to net the club \$150 or \$200 easier than 50 can be sold for double that amount for regular golf playing memberships, entailing heavy dues, obligations for funded debt, and the possibility of being assessed.

What can be more sound economically than to increase golfing activities on days when your course is comparatively idle? What can be sounder than to increase your income in the dining room and from house operations, if it can be done without encroaching on the golfer? What action would be as popular with present members as to distribute the annual expense of non-golfing activities among double the number of people and thus reduce the cost of golf for equity members?

American Golf Guide Returns to Reference Shelf

American Annual Golf Guide. 1930-1931 edition. Pub. by Golf Guide Co., Inc., 134 Centre St., New York City. 528 pp., illustr. \$3.00.

LAST PUBLISHED in mid-1929, the American Annual Golf Guide once more takes its place among the valuable reference volumes of the game. As in previous years, this fourteenth edition devotes the greater portion of its pages to a directory of United States and Canadian golf clubs, with names of officials, distance from town, length of course, green fees and similar information. According to the publishers, these listings are as accurate as intensive effort can make them.

In addition to the directory of clubs, the Guide contains full statistical data on all important golf tournaments, both national and sectional, a list of golf associations of the U. S. and Canada, brief biographies of prominent golf champions of the present and past. A section is devoted to a full reprint of the official rules of golf.