

"Back to the Player" Is Keynote of PGA Education

By ALEX PIRIE

FAVORABLE comment on the educational plan of the PGA as one of its phases is being tested in the New York and New Jersey metropolitan districts shows that this plan, inaugurated by President Charles Hall, is worthy of energetic development.

It seems to me that the phase of the educational program now active is a sound one, not that I entertain glowing notions as to the ultimate success of the "back to the bench" movement but because superior knowledge of proper design and construction of clubs is an essential in fitting the right clubs to the players. I have my doubts that there are as many as 200 competent bench clubmakers in the country. We cannot expect much in the revival and extension of bench clubmaking artistry from our young men who now are designated assistants instead of apprentices at this time, when the far greater part of clubs are factory-made and this situation according to all judicial evidence promises to continue; possibly to extend.

Back to Player—Not Bench

Nevertheless, a pro lacking a thorough command of club design and making is not competent to serve his members correctly. What valuable knowledge is being acquired by some of the younger eastern pros as a result of the PGA travelling instructor's efforts is, to my way of thinking, better classed as an important part of a "back to the player" campaign than as a basic detail of a "back to the bench" enterprise.

This expression is merely my personal opinion. Others may differ. But differences of opinion make horse races and matrimony; both of which are for "the improvement of the breed," and that's about the purpose of the PGA.

We made some great clubs on the bench in the old days. Considering the improvement in the ball and comparing the scores now and then we might not be able to understand fully why the bench business vanished. Part of the disappearance prob-

ably is for the same reason that nails are now made by machine instead of by hand—quicker production and greater uniformity. Another reason undoubtedly is that while we were maintaining our mastery of club making we were treating our strategic selling position too casually.

But after all, the average pro earning now is considerably higher than it was in the bench-made club days, so progress has been kind to us.

Pro Has Service to Sell

Studied promotion of a "back to the player" movement will be extremely timely. It will mean that we give more attention than ever before to the matter of instruction. It calls for shop operation on a strictly service station basis and that is the only right way for any of us to run a shop.

The playing public's idea of shop profits is something that pros wish were true, for we all know that with the modest guarantees given to most pros and the heavy expenses of shop operation, salaries, insurance, free repairs, replacements and other items, our margin narrows down to the vanishing point.

Nevertheless, the pro's shop and lesson tee are his business headquarters and if we are in the slightest manner deficient in maintaining our department at the highest standard we are taking costly risks in these times.

Shop Is Key Spot

Regardless of what objections might be voiced against pro emphasis of the shop we must educate ourselves to see that our shops are conducted on the highest plane of merchandising because the shop is where we merchandise the most important thing we have to sell—our own services. Even the selling of our lessons is done in the shop most often. We all know that despite the general public's error in wildly over-estimating our shop profits, it is from the shop that a good part of our living income must be secured. Consequently there

must be an important place for merchandising education in any of the PGA educational plans.

There is another timely angle to this matter of shop education. Every phase of retailing, in its present form, is in a battle for survival. From an authoritative source I learn that retailing generally in this country is off from 50% to 60% from 1930. As near as can be estimated from several manufacturers and sectional PGA officials, pro-shop cash volume of sales at the most is not 30% under 1930 figure, notwithstanding drastic price reductions. This means one or both of two things: (a) our strategic location protects us against the bottom dropping out, or (b) we are improving as merchants and haven't the handicap of previous over-selling to keep us from doing a fair amount of business.

Now, with the other retail outlets unable to afford the continuance of departments in which there is a heavy loss and the golf goods volume other than pro shop business being divided among many fields of retailing, the stage is all set for us to make most emphatic our commanding position in golf goods retailing.

By realizing this opportunity and educating ourselves to take advantage of it, the pros will come out of the present general slump in better position than they ever were before.

In view of the above outlined conditions it seems plain to me that it is strictly up to us to prepare ourselves for directing and commanding whatever developments may take place.

What About Greenkeeping?

To me, it appears further evident that our educational plans should seize upon merchandising rather than greenkeeping as its imminent objective. Not that I don't think a pro should know greenkeeping. I do. And I happen to know what a tedious, complex and exacting matter greenkeeping is for I have been at it for years and like some of my able and prominent pro-greenkeeping friends, among them Alex Cunningham, Jack Mackie, Elmer Biggs, George Knox and Willie Ogg, for example, I consider greenkeeping with humility. But the idea that greenkeepers can be developed in a few short years is one that can lead the pros into grief. We individually can stand all greenkeeping knowledge we can get from the already established organizations for greenkeeping instruction, but as a definite factor of the

PGA educational plan I believe we can properly dismiss greenkeeping.

What many pros need in the way of greenkeeping knowledge is information that will help them to co-operate effectively with the greenkeepers at their clubs and utilize to the utmost the present scheme of club operation. Some of us may be inclined to think that the grass on the greenkeeping side of the fence is greener but viewed in the light of greenkeepers' average salaries and the serious responsibility they must personally accept for what may truly be acts of providence, the greenkeepers' lot is not one to be envied.

I certainly don't mean to infer that any pro should neglect his study of greenkeeping. Under prevailing financial conditions at some clubs a pro-greenkeeper position is imperative. But if a club can afford both pro and a competent greenkeeper there is every reason for it to maintain these positions unless it is fortunate enough to have a thoroughly experienced pro-greenkeeper on its staff. The number of these men is not many.

Our main educational job is to sell ourselves and our services on a basis of greater mutual profit to our clubs. Logically then the PGA educational plan is one that helps us all make the most of our chances as they present themselves right now.

Each section of the PGA might well be giving careful thought to its local educational problems and give all possible co-operation and impetus to the national PGA educational plan as launched by President Hall.

Pro-Shop Robber on Prowl in Michigan

FRANK REFNER, pro at Hillsdale (Mich.) C. C. and one of a number of recent victims of Michigan pro-shop robberies, acquaints GOLFDOM with details of the theft at his shop. The robber knicked Frank for about \$509 worth of merchandise. He wants to warn other pros and asks their aid in apprehending a suspect. This suspect was about 5 ft. 5 in. in height; weight approximately 125 lbs. He came into Frank's shop and made a careful survey and although the theft was of high grade merchandise, Refner said when he got the suspect to register for a round and watched him tee off, it was obvious the man was the rawest of dubs.