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Mid-Season Survey Shows Clubs Weathering Storm Nicely

By HERB GRAFFIS

M ID-SEASON check-up of the golf clubs brings to light cheering news.

Private clubs have suffered membership losses that probably will run as high as 20%, but that figure isn't as serious as it appears offhand, since many of the members who dropped out were rather inactive in previous years. Establishment of "associate" memberships or other classes permitting play on payment of green-fees has made up for some of the gap in the membership.

Public courses are getting a lot of play at low rates because of unemployment, so the toughest spot in the business is the daily-fee courses that are hit on one side by the low price competition of public courses and on the other side by the private clubs dropping the bars on trade tournaments and permitting individual play for green-fees and a small annual payment. However, with the exception of spots like Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland where there has been some over-building of fee courses, the pay-play situation is in better shape than is most business these days.

Women Brighten Outlook

Women's golf continues to be a bright spot in the picture. At the majority of metropolitan district clubs, women's play this year is greater than ever before. Free class lessons given by the pros and re-

duced luncheon prices have been important factors in increasing this play. Signs of the women's heavy play are plain on the tees. With reduced maintenance budgets the greenkeepers can't keep right after tee repairs as they did a couple of years ago. Women's play in the mornings also prevents tee repair work. Men's merciless hacking at the tees is bad enough but when the women get through their assaults, the tees are sadly stripped.

No More Show-Off

Reports from representative clubs show that by eliminating the exhibitionism and extravagances that were O. K. in the old days when precious metals jingled in every pocket, the golf clubs have been able to put themselves in sounder shape than ever before. Golf clubs today are for golf. Despite tough times, retirement of indebtedness is proceeding satisfactorily and sinking funds, long unpardonably absent in the financial operations of many clubs, are being established.

There will be extremely few assessments this year. Typical of the cases in which assessments are being avoided is that of the Glen Brook C. C., Stroudsburg, Pa. Membership is down about 20% and the folks who are active are watching their expenditures, since the club's income is off one-third, part of which is due to lower food prices and green-fees. Expenses have

been reduced one-third and paring has been done in details that are not strictly golf. Consequently the club will get through the year financially right side up. This one-third cut in expenses seems to be a fairly general figure. At Woodland in the Boston district, play is up to normal due to reduction of club operating expenses by a third and broadening of the guest privileges. Golf at bargain prices is the cry in the Boston district, according to Woodland's president, Natt W. Emerson. The clubs' panicky tendencies at the start of the season probably had as much to do with the reduction as did the clamor of the players.

It all means a cut in the cost of golf, which is a good thing for the game so long as the cuts do not throw the clubs back to the cow-pasture era of maintenance. Temporarily waiting lists have vanished, but with the cost of golf now at depression prices, a new crop of golfers is being raised for use of the existing golfing facilities.

Course Labor Savings Large

Further study of labor handling in course maintenance has resulted in some astounding economies in course operation. GOLF-DOM has repeatedly pointed out that the labor item afforded biggest opportunities for saving, but until drastic cuts became imperative, many greenkeepers and chairmen did not realize what was possible in more efficient utilization of labor. John MacGregor, superintendent of Chicago G. C., summarizes the situation by saying:

"When budget slashes got so strong it was a case of the greenkeeper absolutely cutting down or losing his own job, the greenkeeper had not only a strong incentive but full responsibility for savings. Probably some mistakes have been made in trying to effect false economies, but it is a certainty that all of us are handling our labor better than ever before and getting better work from our men. The main danger from now on is not letting the greenkeeper use these recent teachings of experience in making up his 1933 budget. The cutting is in danger of being overdone as some courses already show."

At the Audubon C. C., Louisville, the club shows an approximate profit of \$3,000 for the first six months of 1932 operation. The grounds maintenance expenses are \$3,000 under the same period last year. August with its usual history of serious brown-patch attacks and insect pests will be a testing month at most courses for a

couple of bad weeks can eat away a goodly part of the budget and leave the course with injury that may take months to remedy. Labor economies are credited with being the major item in the Audubon reduction of expense.

Season Memberships Help

At Chagrin Valley C. C. (Cleveland district) the 1932 budget was made on a basis of income 30 to 40% below 1931. The Chagrin Valley officials report they have reduced departmental expenses by amounts varying from 25 to 50%, with the smallest reduction being in course maintenance. Income this season is larger than estimated. Season playing privileges selling for \$50 a year less than the cost of regular membership make up for the drop in regular membership. Regular members, instead of demurring, took to the temporary plan gracefully. The club also allows inactive members to go on an "inactive list" for a year by paying \$50. This relieves the member from the necessity of paying dues. Green privileges are extended on payment of green-fees. This has worked out so this class of member has paid into the club treasury about as much as they would when maintaining their \$150 annual dues of regular membership.

Collections Being Watched

Collections at Chagrin Valley and most other private clubs are in excellent shape. The club probably will finish 1932 in the black more than \$3,000. It looks as though most of those unable to stand the expense of private club membership now have dropped out.

Some of the clubs have gone on a cash basis instead of the usual monthly bill procedure. At one of the blue-chip clubs in the East where the members were hit hard by the market and general business depression, accounts are billed on a weekly basis. Almost complete elimination of posting has been the result.

Some of the smart old clubs that never went in for circus stuff right now are in better shape than most businesses. Columbus (O.) C. C. continues to operate at a profit for the simple reason that its officials long have been in the habit of making income and outgo jibe. Prices were reduced and operating costs cut right along with drop in the membership instead of waiting until a year's red had to be made up.

Mission Hills C. C. at Kansas City, Mo., is another one of the old reliables that

paid as it went along. The club has a big directorate—fifteen—and an official personnel experienced in golf club affairs. The directors meet as often as 21 times a year. It is 18 years old and close-in. A sinking fund, formerly \$2.00 per month per member, is now raised to \$4.00. In July, 1931, the club had all its property, including a swimming pool, paid for, no bank obligations, and kept on discounting its bills. It bought ground for a new clubhouse at the end of 1931 and during the past 6 months has retired \$10,000 of that ground's purchase price.

Because Mission Hills is in sound physical and financial shape, the loss of members by removal, death and depression is fairly well balanced by new members who want to join a strong club.

Olympia Fields C. C. (Chicago district) has been doing a husky job of retiring its obligations this year, and a recent circular letter sent out by President William Wise detailing this reduction of indebtedness shows vividly how smart operation and close watch of expenses can put clubs in good shape without depreciating the plant. Payroll reductions at this mammoth club have amounted to better than 30 per cent this season as compared with last.

One item standing out in reports from clubs in various parts is that many records for golf play and entertainment attendance have been broken this year. Livelier programs at the clubs and bargains in entertainment have brought folks to the clubs, probably at the expense of road-houses. Some of the gold coast clubs report unusually heavy play because members who formerly left town on vacations are staying home this summer.

Generally epitomizing the situation, it is plain that the fears of the bottom dropping out of golf this year, which were strong in some quarters this spring, have not been warranted. Estimates from private, daily-fee and public courses indicate that play is off possibly less than 10% from 1931, but a lot more people are using the ball washers at the first tee than ever did before. At that, pro shop sales of balls and clubs are better than the average retailing picture. A drop of 25 per cent under last year's total dollar volume of pro shop business looks to be a good guess after talking to manufacturers and pros. This isn't at all bad when the sharp reduction in retail prices of golf goods is considered.

Two things stand out in the present situation, both of which GOLFDOM has been pounding for a couple of years. One is that special rates and special attention given to development of women's play is creating big interest and business in the golf field. The other thing is that the clubs with accounting systems that really tell the score promptly and fully have weathered the storm in grand condition.

New Tree Culture Manual is Valuable to Greensmen

"Insects and Diseases of Ornamental Trees and Shrubs." By E. P. Felt & W. H. Rankin. 507 pages, profusely illustrated. Rural Science Series, The MacMillan Co., New York City. \$5.00.

IN VIEW OF THE increased emphasis being placed today upon preservation of golf course trees by golf club members, the latest addition to the MacMillan Co.'s "Rural Science Series," entitled *Insects and Diseases of Ornamental Trees and Shrubs*, by Ephriam Porter Felt, director and chief entomologist of the Bartlett Tree Research laboratories, and W. Howard Rankin, research associate in plant pathology at N. Y. State agricultural experiment station, is a volume which should be on hand for study and reference by green-chairman and greenkeeper of every golf club.

The book is divided in two parts, the first section dealing in a general way with injuries due to insects and fungi and the latest accepted means of eradicating damage, with particular emphasis on the advantages of annual preventive measures in forestalling the depredations almost sure to occur if trees are neglected.

In the second half of the book, trees and shrubs are alphabetically arranged, with detailed descriptions of the particular diseases to which each tree or shrub is subject and complete directions for identifying the source of the trouble and remedying it. Over 250 photographs and diagrams are included.

Golf clubs of the U. S. spend thousands of dollars annually protecting the trees which beautify and improve their properties. A volume as authoritative, up-to-date and useful as this belongs in the club library where it is quickly available for reference.