Pro Business Men Fed-Up on Chronic Whining of Cripples

As Told by

A PRO NAMED "EDDIE"

to Herb Graffis

I SEE THAT GOLFDOM's 1931 season survey shows 27% of the U. S. golf courses are daily fee or public. That should be the most significant news the pros have read in many a year.

Unfortunately, to a lot of the fellows it just means 27% of the courses are not private. Those fellows will go on complaining about department store competition, the sad way they are being pushed around by manufacturers instead of being teacher's pets, and squealing about the members buying wholesale and other raw deals they are getting from the clubs.

I leave it up to you whether it's cause or effect—this bellyaching business of the pros who have the most trouble. My own opinion, after 25 years in pro golf, is that the fellows who attend to their own knitting instead of depending on outside factors for help are birds who are sitting pretty. Too often squawks are alibis for errors of omission and commission by the pro who is crying. Let the wolves howl at me for making this statement. The pros who are real successes will back up every word I say.

Pro's Lot Not All Tears

Pro golf is not a bad business by a long way. Compare the operating expenses, investment and profits of a pro shop run by a pro who studies his business and who is on the job, with the same items in other small retailing businesses. Let these boys who are crying look over the statistics on business failures in 1931 that Bradstreet's compiled. More failures than in any other year since Bradstreet began getting up these figures! Still the total of 26,381 was only 1.25% of the companies in business. The retail clothing stores lead with 3,769 failures. And don't tell me pants and coats aren't more necessary than golf clubs and balls. Even the banks had 1,556 "suspensions," as bank failures are tactfully tagged.

Think about those figures for a few minutes and you will appreciate that the pros got by quite nicely, everything considered. The smart fellows in the pro business will continue making money because they realize what they are up against as merchants and are depending on their *own* business ability to earn a profit. No one manufacturer these days could give the pro a break that would assure a big, steady profit and a command of the market even if the manufacturer wanted to.

What some of the boys don't seem to appreciate is that the pro business these days is up against a changed set of conditions. The pro not only has to be a salesman of golf instruction and equipment, but more than ever before a salesman of golf. Private clubs are competing strenuously for members. The pro who can help his club get members by giving his club the reputation of having the best pro department service and by showing the membership prospects evidence of how a pro department is run for more pleasure to the members is the pro who is "in" at this time. That is strictly up to the pro and he can't complain about any manufacturer or member condition if the pro department falls down in this respect.

Where Pro Means $$$$

The pro has the greater part of the cure for his present complaints right in himself. A lot of teamwork is needed, of course, but the individual who is abusing this fellow and that condition had better go into a huddle with himself and see if some of the original fault isn't with himself. Take the fee course and public course situation as revealed by that 27% figure. That percentage means 1,243 fee and public courses in the country. And any pro who knows how things stand at these courses will admit readily that there aren't 100 first class already-developed pro jobs at all of these courses!

That's positively painful because of all the places where a smart pro, given latitude to work out his ideas, could make money for himself and his employers, the fee courses are the foremost. The same thing holds good at the public courses because the value the public receives from this play facility depends a great deal on how the pro service functions at the plant.

Take the average private 18-hole club. It has about 300 active men and women players who constitute the pro market. At the usual fee or public course in any good-sized district there are at least 1,000 fairly habitual players in the course of a season. What a vastly increased market a pro has there as compared with the field before the private club pro!

The fee course pro is master of his own destiny if he works at bringing players to the course, either as individuals or in trade or society tournaments. The more players he brings in, the more money he makes for the owners of the course and the more money he makes for himself.

Sell Selves to Owners

It is perfectly true today that the majority of fee course owners don't realize how getting a good pro on a mutually profitable basis means more net cash to the owner at the end of the year. It also is true that many municipalities don't pick fully qualified men but try and operate with the man who will work for the least money. Correcting that situation is a propaganda job for the farsighted individual pros, and the national and sectional PGA organization. What has to be done is to show these fee and public course officials that there are plenty of good business men in pro ranks—men whose employment at a good price will be a bargain. That work has to start by the pros talking about themselves being business men, capable to handle their problems like other retailers handle problems without throwback to methods and policies that are inferior and antiquated in 1932.

When pros enter into any club buying deal that insists on cash in advance from PGA members it looks to me like there is lack of consideration given to the building up of pro reputation for business, at least with respect to credit. The inference from such a deal is directly contrary to the facts of PGA members' credit being excellent as small retailers go. However, those who might be considering hiring a good pro for a job with a good guarantee and opportunity won't go prying much further into the credit picture with the hasty, but erroneous conclusion that was set before them by the ill-starred assembly deal.

That's one of the incidents that we might have been able to pass over in former years but now every little movement of the pros and their organization has a meaning all its own.

The unemployment situation again emphasizes the importance of pros' individual and collective action. Think about there being 5,691 golf clubs in the U. S. and only 3,079 pros in club jobs, with probably 400 pro-greenkeepers added! You know, too, how many municipal and fee courses are going without pros, and how a good pro at any of these places would make money for all concerned.

I mention that employment angle to show what a big field the pros have before them as a major detail in solving the pros' problems. Whose fault is it that these jobs are open? It's our own. It's something that we as pros can't blame on anyone except ourselves because we need to do more of a job of selling ourselves as a group.

It looks to me like every fellow who keeps constantly whining about the pros getting a raw deal is doing the pro cause far more harm than he can conceive. There are evils in the golf business adversely affecting us that are not our fault. We can attend to them in due time but in the meanwhile let's see that the fellows get a different angle on the picture now and begin their job of putting the golf business on a perfectly happy and profitable basis by starting at the same place charity begins —at home. We've got a great story to tell for ourselves but I'm saying to a lot of the boys they are making people unwilling to listen to us on any subject because so many of our number keep eternally whining for help instead of thinking out and working out their own salvation.

Book Wanted

R. OTTO PROBST, treas., Erskine Park G. C., 334 N. Hill st., South Bend, Ind., wants copy of Colt and Alison's *Golf Course Architecture.* Will pay $5 for copy, which is premium over published price. Write him before sending copy.

SOME WELL constructed fee courses tried to boost trade by 25c green fees during latter part of 1931, but the cut was a decided flop as a business getter. Maintenance suffered to extent that future repair cost will be heavy.