

Cleveland Fee Course Owners Promote Private Club Spirit

By KERLIN SHORT

TEAMWORK among fee-course operators located in the same territory is profitable for all concerned. Pay-play club members of the Cleveland District G. A. are among the latest to begin a co-operative drive to develop and stimulate play.

Cleveland, like all large cities, has had its full share of depression and golf as a business is weathering the storm. In some instances, private clubs were forced to throw up the sponge by accepting fee play to help defray expenses, while others became pay-play propositions entirely. But, depression or not, fee-courses in this district with their more appealing rates opened the 1932 season to splendid crowds. Evidence is undeniable that today price speaks with a loud voice, in sport as in anything else. Too often, unfortunately, the golfer's desires said "yes," but his pocketbook said "no." With the new lowered rates, fee-courses in the Cleveland territory are meeting the player half way.

The Willowick C. C., managed by the well-known Bill Livie, is a good example of progressive fee-course operation. Willowick, formerly one of the most exclusive private clubs in Ohio, is now entirely on a fee basis. Livie, now in control, is responsible for numerous innovations. He is employing the so-called Artisan Club plan, which is another word for employees' play. Organizations from offices, factories, lodges and public institutions are given club rates as groups under this scheme.

Livie advertises his course as having "all private club privileges at public course cost." Willowick does have facilities not ordinarily available at the average fee layout. The plant includes a spacious dining room and grill, a dance floor, a children's playground as well as a bathing beach and a baseball diamond. Livie's scheme is to bring groups of players to the course as well as individuals. He gives special rates of all varieties. If, for instance, a golfer has Monday of each week off from work, he can get a season rate for that day throughout the season. By this plan, Livie hopes to encourage during-the-week play,

which is necessary for profitable operation of such a course.

Group for Lessons by Skill

Group lessons are being given at Willowick, too, and every effort is being made to gain new players to the game. The groups are classed according to skill so each recruit may receive the maximum benefit.

The other fee-course members of the Cleveland District G. A. have joined with Livie's club in planning inter-club matches for this season. A public links league has formed, with teams from the various courses competing against each other. In this way the Cleveland operators are successfully arousing that home club spirit in the player, also loyalty for his particular course.

Usually, the fee-course does not possess as elaborate a plant as the private layout, and often the "club" idea is sadly neglected. The public links player is not much different from his more prosperous brother, the private club member. He enjoys that certain fraternal feeling which comes whenever a group of men get together, and the fee-course owner must not disregard this fact. With organized groups, such as the Cleveland operators are forming, there is a more friendly attitude noticeable.

Build Atmosphere

Without some sort of club atmosphere in the fee-course scheme players tend to stray to other pastures. Group and team play will do a great deal to keep a player loyal to his course, an important step in successful operation. The Cleveland fee-course managers have elaborate plans formed for this season to keep their players interested. Competition between courses, they feel, is a dependable method to develop loyalty.

As the average-fee-course player is usually confined to his job during the first 5 days of the week, or, at least, has very definite working hours, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays receive the crowds. The problem of the operator has been to dis-



Techny Fields Fee Course (Chicago district) prompts play with free class for New Trier high school students

tribute the play more evenly through the week. At present there are a large number of unemployed who will spend their days on the golf course if the cost is not too high. When during-the-week play is reduced in price so that golfing is not considered a luxury, more of this class will golf. Willowick's Bill Livie holds to this theory. Just like any other new plan, the proof is in the trying. The books will tell the tale at the end of the season.

Big Unworked Field

There is no denying, however, that there still remains a very fertile field open to the fee-course operator, and that is winning new players to the game. Golf is only recently a "workingman's" sport. Thousands still believe that golf is too expensive, or too "nice" for their taste. Last year I introduced several strangers to the game. They had never had clubs in their hands before and frankly confessed they held a secret ridicule for anything affiliated with golf. Perhaps the years of class distinction and social rating had soured them against their more wealthy friends who could afford a private club. But, at least, they had an unwarranted prejudice against the game, only because they believed that it was nothing but "hitting a little white ball and then looking for it." A day on the course, with plenty of time and a few helpful companions, changed their attitudes immediately. Two weeks of playing transformed them into ardent fans. Now their wives are blaming me!

This just serves as an example of what must be done. Give a man an opportunity to test out the game. Let him take a few lessons, in a group if possible, and send him out on the course with a congenial partner. The first taste should be sweet and it will be if the new recruit is given a helping hand. And by making a golfer

out of an awkward skeptic, the fee-course manager has sown more seed to increase the profit harvest, as well as gaining another loyal booster for his plant.

With group instruction, the pro can keep up his earnings yet lower the cost to the pupil. At Willowick, for instance, Bill Livie and his brother George are organizing classes wherever and whenever possible. They realize that often the average fee-course player cannot afford expensive instruction. High school groups, for example, are instructed collectively, as are women. The Livie brothers are anxious to make golfers out of duffers, as they are well aware that by understanding the fundamentals of the game, the player gets more enjoyment for his money and will make golfing a habit.

Another idea being studied is that of giving low-cost, or free, instruction to the beginner with the sale of a season membership. Why couldn't a half-dozen or more lessons be donated with each fee-course membership? Who would lose by it? If a beginner realized that he would be taught the proper methods of play, wouldn't he be more easily sold on the idea of plunking down \$60 or \$70?

To encourage bringing new players to the course, a premium of some kind could be offered to the old member for each recruit he garnered. Possibly, one of your fee-course regular players knows of a friend who would like to start in golf for the first time. With an incentive he would go out of his way to bring in that man or woman. The fee-course owner could afford to give cash discounts on play for every new player brought to his tee to whom a membership is sold. Just as a thought, for a short period advertise free play to every player who brings a new player along with him. Such a plan could be easily worked out to everyone's satisfaction.