Ruinous Cut-Price Panic of Daily-Fee Golf to be studied

DAILY-FEE course business is sick and suffering with an acute attack of fiscal anemia which the patient itself is having difficulty in diagnosing. In the absence of correct diagnosis and prompt, effective treatment it is certain that the golf season of 1933 will open minus the presence of some of today's operators of fee-courses.

What hope there is for these doomed operators depends entirely on the attitude of the receivers or other heirs to the properties now on the ragged edge. And there's not much hope there for, even with properties bought in for 30 cents on the dollar, the new owners are not going to take a chance on future operation by fellows who have registered one flop on the job.

But the golf business seems to have been blessed by the benevolent attention of a gracious providence which up to this time always has given the unfortunates within its fairly prosperous ranks "one more chance." This happy and promising aspect of the present plight appears in Chicago, the most intensely developed daily-fee course territory in the golfing world.

The Chicago daily-fee owners include some men who have done a pretty fair job of keeping afloat during these troubled times. They have bucked murderous competition of 23 public courses and of private courses that are operating either outright or practically on a daily-fee basis. But this competition hasn't been the toughest spot, or the basic reason for the reddish tinge of the Chicago fee-course owners' ledgers. The worst competition is between the fee-course owners themselves; so the fellows who have substantial investments and an excellent chance of eventual good profit in normal times now are planning to investigate and point out the competitive errors that have played hell with the whole fee-course situation.

Whether any of these owners like it or not, they now are in the spot where they must become their brothers' keepers. The violent ill of the Chicago district fee-course business today is blind, panic-stricken price cutting. That same sickness is raging as an epidemic in many of the other districts. The pestilence started in an easy way. Some readjustment of prices might have been necessary because of the general downward trend of prices. But even this cut was questionable as the accounting methods of many of the fee courses are so haphazard the owners don't know where they stand and operate in the dark until the sheriff steps in and shows them the light—and the air.

Most people think they can run a fee-course better than the fellow who is doing it. They get in and find themselves over their heads in a perplexing business. Take a representative cross section of fee-course owners in the Chicago district, for instance, and you have wide variation in professional and business training that doesn't especially qualify men for fee-course operation in addition to their other duties. Among the businesses represented in ownership roster of Chicago district fee-courses are fruit, dentistry, farming, railroad supplies, lumber, real estate, pro golf, surgeon, physician, automobiles, advertising, hotel, ice-cream, coal and ice, contracting, printing, building supplies, binding, financial promotion, banking, clothing and furniture.

Apparently the fee-course business can qualify as did the movies during the Potash and Perlmutter days when Abe said to Mawruss, "Every man has two businesses, his own and moving pictures."

Remote control operation has exposed these courses to the public really taking over the management. Some one comes around to a course with the statement that the price at so-and-so is cut. Without stopping to investigate, the operator at the course where the statement is made, cuts the price and the vicious circle is started.

Now the fee-course operators are at the point where they are planning to regulate their business instead of letting it slide hopelessly into the red because of panic-stricken reaction to golf shoppers.

Just what form this regulation will take depends on the response to a questionnaire that soon will be sent out among owners in the Chicago district. This questionnaire will be sent by GOLFDOM to all fee-course owners.

There have been frequent inquiries made of GOLFDOM regarding the possibility of sharply marking the destructive influences in fee-course operation. What can be done in eliminating these influences by acquainting the owners of the costly result of letting these destructive factors continue to run wild?

It may be just another "noble experiment," but it is reasonable to assume that there will be a general and frank response to this questionnaire for the simple reason that it's a vital and timely effort to get a legitimate and promising business on a solid basis.

Early reaction to the investigation has been favorable. What the substantial fee-course owners point out is that any suggestion for regulation of the business must be something that has teeth in it, otherwise the fee-course business is in danger of being like the fabled snake that chawed away on its own tail until it ate itself.