

Lytton (store head) Writes to "Pro-Shop Business Is Too

By JACK

A FEW YEARS AGO, The Hub, one of the biggest stores for men in the world, entered into arrangements with golf clubs in the Chicago district, whereby The Hub was to take over the pro-shop concessions and pay the club a commission on sales, generally around 10% of the gross.

This was a harpoon right into the hearts of the pros and at the time GOLFDOM handled the matter in several yarns forecasting that the Hub-club arrangement would be a disappointment to all concerned. It later turned out to be just that—again proving what child wonders we are.

The Hub formerly was run by a grand old guy named Henry Lytton and one of his stalwart sons, George. They sold out when the happy days of consolidations were on in this fair land. Lately they took back the old plant and have been stirring things up to the extent that the GOLFDOM gang is seriously considering buying its spring trousseau at the Chez Lytton.

Well, the other day, Papa Gates of the PGA got a letter from George Lytton that ought to bring some sunshine into pro hearts and remind them that if they play smart and keep on the job they are the king pins of golf merchandising. George wrote Albert:

I am very glad to inform you that The Hub is entirely out of the golf shop business.

At the time my father and I bought back The Hub last November, we decided that we would eliminate this phase of our business immediately. The factors that motivated our entrance in this field several years ago are unimportant now. The thing that you are interested in is the fact that we are out of the private clubs for all time.

We are anxious for the friendship of the professionals, of course, and we are making every attempt to promote golf as a sport in the Chicago district.

May I compliment you on the fine work

the P. G. A. is accomplishing and assure you of our friendship and cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) GEORGE LYTTON.

During the time The Hub was operating pro-shops its golf business steadily dwindled. The best showing that was made on the club contracts was at Medinah where Tommy Armour, on his new contract, has the pro shop. At Medinah the sales of apparel under Hub operation were astounding, but the strictly golf business was a decided flop.

George and his daddy, two of the smartest merchandisers in this country, were unable to make pro-shops operate at a profit—so you get a hunch that pro-shop operation is no cinch—maybe you'll even get the idea that it takes one smart hombre as a pro business man to get much more than an even break running a pro-shop. Clubs that are operating their own shops will wake up eventually, but their awakening is held off for some time because of the trick bookkeeping methods so common at golf clubs.

The Lyttons figure on getting back into the golf business on their former strong basis by developing the daily-fee and public course business. For some reason, the operators of these public layouts seem to wince at the idea of hiring a pro on a basis that will attract a live, good man and permit him to make any money. The Hub will make plenty out of this trade and everyone will be happy, because the fee-course owners will not know they can get some pros who are real business getters and workers who can sell some clubs and balls and get some players if they have a chance to make some dough.

A lot of people in the golf business would be smart to follow the Lytton tip-off.

Pros who have been wondering what the so-and-so hell the PGA has been doing, will be impressed to learn that the Lytton decision to get out of the pro-shop business was the direct result of Papa Gates' work.

Gates (pro's front-man) to Say Tough for Us — We're Thru"

EULTON, JR.

The Hub is running a golf show early in April. Press agents for the show are a couple of bright space-chiseling kids who could steal a hot stove from a publishing office and then break a story in the paper featuring the name of the manufacturer of the stolen stove. These boys dropped into the GOLFDOM office asking about stunts on which stories could be hung. We tipped them off that the Ryder cup would make a great window display, but if they asked Gates for the trophy he would burn them plenty because of the Hub dealing itself a hand out of bounds in the pro business. And Gates did, frequent and tough. After Papa Gates and George Lytton had talked it over, the Hub signed off on the private club pro business, thus saving itself some jack and giving the clubs a chance to be private clubs, instead of substations for the Hub. The move also opened the gates for some good, busy pros to make a precarious profit from pro-shop operation.

The next move is up to the pros. Some of the brainy laddies will make the most of it. Others will speed their ways out and go back to carrying the hod. Personally, we suggest hod-carrying for the birds who come into the office and provoke a dialogue about like this:

Pro—Get me a job, will ya, Pal?

Us—O. K. That makes 39 today. Whatcha leave the last spot for? Canned or what?

Pro—Naw; not canned. The tight sich-and-siches wouldn't give me the old contract and this year all they'll give me out of the spot is just what I can make.

Us—Well, what to hell do you think we make out of this racket outside of just what we can make. Let some guy give us a guarantee on getting out our book and you'll see us grab him right out of his shoes. The only exception to this "just what you can make rule" is the birds who are pro-greenkeepers or outstanding name players or instructors, who are so rare they deserve a guarantee and wouldn't be

getting it unless they were able to command it despite tough competition.

If the boys who are just ordinary mine-run pros, like we are just ordinary mine-run reporters, would realize that all they can get out of their jobs is just what they can make, the pro business would be one of the richest businesses in the world. The opportunity is there.

IN A RECENT issue of the American Mercury, "Golf Is a Poor Man's Game," by Kenneth Payson Kempton, tells in interesting style of the way that golf grew up-stage and expensive.

Kempton makes some statements that possibly make a better story than accurate record although they undoubtedly hit in some cases. He tells about the young Scot pro his club hired when it was getting snooty, making out of the golf ball concession "two or three thousand a year" and after placing in the National Open demanding and getting a salary of \$10,000.

He tells with sobs about the uncertainties and losses of clubhouse restaurant business. Relating that the members looked with scorn on any member who carried his own clubs, he adds, "The system used by most of our caddies was to steal balls whenever possible, and move to other clubs if fees were higher, bags lighter."

One point he mentions tells a good part of the story of golf's major woe: "Our overhead swelled like a tidal wave: material, repairs, insurance, taxes and betterment fees—for our venture had raised property values over half a township."

The article concluded by advocating stark simplicity with caddies only for players over 70, closing the clubhouse, dividing the members into gangs for course maintenance work to be done one evening each week, taking over pro-shop concessions and dropping all thought of membership drives. Which, of course, is just as foolish and unnecessary as the extravagances responsible for the dilemma in which Mr. Kempton's club found itself.