

Smart, Bold Thinking Put Golf Clubs in Good Shape for 1933

By HERB GRAFFIS

SUCH PRONOUNCED cuts in operating expenses were made by golf clubs in 1932 that preliminary figures gathered by GOLFDOM indicate considerably more golf clubs operated "in the black" during last season than in any other year of the past decade.

It is doubtful that further economies can be effected without seriously handicapping club operation or course maintenance. Even some of the economies in maintenance that were made last season cannot be repeated this year without lasting damage to the courses. It is a certainty that course condition during 1933 will play a more prominent part than in years past for the simple reason that it will be an ace factor in getting and holding memberships. Shortsighted economies that result in deterioration of the course in 1933 will bring a loss of members that clubs cannot stand without plenty of worry.

The extent to which fairway watering installations have been made since the close of the 1932 season shows how clubs recognize this factor of course condition as paramount in connection with the annual income. Many of the courses are planning to pay for their fairway watering systems painlessly by adding a small amount to each caddie ticket.

Play Up to Women

It already is quite plain that any membership campaign for 1933 must emphasize the club attractions for women. From all reports the growth in women's golf during 1932 was approximately 20% ahead of the number of women playing in 1931. There still is plenty of nervousness about the membership situation in the metropolitan district. As early as October, 1932, some clubs began taking in members who were acceptable to the admissions committees, without any initiation fees. Dues in many cases have been sharply reduced. But the clubs with heavy fixed charges are putting on alluring and logical sales stories with the present promise that their membership

situation will be in good shape by the start of the season.

Prohibition Repeal May Help

Club officials and managers who have attempted a forecast believe, in the majority of cases, that return of beer will help the golf club situation. They argue that much summer revenue goes to the road houses where beer is obtainable. The bulkiness of this beverage as well as the difficulty of handling its serving, ruled it out as a locker-liquor proposition at golf clubs. Many members, who considered it was no sin to drink a few steins with dinner, left the clubhouses after a hot round and dined at some roadhouse. Doing away with the added expense of the roadhouse affairs may cut the cost of golf to the average convivial member considerably, believe many managers, and be the item that retains the golf club membership on the personal budget.

In providing a basis for this guess the managers point out that during the last two years many of the wealthiest clubs had their best years. The reason was that the members, hard hit by the depression, didn't go away for the summer but stayed at home and used their golf clubs.

But, there's one grave mathematical doubt about the return of beer being a financial benefit to the country clubs. The long profit on ginger ale and mineral waters has been a mighty welcome detail in departmental operations. Whether or not there will be enough beer sold, at a much lower margin of profit, to make up for the loss in set-up income, is debatable.

Can Present Members Stick?

Club officials in all parts of the country tell GOLFDOM that the solution of the 1933 membership problem depends on just how many of the members maintained their club affiliations in 1932 on the financial reserves, these members were able to save from the storm. There is a rather optimistic view taken of this matter. Club officials maintain that with the firm policy taken by most clubs in dealing with delin-

quents during 1932, borderline cases have been eliminated. Those who have retained their memberships will be able to ride along steadily.

Golf assuredly has not escaped the harvest of overbuilding that is being reaped by other sports and general business. As near as we have been able to determine the three hardest hit sectors of the golf field are New York, Detroit and Los Angeles. Overbuilding of courses is a major factor in the misery of each of these sections. The market and the disappearance of high salaries murdered the New York situation; the slump in the automobile business put a crimp in Detroit where the screwiest of all golf nuts are located in normal times, and the painful necessity of return to hard labor by men who had practically retired with boom profits was the headline bad news to the Los Angeles district.

Sun Shines in the South

One of the interesting, bright spots in the golf field is the south. Take the case of the Belle Meade C. C., Nashville, Tenn., as one example. The 1932 season was the best in the club's history of more than 30 years. Before charging off depreciation the net profit was \$12,300; after depreciation the profit was \$3,226. Such a charge-off for depreciation indicates that the club doesn't kid itself by neglecting any proper charges.

Gross income at Belle Meade was much less than during previous years, but expenses were reduced and a swimming pool built. The swimming pool, the club figures, was a prominent detail in keeping memberships, and proved itself well worth its cost even in a tough year.

The Country Club of Virginia, at Richmond, in its annual statement, showed that every department had operated under its budget. After setting aside \$11,797 for depreciation and \$5,000 for contingencies, the club still showed a profit of \$11,710, and reduced its indebtedness \$27,000. President Stuart G. Christian in his annual message pointed out that the Country Club constitutes a great civic asset to Richmond and suggested that if more thought were given to this consideration as well as to the social and recreational advantages of the club, resignations of many members who are financially able to continue would cease. This civic asset phase of many clubs is something that calls for emphasis. It's not alone a matter of social

prestige and entertaining facilities that make many clubs civic assets these days. Thousands of dollars last fall and this spring will be the bill golf clubs will pay for welfare labor used in making alterations and improvements that may not be necessary to the clubs but are warmly welcomed as work putting money into circulation.

President Christian's message paid considerable credit to the work being done for the club by General Manager John G. Burns and the pro, Bobby Cruickshank.

At the Audubon C. C., Louisville, Ky., a remarkable showing was made for the year. D. J. Gleeson, president, T. J. Fullenlove, green-chairman, Henry Weber, manager, and their associates finished the year for the club \$5,249 in the black, despite a \$7,000 smaller income than in 1931. Membership loss was only 5 more than in 1931. Prospects for new members promise that the 1933 membership will be equal to that of 1931. A \$125 initiation price has been put on memberships for a limited time. Dues do not start until April 1.

Principal item of expense reduction at Audubon was in labor saving on course maintenance. The greens department organized, directed and supervised its labor in a way that made one of the most astounding cuts of the year, in maintenance expense. President Gleeson says that the greens and fairways were in excellent shape.

Probably the hardest hit group of first-class clubs were the Jewish clubs because of the expensive character of their plants and operations. However, among these clubs, occur two of the best examples of successful revision of practice that the harsh year of 1932 revealed. Bryn Mawr in the Chicago district and Fenimore in the New York district were national standouts as clubs that altered their financial operations according to the 1932 dictates. Fenimore reduced clubhouse prices and shot up house volume sufficient to make a fine showing. The club also issued weekly house bills and practically eliminated collection delays. By establishing a class of 1932 special members who were subjected to the usual strict survey of the admissions committee the club offset the resignations. The 1932 special members only paid the year's dues. As is usual when a club takes in new members, the newcomers patronize the club briskly, and Fenimore's golf play for 1932 was above normal.