



From the porches of Midlothian's clubhouse, one looks down on a double green, serving the ninth and eighteenth holes of the course.

# Competition Tough, But Club's Smart Drive Fills Roster

By JACK FULTON, JR.

**O**RGANIZING a membership campaign and actually putting one over have always been two different things. This was especially true in early 1933 when hardly a golf club in the U. S. found itself in position to coast through the season on its existing roster. At least nine out of ten clubs put on membership drives of varying success.

All of this activity resulted in much competition and much price and throat cutting by the clubs, particularly in the metropolitan districts, with the natural result that few clubs achieved the goal they set out for—a full membership. Perhaps competition is not entirely to blame for these failures—there is something more than a hint that many a campaign flopped because the ringleaders failed to keep the rank and file of the membership keyed to sufficient pitch during final stages of the drive which started out with a world of enthusiasm, but within ten days petered out until only the membership chairman and one or two of his committee-men were active.

## Here's Drive That Won

But not all 1933 membership campaigns failed. For example, an outstandingly successful drive was inaugurated and carried through to its goal by Midlothian Country Club of the Chicago district.

Midlothian is one of Chicago's oldest golf clubs. It was established in 1898 and has always numbered among its members

many of the Windy City's more substantial citizens.

Like many other mature clubs, Midlothian's roster felt the results of the depression severely. During prosperous times it had continued to number among its members many men who had joined the club years before and who, no longer physically capable of playing golf, continued to pay dues for sentiment's sake. These men reluctantly resigned from the club when the financial clouds descended. Had they been younger, active golfers, the chances are they would have found some way to continue their memberships.

## Many Vacancies. What to Do?

In addition to this class of resigning member, Midlothian of course had its share of resignations experienced by all clubs, from younger members whose active interest in golf was keen, but who had no reserves to tide over the tight money period. All in all, Midlothian found itself last December needing approximately 100 new members out of the 275 maximum permitted by its by-laws. Something had to be done, or Midlothian's years of leadership would suffer.

The problem was promptly tackled by the club's president, David B. Johnson. His initial move was to call a meeting of the finance committee, which aided by the chairman of the club's other committees set up a budget for the new year, based on the experience of prior years, but with

every economy consistent with Midlothian's standing and traditions effected. Estimates showed that income would not balance expenses without one of two alternatives — either an assessment would have to be levied during the year, or the club would have to reduce its membership vacancies, thus obtaining the necessary added income to finish the year in the black.

Assessments are always objectionable and generally cause numerous resignations. Midlothian was not in position to stand many of those. The proposal to acquire additional members was obviously the better solution to the club's problem, and accordingly the finance committee set to work to see what it could devise in the way of an attractive offer to prospective members.

The first step was to reduce the dues. Midlothian had been collecting \$200 annually from its members. That was too much money, under current conditions, to attract new blood. After much figuring and weighing of one proposal against another it was finally decided that the club could reduce its dues to \$125 per year and still get by under its economy budget, *provided* not less than 100 new members were taken into the club. Any fewer new members and the club would end the year with a deficit.

### Vital to Make Offer Attractive.

The next problem was to decide on the price at which these new memberships were to be sold. It was pointed out that fully 200 clubs in the Chicago district were even then making strenuous efforts to fill their rosters. If Midlothian was to get anywhere in its membership drive it was commonsense to make its proposition so attractive that the average eligible golfer would have difficulty turning down an invitation to join the club.

Johnson finally recommended *giving the memberships away* to anyone who would agree to pay half a year's dues in advance and another half-year's dues at the end of the first period. Thereafter those members would pay quarterly, as the other members pay. A full equity membership certificate was to be issued immediately.

Here is the rest of the story, as told the writer by President Johnson in a recent interview:

"I don't need to tell you that the proposal came as a distinct shock to several of the men attending the meeting. Uppermost in their minds, I suppose, was the

\$1,000 price at which memberships in Midlothian had sold as recently as 1930. It seemed unbelievable values could have descended so markedly in so short a period.

"Compromises were suggested. 'Sell memberships at \$150, even \$100, but don't give them away' was the usual reaction, but it was soon pointed out that such prices would simply put us in active and equal competition with other Chicago clubs. We needed a proposition that would meet with minimum sales resistance. Nothing less than giving memberships away would fit that definition.

"After prolonged discussion, the give-away membership play, including the six-month-in-advance dues payment proviso, was decided upon. The next step was to organize the membership for a sales campaign."

To accomplish this, Johnson invited 20 active members of the club, none of whom were members of the Board, to meet with him at a luncheon. At that time, the adopted plan of the Board was explained to them and these twenty men were asked to become "Captains" in the campaign for 100 new members. The entire membership of the club was then allotted to the various captains on the basis of acquaintanceship between captain and members.

### Arrange for Frequent Meetings

"It has always been my observation," Johnson continued, "that appointing teams to do the selling is about as far as most membership campaigns go. This is a mistake—no matter how enthusiastic and willing a team member may be to sign up prospects, his interest is sure to lag after a few days unless some means is at hand to keep him pepped up. We assure continued effort in our drive by establishing a headquarters at the South Shore Country Club, which is conveniently located on Chicago's South Side, the area wherein most of the prospects we would sign up lived.

"The headquarters, consisting of a spacious private suite in the clubhouse, were to be open four evenings each week during the drive from 7:30 or thereabouts in the evening until everybody went home. No dinner was served, but there were refreshments of various sorts. Any expenses incurred were charged to the membership committee.

"Every member of Midlothian was not only invited but urged to drop around to headquarters at least twice a week, bring-

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ing with him any prospect for membership he might have in mind. There would be no planned program, just a chance to show the prospect the caliber of men who belonged to Midlothian and to sell him by indirect means on the good-fellowship to be found in our club.

"These meetings four evenings a week worked out even better than we had hoped. It takes a lot of interest on the part of a man to make him leave the family fire-side on a cold winter night, yet the team members invariably turned up in good numbers. At least half of them had a prospect in tow and I would say we were able to sign up at least one prospect in three who attended—if not on his first visit, then subsequently after he had been with us for several of these evenings. Considering that the golf season at Midlothian was still some three or four months away, I think our sales average was remarkable and indicative of the interest in the campaign on the part of our members.

#### Phones Keep Pep Alive

"The one worry I had after the drive had started was whether or not we would be able to maintain interest in filling our roster. I was afraid the pep would gradually die down unless the members and particularly the team captains were constantly reminded of the drive and what its success meant to Midlothian. I took it upon myself to see that this part of the job was done right.

"Every morning I would sit down at the telephone and call up each team captain. I had in front of me a card index listing every prospect for membership that had been introduced to date, and these cards were grouped under the captain whose team had brought the man around. One by one I went over the prospect cards, asking about the status of the particular man, learning what sales resistance he had put up, and advising the best way to overcome the argument that had developed. I made it plain that I was devoting much of my time to the drive and was always available to help close a prospect.

"My work over the telephones did not end with my daily calls to the team captains. Other members of the teams had to be kept interested in the drive, especially those members who had brought around one or more prospects, so I phoned them too, offering every assistance at my command. This was absolutely essential, because a member might have all the de-

sire in the world to sign up one of his friends for a membership and at the same time have no ability as a salesman to get the prospect's name on the dotted line. Such men welcome the assistance of some one well posted on the club's condition.

"We held the evening meetings at South Shore for two weeks. Then, in order to give the members a chance to catch their breath and the prospects a chance to think things over, we declared a two-week layoff, after which the meetings were once again scheduled for a fortnight more. At the end of this period almost every prospect on our list had attended several meetings and there was nothing to be gained by continuing to invite him around—either he was going to join Midlothian, or he wasn't. So we called the drive off.

"Besides, we had signed up approximately 100 new members which we needed under our budget plan. That was a very satisfactory place to end the drive, because with spring approaching and the golf season about to begin, we knew from past experience we would have little difficulty filling our roster once the urge to get out on the links hit the remainder of our prospects and such new ones as came to light in the meantime.

## More Pros Ally With S. Calif. Professional Association

Los Angeles, Calif.—The Southern California Golf Alliance is getting under way in the Los Angeles district, with a directorate of 7 members composed of PGA members and a sec'y-treas. pro tem in the person of J. A. Patterson, who holds the same office in the PGA of Southern California.

The new organization will accept as members pros and concessionaires at golf courses, driving ranges and golf schools where golf goods is sold.

In forming the new organization the pros have reached out to give all the fellows a better chance to eliminate the trick discount buying of golf goods. The agreement between the Northern California PGA and dealers and the manufacturers to curb the free distribution of balls to amateurs and the "buy it wholesale" racket was endorsed by the southern California pros and dealers, who worked out a similar proposition. By grouping together all of the merchants at point-of-use outlets the pro sponsors of the new alliance are confident they will be able to control marketing practices.



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