

# Volume Membership Sales Probable This Spring

By JACK FULTON, JR.

**A**S FAR AS northern golf clubs are concerned, the period of greatest membership committee activity extends from April first through early June. True enough, many clubs in recent years have established the practice of initiating high-pressure membership campaigns almost as soon as the season is over in the fall, using ammunition such as "join now before prices rise," "only a limited number of memberships at this figure," "sign up now; dues start May 1st," but more often than not such campaigns have dragged through the winter and into the spring selling period before any real results have been shown.

The reason, of course, lies in the fact that the average golfer, looking for a club to join, sees little reason to plank down his money for a membership several months earlier than he can expect to get any return from it. So he waits until the first few warm days of spring put thoughts of golf in his head before he becomes receptive to membership invitations.

## Membership Sales Should Increase

With respect to the present 1934 selling season, all indications point to much more satisfactory results than has been the case for several years. A number of factors combine to bring this note of optimism into the membership selling picture.

Primarily, people are feeling better about the future. There is widespread confidence that incomes reached their nadir several months ago and that from now on times are going to get better. This makes membership selling a much easier task—the prospect whose income today will justify or almost justify his joining a private club is far less cautious about taking the step than he was a year ago when the spectre of financial uncertainty lurked in the background.

A second influence toward easier membership selling lies in the so-called new leisure. Many a golfer who heretofore has refused to join a private club because his only time for golf was Sundays (he worked full days the rest of the week) will be on

a five-day week this season. He will have all of Saturday as well as Sunday for his golf. Under this new set-up he will be able to play about twice as much golf; therefore each round will cost, dues alone considered, only half as much as in former years. Previously it was cheaper for this man to pay some daily fee layout by the round; under the new leisure he can save money by paying monthly dues at a private club.

## Here a Prospect Source

Thousands of golfers will have an extra day for golf this season, as the result of the new leisure. It will pay membership chairmen to check up on the various industries and concerns in their communities, and discover which of these will be closed on Saturdays this summer. Among the major and minor executive personnels of these businesses will be found many golfers who are even today wondering what they're going to do with their Saturdays. It has probably not occurred to the golfers among these men that it will be cheaper to join the local private club on a dues basis than to pay the daily fee every time they golf. It is a common sense, convincing argument for any membership chairman to present to a golfer who has always played the fee-courses and now has new leisure.

A third factor which will aid in membership selling this spring is the rock-bottom price of memberships today. The day when a club could maintain an artificial value on its memberships has passed. Equities mean very little—the book value of an equity membership in a given club may be close to \$1,000, real-estate and improvements considered, but since a solvent club rarely disbands there is no way to realize on that equity.

Only one thing determines the price of a private club membership—what figure will fill the roster. Ordinarily in the past clubs have made the mistake of attempting to get a price for their memberships somewhat above the market. After a time, when it becomes apparent that memberships will not move in volume at the figure

set by the club, the governing board authorizes a reduction. But meanwhile the market drops and the club is still high.

The old thought that a club loses exclusiveness and allure if its memberships sell too cheap has today almost universal realization that it doesn't greatly matter what a man pays for his membership—it's the regular dues and house account coming from him month after month, once he is a member, that determines whether the annual statement will be footed with red or black figures.

Hundreds of clubs in the past year have given away full equity memberships to acceptable golfers who would agree to pay the regular dues. By this means many clubs have succeeded in filling their rosters, which in turn brought about full-time patronage of the various departments of the club and permitted these departments to show substantial profits.

### The Tramps Are Out!

Perhaps as important as any of the other factors that are expected to make membership selling easier this spring is the recent awakening of clubs, especially those in metropolitan districts, to the tramp-golfer evil and the determination of these clubs to end the lax regulations which have made owning a membership and paying dues economically unsound.

Last month, GOLFDOM discussed the tramp golfer problem at length, pointing out that the clubs had only themselves to blame if certain golfers, not affiliated with any private club, played all the golf they cared to over private links by the simple expedient of playing frequently with friends who happened to hold membership cards. Ordinarily, these friends saw no harm in having frequent rounds with their "tramp" friends; wasn't the club eager to collect all the green fees it could to help along its income, and weren't they doing their part by bringing guests out? The members overlooked the fact that many of these tramp friends were perfectly good prospects for membership, but would hardly care to join and start paying dues so long as they could visit the club regularly upon payments of modest green-fees.

The whole trouble, of course, lay in the lax guest privilege regulations in force during the past year or so.

This season, if early dope can be believed, the tramp golfers are not going to find it so easy to play private layouts at pleasure. Nearly all metropolitan districts have taken cognizance of the tramp golfer

evil and have requested local clubs to tighten up on guest regulations. The theory is—and it sounds exceedingly practical—that while the clubs will undoubtedly lose some green-fee income by refusing to permit the same non-member to play more than, say, three times a season, they will more than make this up by forcing these men to join the club and contributing more than just occasional green-fees to the club's support.

Of course, not all clubs have been totally ignorant of the tramp golfer evil. Many of them began combating it several seasons ago. For example, read what Louis F. Rosenberg, president of Ledgemont CC (W. Warwick, R. I.) has to say about his club's solution of the problem:

"Here is the manner in which our club not only got rid of the tramp golfer pest, but also gave us an increased membership, for some of these so-called "tramps" were possible prospects and only refrained from joining a club because they found a method of playing on good courses without having to take out memberships.

"Following is the rule that we have had in force for the past 3 years and it has worked out very well.

*Any person who is not a member of a golf club associated with the Rhode Island Golf Assoc. is permitted to use the course upon payment of greens fees and proper introduction only once every three months.*

*Any person who is a member of a golf club that is affiliated with the R. I. G. A. is permitted the use of the course upon payment of greens fees and proper introduction as often as they so desire.*

"Our reason for the last paragraph is that we do not expect people to belong to two golf clubs at the same time, owing to the expense, and we often find that people who like our course are sometimes weened away and become members of our club.

"This rule keeps the tramp golfer away and I don't mean maybe. So as not to have any friction with our members who hesitate to ask their guests whether they have played our club within the allowed period, our clerk in charge is instructed to invariably call attention to the notice posted alongside the guest register. We keep a card system of all guests at the registration desk at all times."

All in all, it looks like a good spring for membership sales. People are feeling better, they're going to have more time for golf, the clubs have rock-bottom prices.