



Hickey gets an even bigger kick out of his group golf lessons than do his pupils. Here he is working with one class of a dozen of his hopefuls.

Hickey Enthuses Over Golf Growth at Agua Caliente

By BILL HICKEY

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DID YOU EVER see a dream walking?

Well—I did. And right now that dream is starting to come true. It is a dream of a great community golf center down here in Tijuana, Agua Caliente to be exact, in which the entire population of Baja California, Mexico, is interested in the good old game so dear to us all.

This may seem like a pipe dream, but it is a reality to me and to those of us who are interested in seeing Mexico become a golf-loving nation. But let me start at the beginning instead of jumping right into the middle of what I have to tell you.

Several years ago Agua Caliente, realizing the importance of golf, employed William P. Bell to construct a thoroughly championship golf course in the rolling foothills five miles below the American border, in Old Mexico, twenty miles from San Diego. The ground was magnificent terrain for golf course architecture and Bell did himself proud. He built a course which is tremendously popular with the every day golfer and a course which can quickly be made a searching test of championship play. The greens are cocoos bent, the fairways are good old California

bermuda grass, the traps are large, self draining, and beautifully target the greens. The greens themselves are so constructed as to place a high premium on the perfectly placed tee shot. The long drive which is off line finds the holes closed while the well placed drive opens the greens up beautifully. It is just the kind of course to appeal to the finest play.

So much for the golf course.

The next thing Caliente wanted to do was to show the world that it had a fine golf course and so it was that the \$25,000 Open Tournament was evolved. You will recall that Gene Sarazen traveled across the country to win the first of these great competitive events. Times made it necessary to cut the size of the purse a bit, but the fine character of the tournament has been maintained. It is a championship event in every sense of the word and this year Wiffy Cox played record breaking golf to lead the finest field ever to tee off in this tournament.

Now—the galleries that follow play in this Agua Caliente Open run from 1,500 to 5,000 persons each day. Many came from Los Angeles and many from San Diego—

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but hundreds of those who follow the world's greatest professionals are native Mexicans living either at Agua Caliente or Tijuana. They came out, first, to see what the crowd was doing. They were thrilled at the showmanship of "money golf" and after the big boys had left they lingered around the golf shop, eager to get acquainted with golf clubs and eager to try out this game which seemed to have such a hold on the visiting American public. Perhaps the caddies started it. Frankly I don't know. But it wasn't long until you would see the Mexican boys taking practice swings, chipping, putting, etc., in their own back yards. Then came the day when they came over to the club and wanted to actually try the real game.

Perhaps this interest was fostered by the golf enthusiasm of the President of Mexico, Abelardo Rodriguez. Perhaps the great interest of General P. E. Calles had something to do with it. Both play a great deal and both have been instrumental in giving Mexico City country clubs which compare with the finest in the U. S. Let it suffice that the Mexican population of Baja California became tremendously golf minded.

Golf clubs that our Mexican friends used were nondescript. That didn't make so much difference. I felt this "thirsting" for golf knowledge and felt that a part of my civic duty was to help them learn to play, help them learn to become good golfers and good sportsmen. I organized golf classes, first of caddies and then of leading citizens of this district. They took to golf naturally, loved it and I honestly think will sooner or later make their presence felt in the golf world.

Once they knew what it was all about the Mexicans here wanted to play. In this we cooperated with them to the utmost. For more than a year they have been playing here at Agua Caliente. And now they would play in tournaments. Can you beat it? And they're playing well. This high interest prompted me to sponsor the first annual championship of Baja California. It was a closed event, open only to those who live down here below the border. We had a total entry of 75 players and Augustine Silvyera won the title. He shot an actual 79, with two penalty strokes against him. It might well have been a 77. Now that the tournament is out of the way the boys are hounding me for another—and I'm going to give it to them.

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