

# Nation's Clubs Winning Fight Against Tramp Golfers

By JACK FULTON, JR.

**B**ACK IN the days when Prosperity was sitting in our laps instead of playing hookey around the corner, golf club rules relative to the use of club and course facilities by non-members were pretty strict. Green-fees were made high, both to make as much money as possible from that source, and to discourage members from bringing out too many guests to "clutter up" the links, especially on weekends. Generally there were rules in effect sharply limiting the number of times a man could be invited to the club in a given month and season.

Such rules, regulations and restrictions were smart when club business was booming, but when the depression hit, a decided change of policy toward the non-member golfer developed. Where formerly even with the rankest extravagance most clubs made money, they woke up one day to the sad and somewhat belated realization that vacancies were occurring in the membership list faster than the hard-working chairman of the membership committee could sign up new prospects.

So the bars were let down, generally under the guise of a membership drive. "Bring out your friends for a day of golf and sell them into the club," was the proposal made to club members. "There will be no green-fees."

## How Tramp Golfers Are Born

The members cooperated willingly, having the interest of their club at heart, and worked strenuously to sign up some members, but this same interest in the club's well being was not always uppermost in the thoughts of the prospects, many of them taking advantage of the situation to get in a lot of golf free of charge. They hadn't the slightest idea of joining the club, but when some friend invited them out to the club, why turn down the invitation?

Certain more unscrupulous of these non-club golfers, especially those living in metropolitan districts, soon found they could play all the golf they wanted by getting

in touch with friends who belonged to clubs where membership drives were in progress and hinting to those friends that they might tie up with some club or other.

Thus was born the "tramp golfer," a species of sportsman (?) virtually unknown a few years ago. Today there are thousands of them, belonging to no club but playing at many. It has become a serious problem, not only because the country clubs are being taken advantage of, but also because so long as a man can obtain unlimited use of a course without belonging to it, he is not a prospect for membership. It is only when the clubs tighten up on their guest regulations and make it difficult for the free and easy golfer to play his golf that the membership situation will improve.

## It's Mostly the Club's Fault

The tramp golfer does not generally insist on free golf—with green-fees absurdly lowered during the last two years or so, he frequently insists on paying his friends the green fees and the cost of lunch, set-ups, etc. This salves his conscience, although he must realize that he is not paying as much for his golf as his dues-paying friends are paying.

The attitude of a tramp golfer toward joining a club is not to be condemned. Any blame that attached to the growth of the animal must be laid on the shoulders of the club officials, who were so anxious to encourage play and hold sorely needed income from green-fees at its former level that they overdid matters. Most of them thought cutting green-fees in half would more than double the number of guests playing at the club, but it doesn't work out that way. Nearly all clubs are now coming to realize that it is much better to hold the price of green-fees above the levels asked at neighboring fee-courses and not try to be competitive with these layouts. While they won't have as much guest play as they would have at lower fees, the gross income will be the same or larger.

The degree to which individual clubs have relaxed their guests' requirements of course varies. Some clubs are still fairly strict. Others have to all intents gone daily-fee, since any golfer willing to plank down the green-fees is permitted the privileges of the club without being required to have an introduction by a member.

It is these latter clubs that have felt the effects of the tramp golfer most severely. Their members are still paying dues and they object to seeing a stranger receive all the advantages they do other than the right to vote (if that can be considered an advantage) for far less money than they pay. Moreover, they see many men using the club's facilities whom they would promptly blackball if these men were proposed for membership. With all pretense to exclusiveness gone, some clubs of this type are rapidly losing what members they have so far been able to hold.

### District Golf Bodies Get Busy

The various district golf associations have recognized the problem of the tramp golfer and have announced that the solution of the matter rests with the clubs themselves. Green-fees must be raised, they advise, at least high enough to make it cheaper to belong to a club than to pay the fees each time a game is played.

One of the associations that recommended steps along these lines is the Massachusetts G. A. Its secretary, Henry A. Wentworth, writes GOLFDOM anent the matter as follows:

"Practically all the large member clubs and many of the smaller ones have stiffened their attitude toward green-fees this season as compared to last year. The clubs have found that instead of increasing their income, low fees cause members to drop out and play their golf by paying the green-fees.

"The tendency this year has been in many clubs along the lines of temporarily waiving initiation fees, bond purchase requirements, etc., for a year or two years, thus tending to drive local people who care to play golf at these clubs back into membership. The once-a-month rule for people within 25 or 50 miles of the club is being adhered to strictly by most clubs.

"The general attitude on the part of most clubs has been practically cold this year toward the itinerant golfer. The result is that many clubs have increased their membership lists materially this year over last."

Similar steps toward eliminating the tramp golfer evil were taken at the 1932 annual meeting of the Metropolitan G. A. Its president, Stacey Bender, commented at length on the way in which reductions of green-fees and lightening of restrictions governing play by the public on private courses was threatening to make it impossible for these private courses ever to get back on a strong private club basis. Mr. Bender urged the governing boards in the New York district clubs to take immediate steps to overcome the abuses then prevailing. This the clubs did, with these major results:

(1) Extreme reductions in green-fees were stopped, many clubs hiking their fees back to figures that utterly discouraged the itinerant golfer.

(2) Clubs which were operating under the guise of private clubs, but which actually were out-and-out fee propositions were forced to declare themselves.

(3) Many clubs established special "season," "annual" or "associate" memberships costing the equivalent of the annual dues, generally non-assessable and with full playing privileges, but no voting power or equity in the club property.

These special memberships were temporary arrangements in many cases, to be declared void when conditions warrant their elimination,

### Bargain Memberships Are Helpful

As other clubs in the MGA area, and the same applies to clubs in the Chicago, Detroit, and several other districts, another plan was used. Initiation fees were temporarily abolished and desirable men taken in who would pay the annual dues. These memberships ordinarily were made assessable, but this factor was offset by granting the new member an equity in the club equal with all other members.

As compared with any of the various "season" arrangements, this latter type of membership has an advantage for the membership committee in that the membership does not terminate after a stated period and therefore the committee is not faced each spring with the problem of filling the roster again. Admittedly these golfers who join clubs and pay regular dues but escape an initiation fee have no investment in the club and stand to lose nothing by resigning. However, most of them are expected to go along as a matter of course when next season opens, particularly if the club has been careful



Russell Miller, manager of the Medinah CC (Chicago district), and engineers of the Liquid Carbonic Corp., figured out this big bar for Medinah's grill. Its cost, fully equipped with glassware, was around \$4,500. That seems a stiff sum, but even during the winter the bar has been doing a business that indicates it practically will have paid for itself by the time the season opens.

to sell these memberships to substantial and desirable prospects.

The Detroit District G. A. effectively crippled the activities of the tramp golfer this season by recommending strict rules regarding the number of times a man could be invited to a given club. The clubs are cooperating well in this direction and for a tramp golfer in the Detroit district to get his fill of golf, he must go to a great deal of trouble "inviting" himself here and there. After a visit of two at any club, his presence there is not too pleasant.

The tramp golfer is still with us, despite the various regulations and recommendations that have been devised to combat him. But his activities have been definitely curbed, and with an improvement in business conditions, which will automatically make the job of filling membership lists easier, it ought not to be too difficult to eliminate him completely as a private club problem.

The daily-fee course owners are solidly in favor of this and in most districts are working with the clubs in an endeavor to end the miseries the tramp golfer has caused. There have been numerous complaints by fee-course operators in recent months over the unfair competition they were receiving from layouts that had been private clubs in balmier days, but today operate on a true fee basis, although still claiming to be exclusive membership or-

ganizations. The fee-course owners feel that any club that accepts players without restriction has no right to pose as a private layout.

### Single Drink Bottle Favored for Club Service

**M**ANAGERS and house officials who have begun to give serious thought to club whiskey service the coming season are favoring the idea of miniatures; bottles containing single drinks of 1.6 oz.

The cost is a cent a bottle more for such high class brands as Canadian Club, but the service advantages are such that it is expected many of the better clubs will adopt this method. There are 240 of the miniature bottles in a case. Each one bears the revenue seal and gives the members assurance against substitution.

Further advantages are closer control in handling by employees and members, neatness, no spillage and speedier service.

Demand for these miniatures by the higher class clubs is such that bottling facilities are taxed even in such plants as that of Hiram Walker & Sons at Peoria, Ill., which is the largest distillery in the world.

Clubs planning to adopt the individual service of liquor for the 1934 season will find it advisable to get in touch with the Walker organization regarding requirements at earliest convenience.