

Review of "Good Old Days" Is Spur to Pro Progress

By WILLIAM V. HOARE

WHY HAVEN'T the pros more than 90 per cent of the golf business? I've seen the day when they had this percentage or more. Still, I am not one of the fellows who says "those were the good old days." The best of us who were selling all of our members all of the golf equipment they ever bought in the old days didn't get through those years with anyway near the net profit of an average year at a fairly good club just before the depression.

It is beginning to look like the depression is over so it is time the pros begin to plan for recapturing the strong position they held when American golf was younger.

I've been on both sides of the fence; as a pro cussing the manufacturers and as a manufacturer cussing the pros. I've found that cussing the other fellow gets just nothing net, but that discussing the other fellow and our mutual problems leads somewhere, so I am going to review my experiences and see if there is a lesson in them for the pros.

I was taught clubmaking by Charley Gibson at Westward Ho and came out to the states in 1896 after Charles Potter, president of the Philadelphia Cricket Club, had seen me at Westward Ho and offered me the job. The Philadelphia club had about 500 members; of them, about 150 played golf. I had to supervise the course, do the teaching, club-making and repairing, ball repairing, organize competitions, induce people to take up the game, play with them and see that they bought enough equipment to be able to play the game. It took 12 hours a day and I didn't think it was a hard job. One thing that I learned was to make my time mean something. The younger fellows now—most of them—are around the club enough, but they often fail to appreciate that time is money. A lot of times when they have nothing to do they might be figuring or working on something that will mean greater interest among the members and more money for the pro and the club.



Willie Hoare, in the early 1900s, when he was pro at Calumet. With that bandaged left hand he shot Westward Ho in 76.

Fred Miley, now at Lexington, Ky., was the youngster I broke in as my assistant. His daughter is the kid referred to as "the giant killer" in the Florida women's tournaments this year. Fred picked up the golf business quickly. American boys are adaptable, eager to learn and energetic if they have competent and conscientious direction. I found out from Fred something that always stays with me—that a pro's success depends a whole lot on his assistant, so one of the important parts of a pro's job to select the right assistant and see to it that he is properly trained and supervised.

We didn't have much of a sales problem in the old days; the market was growing too fast. That's a tip for us now. If we want to solve our sales problem we need to promote the growth of the market. I think that the way Fred Miley and a lot of other pro friends of mine have developed their own daughters and sons into good golfers has had a strong effect in increasing women's golf.

When we did have customers, they bought irons for \$2.50 apiece and woods

for \$4.00 each. There was a big profit on the sale, because we didn't figure our time as part of the cost. I doubt that today the public would stand for the margin of profit that we figured we had in the clubs we sold in the old days. Of course this business of figuring in our time, interest on money invested, assistant's wages, playing expenses and other costs of doing business didn't occur to us. Every cent we got over the cost of materials was considered profit.

We re-shafted clubs for 50c or 75c and as we bought the shafts for 25c or 35c we believed we were making 100% profit. If someone had told us about costs of doing business and pros had become conscious of these costs early in the game's American development, there would have been a lot of pros saved a lot of business worry. I'm sorry to say that some of the boys today appear to be just as dumb about business, operating costs and bookkeeping methods as we were in the gay but simple-minded nineties.

Profits in the Old Days

The old gutty balls we sold for 25c and 35c. After they had been hacked to pieces we remade them at a small charge by boiling them down, taking off the ridges and remoulding them to a slightly smaller size. I don't recall our exact costs, but I do know that by no manner of figuring did we ever get any more than a 25% gross profit, which is less than we get today with much bigger business.

In those days a very good pro got \$100 a month and had to pay his own room and board. Remember, he also was green-keeper. That \$100 was paid him for being there at work and stirring up golf interest. I am reminded that if some of the fellows in these times were more active running competitions and doing everything they possibly could to create more interest and play at the clubs there would not be complaints about clubs engaging incompetent kids for no salary. A competent man is only of value when he is busy showing that he is competent.

We got all sales and club-cleaning. Clubs were cleaned with emery-cloth. The hands and wrists of many of our American playing stars were developed by exercise with that emery-cloth.

Although the club-cleaning work was harder then, there were not as many clubs to clean for the money. The first good break the pros got in expanding their sales

per customer was the matched sets. However, we didn't increase the charges for club-cleaning and after we had figured our costs the club-cleaning didn't look like any gold mine.

Americans Develop Club Design

Golf owes a lot to the American influence in club-making. Americans, not knowing the traditions, spurred club design. Talking things over with some of our American boys and some of the more interested members, I'd be hit with ideas that I would sketch out and send back to Gibson, Forgan, Stewart, Nichol, McEwan or Old Tom Morris.

Old Tom financed a lot of the boys, but was a very poor collector. He died practically broke, so you can see that the pro credit problem is nothing new.

You can't impress me with any of those tales about the Scotch being tight. The exact opposite generally has been true of the Scotch in the golf business—they have been far too generous. The kindest act that can be done for any professional who is in over his head with bills—or is getting in—is to be hard and say he won't be supplied until he gets busy on getting off the cuff with his creditors. The manufacturer who lets the man or boy get in any deeper, after he already is in bad shape, is doing positively the worst thing that could be done to help the pro.

Some fellows have called me to my face—and elsewhere—everything they could lay their tongues to because I wouldn't sell them unless their dough was on the line, or C. O. D., even though I might have been able to get their order passed by the credit department of the company for which I worked.

A year or so later I have seen them out of jobs and unable to get new ones because of their credit record; broke and discouraged. They have said to me, "Willie, I wish to hell the other fellows had been as tough about letting me get in over my head as you were and I wouldn't be in the shape I am in today."

But the pros in the last several years have become much better credit risks than most other small dealers. They have awakened to the fact that their main need is not credit, but buying and selling brains and effort.

As a former pro I have often been asked if I didn't think the disappearance of bench-making of clubs ruined things for the pro. Not at all, is my answer. Bench-

making is a craft and the pro's job of today is a business. The business-men in any business are the fellows who hire the craftsmen and the craftsman usually considers himself fortunate to be able to get a job where the business-man will pay a good wage.

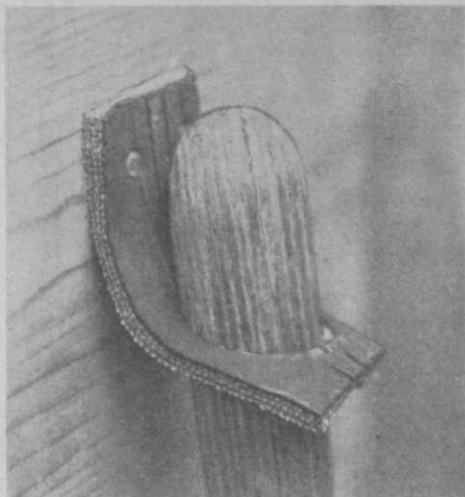
We can see what an effect for the better the vanishing of the bench-made idea had in the ball business when we realize that what gave golf its first big boost in this country was the Haskell ball. That ball would go 35 to 50 yards farther and what brings the American out to play is that business of hitting something and watching it go to far places.

Getting Back Business We Built

Some of the older pros may feel that we all got a bad break after we had built up the business because some of the business we had created was switched to other sales outlets. I think, on reflection, that we made our mistake when we started to feel competition by not snapping right into it and taking more of a personal interest in each member. When the stores started to take interest in our members we should have turned on more steam ourselves.

However, the smart pro today is taking a personal interest in his members and taking advantage of the superior location of his shop and acquaintance with his members and their games—advantages of great weight that pros always will have over other outlets.

I recently have completed a business trip that greatly cheered me. I hit some out-of-the-way spots where pros are doing a grand job building the game and handling their own business. It brought me back to my own pioneering days at Philadelphia and at Memphis and Los Angeles, where I helped lay out the first golf courses in those cities, and at Tedesco and Hot Springs, where at these resort courses I introduced many of our prominent business men and society leaders to the game they have learned to love. Maybe those old days when I would average \$100 a playing lesson out of fellows like the late Fred Bonfils have gone from pro golf forever, but there still are plenty of chances for the pro to make a great profit out of volume. Woolworth seems to have done fairly well in a volume business, and I can't see why the municipal, fee and college courses available for the development of more golfers aren't going to be used by the boys in multiplying the volume of golf.



Easily Made Wall Holder for Long Handled Tools

THE METAL or tool ends of the heavier long handled tools are of course most safe and convenient when resting on the floor, but the top ends of the long smooth handles are not such an easy thing to secure and space handily apart along the wall. Cut strips of an old tire casing some $2\frac{1}{2}$ " wide and $3\frac{1}{2}$ " long. Cut a hole through one end, through which the handle end will snugly but easily pass. Tack the piece of casing to the wall at such a height that a short outward movement of the floor end of the tool will permit the handle to be withdrawn. This simple little affair securely holds the handles and when not in use lays close and flat to the wall.

Treasure Hunt Helps Pro Ball Sales

FOREST STAUFFER, pro at Barton Hills CC., Ann Arbor, Mich., has his name marked on one pole of the balls he plays. He tells his members that when they find one of his lost balls and bring it into his shop he will exchange it for a new ball of the same brand.

Stauffer does not lose many balls during a year ordinarily, but this stunt has helped to sell so many balls in addition to those received in exchange that he finds it good business to lose a few balls intentionally.

Incidentally the players who are most frequently in the rough and find the Stauffer lost balls are those who need sales promotion on the higher quality balls.