

IS IT NEWS?

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THERE is no longer any argument over the fact that the golf clubs and the newspapers need each other. The former found the value of publicity over the lean years just passed. Aggressive clubs cashed in when the membership drives were on. The newspapers are discovering that the fight racket is on the verge of burial and that they must handle some other games beside baseball in the summer season. Furthermore golf news attracts a high type of circulation, it looks good to prospective national advertisers, and lifts the tone of the entire sport page.

Yet from a newspaper man's point of view, golf is the hardest sport to cover. You can't predict winners, you can't criticize play, you can't sit still and have the event staged in front of you. On top of all that it's a hard game to write about when there aren't any big tournaments.

Golf club people, managers, members and professionals, could be a big help to the boys on the papers. Most of them are willing but they usually lack a fundamental conception of the newspaper.

How Sports Editors Figure

All statements on the subject of the high purposes of the press to the contrary, the chief factor in determining what goes into a newspaper is: Will Anybody Read It?

The sports editor knows that the majority of his readers are baseball fans, and that more people will turn out for an average Saturday ball game than will show up in the gallery of the open championship. He knows that baseball extras are sold on the street and that only a few of the greatest professionals and Bobby Jones have ever "sold papers".

So when he sets his policies on golf he thinks of the reader first. Golf stories fall into the following classifications:

1. Instruction.
2. National competition.
3. Local competition.
4. Features.
5. Personalities and gossip.

Newspaper Golf Writer Tells Why and How Golf Gets Into Print

He knows all about articles on instruction. They may not teach anything but whenever they offer a leaflet free he gets several hundred pieces of mail a week. Every golfer, from dub to champion, is intrigued by the stuff of Chester Horton, Joe Glass, Art Krenz and the rest. A lot of them try the hints.

National competition is a problem to the sport page. Except for Jones, Walter Hagen, Gene Sarazen and Tommy Armour, the general run of reader doesn't care very much. The golfers are interested but the baseball fan, the fight bug and the horse player, aren't likely to be excited over Craig Wood and Denny Shute in anything more than a mild way. Few bought a paper to see how Runyan was coming at Charleston. A few bought papers to see how Jones was doing at Augusta.

Local competition can be built up to a certain point and there it stops. If one or two golfers are red hot they can be made into nine-day wonders but if they fail to deliver the writer and the paper look silly. Except for one or two local events no one cares very much except the families and friends of the persons concerned.

Gossip Features Growing

More and more papers are reducing local tournaments and going in for features and personalities. The latter is merely gossip, directed at individuals and based upon the old premise that names are news and the more names you get in the paper the more you'll sell.

The theory behind a feature is the same as that behind articles on instruction, namely that it will appeal to all golfers, public linksmen and champions.

In many cases a feature can be so written as to draw interest from devotees of other games. Such a feature was Sarazen's idea of the eight-inch, later amended to six-inch cup. He broke the story in the dead of winter when news was scarce and sport pages were yawning. It aroused controversy and carried on for several days.

Gene tried again with a diatribe on long trousers and another against the United States Golf Association but they didn't click somehow. He did score with his criticism of golf pari-mutual gambling.

Handling of personalities and gossip is delicate. It is almost impossible in metropolitan centers, for there are just too many courses and players to cover but in smaller cities it will work out excellently.

In most cases where it has been tried the paper has attempted to turn itself into a house organ for the clubs. It is on features and personalities that the club members and professionals can really help.

How Clubs Can Help

There are two old chestnuts in the newspaper business. One is that a man is born with a nose for news. The other is the one about a man biting a dog.

News sense and news stories, however, are things that can be developed. The best way to develop the former is to read the papers carefully and figure out where a story came from, why it is in the paper, and does any similar incident ever come to your attention.

Professionals, club managers and members are usually punk reporters. Public course operators, whose very existence depends upon promotion, are as a class the worst of the lot.

They held the district senior tournament at a local club one year and late in the afternoon one of the combatants rolled down a hill and fractured his shoulder. The writer had been arguing all afternoon with the chairman of the club's publicity committee on the question of who was at fault, the club or the paper, in missing golf news.

The argument was settled a moment later when the writer dropped a nickel into the locker room pay phone and called the club.

"We have the scores of the senior tournament," the reporter informed his office.

"Let's have a few of them. We're running tight."

Scores were read off. Although the reporter scarcely had begun until the office interrupted.

"Anything else happen?"

"No. Nothing."

"Well we heard some guy hurt himself and was taken to a hospital."

The reporter leaned out of the booth and queried the club official with whom

he had been discussing golf club news that never made the papers.

"Oh, yes," the official replied, "but you wouldn't want that. Some fellow fell down and got hurt but we haven't got his name."

A few days later it was our pleasure to print the following item about another club:

"More than 235 people played golf, an unknown caddy was taken to the hospital after being struck on the head with a wild slice, but otherwise 'nothing happened' at M———— yesterday."

The professional lost his job at the close of the season.

"The members thought he was dead on his feet," the president explained.

Most papers printing personalities would rather not use the same names over and over and over. Everyone knows that Billy Burke, Phil Perkins and Al Espinosa are good players and they have to set a new course record, buy a new car, slug a cop, invent a new club, or produce a good feature in order to get into the three Cleveland papers. The same goes for the leading amateurs. After Maurice McCarthy had shot a 69 on every course in town and beaten everyone at match play, his daily rounds ceased to be worthy of space.

What do the papers that are using personalities want?

Simply little things about dubs and duffers and a continual parade of new names, such as:

"Hank Doe broke 100 for the first time at Mortgage Hills yesterday, his score being 98 . . . Fred Roe has a new set of toe-weighted clubs and his handicap is down two strokes . . . After playing every Saturday for three years, Pete Moe won his first ball sweepstakes at Sleeping Squaw . . . Poverty Heights top-dressed the greens this morning . . . They took in \$1756 over the bar at Old Achen last week . . . Joe Poe is asking for two strokes from his regular foursome, due to large fat blisters on left thumb incurred planting forsythia . . . Capt. C. Coe, operator of Lost Profits, public, says he has a caddy named Tris Yancocz who can break 70 any time . . ."

And so on and so forth. Most papers want that sort of thing.

How the News Gets In

But where does it come from? The golf reporter can't call on 20 to 40 clubs in person every day. He must rely upon the

telephone and the people at the club to feed him items. They need the publicity, they want it, they should know that the repetition of their club's name day after day is more valuable than one annual "write-up".

There is some happening of interest at every club every day, and if the local papers show an inclination to print that sort of thing it is the club's job to supply it.

Some clubs do a pretty fair job on Saturday and Sunday when there are a lot of trick tournaments to report, but during the week, when the papers are crying for golf news these clubs are dormant.

Personalities seem to be the only solution to the public course problem. In most cities the fee courses cater to 50 to 75 per cent. of all the golfers and support only 5 per cent. of the competition. No newspaper is silly enough to disregard the public linksman entirely, yet the only way to write about him is to print a line about his golf game.

Although all the newspapers aren't yet converted to the gossip idea, there isn't one that won't go for a good feature. As explained before, a feature should interest all classes of golfers and the general run of readers.

What is a feature?

1. A story about an interesting person connected with the game. He might be a war veteran, a retired champion, a duffer who has just begun to take lessons . . . anybody you or your wife might be interested in reading about.

2. A story of some club's plans and program for, let us say, the development of juniors, the increase in ladies' play, improvements on the golf course.

3. A story about instruction. Suppose a pro could lure a newspaper man to your practice tee while he handles half a dozen average players. That might be a story.

4. The golf shop story. Do players try to bend the shafts of steel club over tee boxes? What is the most common repair? What "trick" clubs do your members use?

The list could go on forever. The general run of sport writers are glad to get a tip that there is a feature story lying around at some club. The only rule is that they would like to get a crack at some new idea.

Then there are stunts and promotion schemes. These are usually arranged with a single paper and consist of such ideas as Group Teaching, Novice Tournaments, Hole-In-One events and the like. The

paper regards them as circulation builders and overplays them while the lucky club or professional cashes in on reams of free space.

That about covers the various phases of golf news. The moral of this piece is simply that the golf writer needs all the help and cooperation he can get and the people that help him are going to be the ones that get the best break.

MGA Service Section's Dinner Is Banquet of Business

SERVICE Section of the Massachusetts Golf Assn., one of the most practical and helpful sectional groups in golf, held its club officials and committeemen dinner at the Charles River CC, April 5. The program was interesting and directly applicable to golf club problems.

Speakers and their subjects:

"The Family Club"—Leon B. Rogers, Pres., Brae Burn CC.

"Budgets and Management"—S. Harold Greene, Pres., Charles River CC.

"The Use of Golfing Areas and Golf Clubs"—Charles E. Mason, Pres., Mass. Golf Assn.

"Resignations"—Charles C. Gilman, Sec., Wollaston GC.

"Golf Shops and Tournaments"—Alvah H. Pierce, Golf Chairman, Duxbury Yacht Club.

"Publicity"—A. Linde Fowler, Golf Editor, Boston Evening Transcript.

"Caddies and Their Problems"—Francis Ouimet.

"Greenkeeping of Today"—James McCormack, Supt., Unicorn CC.

SWIMMING pool construction continues to feature improvement work at leading country clubs and to give definite indication the panic has been called off by Col. Bogey instead of by Huey Long, Father Coughlin and Doctor Townsend.

Among famous clubs now installing pools are Minikahda and North Shore (Chicago district). A kidney-shaped pool between the Minikahda clubhouse and Lake Calhoun, together with a children's pool, will provide a new attraction for the club's members and their families and give energetic manager Harry Krueger another focal point for Minikahda's notable social programs.

The North Shore pool is part of the most vigorous and most costly extensions of facilities being made by any club in the country at present.