

"I'VE TAKEN OVER A FEE-COURSE"

By BOB RANDALL

After eleven years at a private club, pro decides there's more future working on "his own"

GOLF is a good business. I've come to that conclusion after looking over many other businesses in which young men, who now are professionals, might engage. There are just as many troubles and uncertainties in the golf business as in any other, but I've found that ordinary common-sense, energy and keeping on the job iron out quickly any of the jams that may confront a pro during his work.

I have often heard pros talk about their troubles and I've thought about their remarks. Most of the complaints add up that the fellow who is discouraged or unhappy is looking at his work merely as a job instead of as a business.

For eleven years I was professional at Spring Valley at Elyria, where there is the finest sort of membership a pro could ask. It was one of those spots where a fellow is tempted to want to stay forever as pro. Members responded to my solicitation of business and rewarded by service efforts with a good volume of patronage.

Takes Over Daily Fee Course

But now I am starting into the daily fee course business on my own, taking over the operation of the Cherry Ridge GC at West River, O. It's a nine-hole course and with some touching-up here and there ought to be one of the most attractive nine-hole plants in northern Ohio.

Some fellows might say I am foolish to give up a sure thing where I have established myself at a good private club and go into one of the most hazardous of all sports enterprises, but I stand pat. My decision is based on sound judgment. I know the golf business and golf is bound to be good for a golf businessman. Where some of the boys are liable to miss connections is in forgetting that to make any business successful you have to work long past union hours, you have to worry and plan plenty and you have to take a chance.

When a pro has to pay the cost of sand to fill up the traps and the cost of putting the course in shape for a new season out of his own pocket, he is liable to get a sharp reminder that golf is full

of expenses and someone has to be strictly on the job to make those costs pay dividends in pleasure to the players. In my case the sand has to pay pleasure-dividends to Cherry Ridge players, which is a curious thought to have about the trouble that is associated with sand traps, and has to pay me a cash dividend, too.

Plenty of Fixing to Do

My course is about six years old. The Black River runs all around it. There are no parallel fairways. The clubhouse needed some repairs and painting to brighten it, but I've seen to that. The superintendent on the course has been here since the place was started and he knows every blade of grass. Equipment needed replacing. Well, when you get paying out your own money for all the things a course and a clubhouse needs, you know you are in a business. You've got to see to it that the customers get their money's worth so they keep on coming back and boost for the place.

When you realize that at a private club the pro has the job of making everything under his supervision bring some returns on the club's investment you see that the pro is in a real business. No golf interest means no income and no club, and that's why the pro has more than a job on his hands—he has a responsibility. There is a heavy turn-over in pro jobs because neither the club nor the pro realizes the extent and importance of the pro's work, thoroughly and properly done, in getting the entire club plant to pay.

There will be many fellows who will say that I am wrong when I state that the greater part of the slump pro business suffered during the depression was caused by neglect or a dull despair. At Spring Valley I had a representative membership, yet at no time during the depression did the pro department feel a heavy blow from the falling off in general business.

The explanation is simply that so many opportunities for increasing business always exist at private and fee clubs that almost any slump can be offset by smarter work in the pro department.

Pro Future

In Fee Courses

In the fee courses I think I see a tremendous future for pro businessmen. Many of these courses have had tough going because their operation was attempted by farmers or city men who did not know the golf business. The pro does or should, if he intends to stay in it. Therefore if the pro will work in this field there certainly is enough potential volume to make him a good, steady income. My own course has no pay-as-you play competition within 15 miles. There is a large volume of play from factory workers waiting to be developed. I already have started to organize industrial and office leagues and from the response to this missionary and indoor lecture and instruction work, expect a heavy play this summer.

I am giving lectures and demonstrations at the high schools. This school work gets immediate advertising results so far as the parents of the students are concerned, and develops some quick business from the kids. Student play can be accommodated at special rates during off-hours. Possibly this high school development is a long-haul proposition, but everything about the pro job calls for foresight, so looking ahead to the time when these school kids grow up isn't going to hurt me any.

Selling Kids

Important Task

Pros have to sell themselves to kids as well as to adults and I'm of the opinion that we are going to see the day when pro golfers are glorified by the youngsters as the kids used to idolize baseball players. We've already seen one indication of the value of this hero worship in the attitude of the younger Italian-American pros and caddies toward Sarazen.

I am making a special play for youngsters because the future of the golf club is going to be on a family basis. You can get parents into golf easier through their kids than you can get kids into the game because of their parents. At my place the season rates will be \$25 for a man, \$35 for man and wife, \$15 for unattached women and \$10 for juniors. All the time I can possibly spare from the work of getting course and clubhouse in shape is devoted to soliciting individual and group

business at factories, offices, banks and at noon and evening meetings of the district's businessmen.

My friends help a lot by pushing for me and I certainly have learned that a good part of a pros' capital is in earning the right sort of friends. But you need money, too, when you go in on your own, and you have to put into force personal and business economies past the degree you employed when you were trying to save up enough to go into business for yourself.

But I'm in now, and the whole deal has to pay out. I'm certain that it will because the more I compare the risks I'm taking with the chances I have to make a good income and put something aside for the later years, the better golf looks to me as a business.

My experience, after only a few months as a fee course operator, makes it plain to me that every private club pro could do himself a lot of good by asking himself "What would I do if this whole club were my business?" The thinking he will do will mean more money to him this year.

GOLF ball price increases have been announced to all retailers. Prices to the players remain the same. Hope of the pros is that an increase in play this year and more pro-shop push of ball sales will produce a volume which will off-set the rise in trade prices.

Wage increases and rising rubber and balata prices have the ball makers worried. Wholesale prices of crude rubber have climbed steadily from 2.7 cents a pound in June, 1932 to 24.8 cents per pound on March 16, 1937. In July, 1935, crude rubber hit \$1.03 a pound.

The fifth increase in automobile tire prices within the last 12 months recently was announced.

REX BIGELOW, pro at Indian Hills GC, Lansing, Mich., introduced a novel and effective note in group class instruction by having movies taken of the class and of individuals.

Pictures of the class, together with other golf pictures, were shown at lessons a week after the time the pictures were taken.

Bigelow ran his classes without charge as a fee course educational and business development enterprise. As many as 200 attend his classes.