

HOW I HANDLE FEE PLAYERS

By JOSEPH F. CHAMBERLIN

A COMPLETE lack of understanding of the golfers' psychology is often the cause of a great many misunderstandings between the fee course management and the golfer. You can be sure of one thing when an argument arises—the golfer has all the best of it and always the last word. That word is more often than not: "Well I'll never go back there," and "I'll tell the gang about this."

It doesn't pay to have an argument with a customer. You not only lose his business but the business of his friends, and this regardless of the quality of your club.

There are three points of contact on fee courses where misunderstandings are bound to arise at one time or another unless the viewpoint of the player is thoroughly understood. These three points are the ticket selling, the starting and the giving of rain-checks. Of course, there are plenty of other places on the course and in the clubhouse where the golfer is likely to run afoul of the "rules" but I'll say these three are about the most dangerous spots.

Asks Adjustment After Several Months

One day in September, a player came to me with four green-fee tickets. He said to me: "We played here early this spring in a foursome. We had only played three holes when we were caught in a rain and we were so soaked we left without getting rain-checks. We haven't been playing golf this summer because of the heat and I am wondering if it is possible to get any credit on these tickets."

I did not recognize the player as one I had seen before. It had been a poor season, we needed money badly and every dollar we could pick up meant life to us. The young man seemed straightforward and rather apologetic.

I thought to myself, "He is not the type that will argue over this: I have every right to turn him down now. This is all irregular." There were any number of reasons why I should have denied the request, in fact, it was a rather nervy request, I thought.

However, I took the tickets, looked at

the date, and the starting time stamp and went to my daily report and looked at the weather record. It was true that a rain did start at about that time and ruined the day.

I went back to the player. I had noticed that he was watching me with a sort of quizzical smile on his face. I said: "Yes! there was a rain at that time. We will be glad to let you play again" and handed him four new tickets. But he stood still. He said: "You know those are \$1.50 tickets, the rate is now only 50 cents. What about that?"

Again I was taken aback, but determined to go all the way or not at all. I wrote out a credit for the difference.

"You know," I said, "tickets on golf courses are not transferable but I presume you paid for those tickets yourself. So I am giving you the refund credit for them as you wish. We want you satisfied and as long as you believe it is coming to you, you are welcome to it."

That man became one of our most enthusiastic supporters from that time on. That six dollars was the best advertisement I ever made. It seemed to give him pleasure to bring new players to the course and introduce them to me.

Rain Checks Always Approved

A policy of approving all rain-checks whenever requested has worked for our own benefit. I have often replied to the question of rain-checks that I would give a rain-check to any player who honestly thinks he should have it. And the golfer seldom has abused that privilege in my experience.

This customer-is-always-right policy on the golf course makes the customer feel important. It gives him a sense of being "someone." Here he is the boss, and the manager and pro are at his service. He may be only a low-salaried clerk in an

office up-town, but here he becomes someone of authority. In this frame of mind he is apt to buy balls, take a caddie, step up to the bar or in other ways spend more money than otherwise.

The first tee is an important psychological point of contact with the player—a place for misunderstanding, a place to ruin the good nature of the golfers before they play a stroke, a place to start a riot that will show itself on every green and tee on the course. No wonder some courses are noted for discourteous players.

It is hard to keep your good behavior hour after hour at the first tee, answering the stock question, "When am I up?" time and time again to the same agitated player. But the good starter must keep that sweet expression of service and help. And the more nervous the player, the greater the will to serve should be practiced by the starter.

Often the method used in lining up players for the start is so obviously haphazard that in itself it is a source of dispute.

Fee Player's Idea of Rights

Golfers like to be led, not driven. They want to be asked, not told. They want to be invited, not ordered. The player looks to the starter for protection of his rights. He is the constitution and the court of equity all in one. In him is placed the confidence of a square deal.

Essentially the golfer has come out for a good time and relaxation. He wants to forget his worries, the strain of the office and maybe of the home. When he pays his money over the counter, one of the unlisted parts of the bargain is a right to relaxation. It is not an admission paid to a battle-field.

A starter should understand this mental attitude and avoid things that tend to irritate players, among which are: Order of starting, short answers to questions, crowding between foursomes, the teeing area crowded, caddies over-running the place, lack of interest in finding the pro, a certain caddie or any other person, loud talk near the first tee.

While visiting a course operator he told me he had a most profitable tournament that day from one of the largest banks in the city. He said: "I have had no trouble today of any kind." And it seemed to me everyone was happy.

Just then one of the players, who was pleasantly liquored and very talkative

stepped up to him and said, "We want to thank you for one of the finest days we've ever had. We're coming back. This is the first time we've been here.

"You know," he said, "we've been going over to the ——— golf course, but we're never going back. Over there they order you on the tee, they order you off the tee, they tell you you can't do this, you can't do that. They don't treat you like human beings. We like the course fine. It's a better course than yours but they treat us like we were cattle. We have had as fine a day as we could possibly have and we haven't had a single word spoken to us that hasn't been courteous. We're coming back by a unanimous vote, and are trying to organize another party next month."

Operator Needs Constant Alertness

To sell a golfer a ticket and make a golfer happy in buying it, to deliver 18 holes of golf without a regret on his part and send him home after six to eight hours of intimate contact with your entire staff is an art. That calls for real reading of character, under nerve-racking circumstances. That is an endurance contest and a maintenance of alertness from early morning to late at night, hour after hour, day in and day out.

Too much importance is placed upon the player taking advantage or chiseling the management. Regardless of what you say or do, there are just so many such persons. You will never change that few. They go on the theory "it costs nothing to ask." You will find them in every walk of life. They delight in breaking the rules. Forget them. Take the chip off your shoulders. Know what you want to do, how you want to run your course, and train every person on your staff to a happy courteous attitude and you will soon find your club is getting a real reputation.

N. J. Managers Form Chapter—New Jersey Chapter of the Club Managers Association of America has been formed as the outcome of informal sessions engineered by Wm. Norcross, Essex County CC manager. Officers elected for the new chapter's first year are:

Pres., Edward L. Grisinger, Crestmont GC; V. P., Clinton E. Wiener, Greenbrook CC; Sec., Lester W. Boyes, Montclair AC; Directors, Wm. Norcross, Essex County CC; Louis Parlamento, Tuxedo Club; J. J. Bond, Braidburn CC.