

Company Course Grows Fast

By Ellis Maples

Here is—we believe—one of the most significant articles GOLFDOM has printed in a long time. It reveals a trend of corporation foresight in making golf facilities an important feature of employees' welfare work. It shows that a fine 9-hole course can be self-sustaining. It shows that golf interest can be built up quickly when bright, well-trained, conscientious workers are on the job.

And it also shows how a young fellow whom we've regarded as representative of the very highest type of the younger generation in pro golf, can—with a wife who has a lot of ability, energy and charm—make a fine business of making other people, and themselves, happy.

—Editor.

THE Plymouth CC was organized and built by the North Carolina Pulp Co., a branch of the Kieckhefer Container Co., of Delair, N. J. The company had put a mill in Plymouth, and as the town was small with no housing facilities, a village of 31 houses was built for its officials. The country club was provided for the pleasure of both company people and residents of the town of Plymouth, which is just half a mile from the village.

On July 1st, 1937, the 55 acres selected to become the golf course, was a tract of

plowed land. On November 1st, just four months later, the course was opened for play, with fine grass greens, tees and fairways, covered, substantially, with Bermuda. The course was designed by William Flynn of Philadelphia; the actual construction work was under the supervision of Louis Wilson of Delray Beach, Fla., and the writer. The course is 3,306 yards long.

The clubhouse is beautifully furnished, and has eight large bedrooms upstairs. The company officials stay there on their visits to Plymouth. The rooms also are rented out as any hotel rooms are to travelers.

We have 135 members in good standing. Ours is a private club, and all members must be passed on and approved by a membership committee. There is a Board of Directors composed of 15 men; ten of these are employees of the pulp company, and five are residents of Martin or Washington counties. The mill leases the club to the members; and the club pays all its own expenses, including lease fee, from membership fees and money made on dances, suppers, etc.

I stayed on as pro and greenkeeper after the course was finished. I had been employed by the Mid-Pines CC as greenkeeper for 8 winters, and helping my father, Frank Maples, and Donald Bay

during the construction of the grass greens at Pinehurst, for the two years before coming to Plymouth. Golf was entirely new to nearly everyone in Plymouth, and it was rather hard to get the members interested. They couldn't see putting so much money into clubs or balls. However, it didn't take them long to get a few devotees; and now, everyone is playing.

As an inducement to new players, I gave two free lessons with every set of clubs sold. This was enough to get them interested, and most of the ones who started with these two lessons came back for more.

Frankly, I felt that after the first season here my market for new clubs would be about used up, and there would be very few sales, as the town is quite small—about 2,500 people.

Slump Didn't Materialize

However, right when I expected my slump, things started picking up. Those people who a year ago purchased cheap sets to start off with, began coming in for better quality clubs; and members upon whom I had given up hope of getting out to play, decided to take it up.

As one fellow said, "I had to take up golf in self-defense, as all the boys talked about was golf, and the language was Greek to me. I couldn't even stay in the conversation until I got out and learned something about it myself."

This is the only grass greens course in this part of the state and we are beginning to draw play from towns from 25 to 50 miles away. We have a group of very active members from Williamston, 22 miles away, and a few from Washington, N. C., 44 miles. The nearest grass green course is at Raleigh, which is 125 miles from here. Our greens are in excellent condition. In fact, players from other towns say they are the best in the state outside of the Pinehurst greens. As early as February 19th, we had well over a hundred players out. In fact, there were 225 nine-hole rounds of golf played. A year ago, we would have thought of rounds as a big day.

I have a small golf shop, and to keep a complete line of equipment and at all times. The majority of players are now using 75c balls. They thought a 25c ball expense was too high, they want the good ones.

My wife has remained from the day we opened; and she has a complete charge of the caddies and teaches

a number, when they are hired. Each day they check in by number, and are sent out in the order in which they are registered. For a nine-hole round we charge the player 30c. The caddie gets 25c and we get the nickel in lieu of a caddie-master's pay. The caddies are dismissed for stealing balls, or given a two-weeks vacation for minor infringements of rules. As a whole, they are very well behaved. A ball-marking machine, with dies for most of the members, has cut ball stealing down to a minimum.

Every once in a while some of the members get kind of cocky about their game, and think they don't need further instruction. Lessons begin to fall off. After a few weeks of this, I usually invite a visiting team over from some town that has an established club. After a sound beating from the visitors, you should hear the weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth over "how rotten my game is," and you should see them boil out for more instruction. Just once have they managed to beat the visitors, but lately the score has been nearly even.

Sometime last year there was published in GOLFDOM an article about a pro giving a series of lessons for \$20, including a movie reel of the player. That gave me an idea. I offered my members all the lessons they wanted to take for the six months beginning Feb. 1 and ending July 30, at a moderate flat fee.

Quite a few have taken me up on it. The idea brought in some ready cash, which always is a very important item to a pro who is building up a new job. These pupils and I both feel like the pupils are getting somewhere with lessons on this basis. They feel free to ask me at any time about certain little details of their swings that wouldn't come under the heading of real lessons, yet help them a lot.

I am sure that instruction on this basis is going to grow and be a good thing for members and pros.

This is really the most pleasant job I've ever had. My wife and I are kept very busy all the time, and the job ties us both down a lot, but we thoroughly enjoy it. The people are the friendliest we've ever come in contact with. We like them, and so we never have any trouble. It has been a real pleasure introducing them to the best sport in the world, and watching their interest develop with their game.

We feel that in a few years the Plymouth CC will be well known; and will have produced some good golfers.