

Tank-Town Pro-ology

Don't pity the small-town pro. Sound business judgment, plus psychology, pays out for him as well as for his big city brother. Don Young, of Clewiston, Fla., continues here his reminiscences.

By Don Young

EVERYTHING considered, there is no question as to the desirability to the pro of a big town club over a small one. Granted, the small club operator may not be required to meet such exacting conditions in some respects as is insisted on at the city layout. But he is faced with a highly important one—the dire necessity of making a living in a specialized profession from a very small group of people. So small a group, in truth, that if he stubs his toe on a single one he's very liable to find himself existing on beans and sow-belly before the first bluebird puts in an appearance the following spring.

I wish it were possible for someone to collect in one story all of the ideas and schemes that small-club pros have used in keeping off the WPA. The yarn should be not only a very amusing one, but a literary tribute to human courage, perseverance, and business acumen seldom equalled in any other occupation.

I'll never forget my first professional job. It was at a little cow-pasture club of 35 members in eastern Iowa. You'll ask me, of course, what I did there. I'll tell you—nothing. But the job did serve to convince me I could teach the game, so my efforts at the spot were anything but wasted. And I resolved to stick, win, lose or draw.

My First Indoor School

Late that fall I purchased a second-hand driving net from my friend George Taylor, professional at the Cedar Rapids (Ia.) CC. Making suitable arrangements with a local furniture and undertaking establishment, I installed this net in a corner of the store and opened a winter school. Believe it or not, I had exactly 35 pupils for all-winter study and practice. Of course, I had to take some of this out in trade at various places, but I lasted until spring at any rate.

It's simply amazing what an ambitious small-club pro can do with a winter school—especially when he is faced with the

necessity of eating. I've conducted several of them, against the advice of more mature brother pros, and every one, with a single exception, has been a professional and financial success. My single failure occurred at a club of 200 members. And although I had nearly 100 signed up for winter activity, old Mother Nature put the bee on me in the shape of impassable roads to the club. So I don't allow myself to grieve too much over that one stumble.

Very few pros seem to be successful with winter schools. Just why I cannot say. But one thing sure, you cannot simply erect a net and sit down and wait for the students to come in. I always started organizing my winter schools before the playing season closed, generally around October 1st. Select the ones you know need the training, sign them up, and then branch out from there.

I am of the opinion that winter study and practice under supervision is one of the finest methods of developing a sound golf swing. Some of my best pupils have emerged in the spring out of winter driving nets. And if I am ever again located in the North during the winter, I shall most certainly conduct a school if conditions will permit my doing so. Aside from the actual revenue a school brings in, it is one of the best means of keeping up club interest.

My next professional venture was at a town of 2,500 inhabitants. The club had never had a pro and was delighted with

Lou Miller, pro at Rock Springs GC, Alton, Ill., has given an impressive demonstration of how a pro can "make" his job. When Miller went to Rock Springs in 1935, the club had 25 members. Now it has 205. Much of his first year's work was devoted to getting the course in condition to attract members. Then the job of soliciting new members began in earnest.

Rock Springs dues are \$66 annually. A locker costs \$2 a year. There is no initiation fee. It's Miller's belief that if the PGA gets around to a pro business school course which so many pros desire, that pro education in club membership solicitation alone will make the enterprise highly profitable to pros and clubs.

Danny Williams, one of the Westchester school of pros, was given a grand send-off by members of Shackamaxon CC where he's been for 20 years, the last 14 as pro. Danny goes to Crestmont (N. J.) CC, having been chosen from among 100 applicants. At Shackamaxon Danny developed a number of amateur stars, among them Charlotte Glutting.

the idea. So was I. I thought I saw possibilities there. And I was anxious to try out my wings in this interesting new profession I had taken up.

The club had a neat little 9-hole layout and 55 members. Of that number about 25 played golf. A clever little clubhouse of three floors was arranged with showers and lockers on the first floor, dining-room and dance floor another flight up, and living quarters just under the roof. The club president sealed our verbal agreement with these words:

"We can't pay you a salary but we'll certainly give you all the breaks."

It's a Secret Order

I am completely convinced that all small club officials belong to some secret order and are under oath to deliver the above to their pros before they take up their professional duties. I've heard that song-and-dance done in two sharps, three flats, and in the key of "C". I've also heard it delivered in baritone, contralto, soprano, whiskey tenor, and basso profundo. But the words were always the same.

At any rate, the job caught me in the usual and inevitable financial status of a small-club pro in the spring—practically broke. I was faced with the necessity of saving my few dimes for eating money for a few weeks until things caught on. And at the same time it was imperative that I procure some sort of fixtures and show-cases with which to open a fairly presentable place of business.

After looking the situation over I decided there was but one spot in which I could operate; that was in one end of the men's locker-room. Accordingly, I sought out a downtown business man, who happened to be a club member, and told my story. This man proved to be a regular fellow and today remains one of my staunchest friends. He unearthed from his basement a huge old desk belonging originally to his great-great grandfather. This ancient piece of bric-a-brac was 7 ft. long, 4 ft. high, and covered with 50 years' accumulation of dust, plaster and cobwebs.

My friend became so enthused over the idea that he had this ponderous mass of

old-world architecture delivered to the club at no charge. And after presenting me with enough paint to refinish it, hauled me away to a grocery store pal of his who promptly dug out an antique cigar case from the depths of a cavernous storm cellar. Twenty-four hours later the desk was a bar and the cigar case held my small stock of balls. My shop was equipped.

In looking over the equipment situation I found a general store in town carrying a fairly comprehensive line of clubs and balls. Having no funds with which to purchase a decent showing of stock, although my credit was good, I gave the matter some thought and finally approached the owner of this emporium in somewhat the following manner:

"Mister, I'm the new pro at your country club. I'm making my living here now and what money I spend will be spent in this town. However, I notice you carry a line of golf equipment. Now it just occurs to me that this town has about as much use for two golf stocks as it has for two cemeteries. What can we do about it?"

Eliminating Competition

After some deliberation he made me two propositions. He would either sell me his golf stock, or I could take his entire stock to the club and dispose of same on a liberal commission basis. Exhibiting just the proper amount of hesitation I agreed to the latter course—and immediately made a friend and booster out of what might have been a plenty tough competitor.

Well, we both made money. And every Monday morning I handed my silent partner a check for the past week's sales, less my commission. Also, a stock report. I had not a cent invested, no stock on my hands at the end of the season, and could buy anything I needed on his account. The business that boy steered into my shop was surprising. And when the following season rolled around he very generously stepped out of the equipment picture and let me have it on my own.

In the very small clubs I have found it extremely important to play ball with the local business men. The small town business man may have his faults. He may be eccentric and inclined to narrow-minded opinions. But once he goes to bat for you he generally stays in the box. And he knows a square shooter when he sees one.

The man mentioned above was a school board member, and when going over some

athletic purchases for the high school, noted a set of golf clubs for the superintendent. This incident occurred after I had taken over the golf business on my own. He immediately cancelled the order and advised the superintendent that no golf equipment would be purchased wholesale by school employees as long as Don Young was in town. The result was that I finally sold enough clubs throughout the school faculty to take a large, juicy bite out of the commission licking I had incurred the previous year.

I increased the membership of that club the first year from 55 to 90 by the simple method of firing with enthusiasm every member, club official and committee with whom I came in contact. The golfers increased from 25 haphazard ones to 75 active ones. Play over a three-month period showed a daily average of 52 golfers.

Must Hold Pep

There's one thing a small-club pro must guard against—loss of enthusiasm. If he loses that he is truly lost. The club spirit of small golf clubs, for some unexplained reason, is inclined to sag in the middle on the slightest provocation. And it is strictly up to the pro to keep a supporting pillar of enthusiasm at this point of sag.

The successful professional at a small club must constantly have his head working at some scheme to pick up some extra money, and in doing so must promote the idea so as to benefit and be an enthusiasm-builder to the club itself. Lessons and sales, in most cases, don't seem to quite cover. There must be a plug from another quarter. Also, whatever form the idea may assume, he should be mighty careful to adjust same to meet local conditions, and be further confident the gag will show an ultimate profit.

In my early days in the pro game I was forced to cook up such schemes from honest necessity. One of the first and most successful I hit upon was the tournament-exhibition idea. It's been played to death, you say? Of course. But it's amazing what can still be done with it if you are in the right spot and use your head.

The first show of this kind I ever staged

Donald Duck has become a propagandist for golf. RKO-Radio's Technicolor "Donald's Golf Game" has a plot in which Donald turns pro to show the game to his nephews, Huey, Dewey and Louie. Donald's not so lucky as a pro. Jack Level, golf nut, is handling Donald's golf publicity for RKO-Radio and doing a grand job.

was at the club last mentioned. I made arrangements with two pros and two amateurs, all pals of mine, and all far enough away to be well but not personally known. One of the pros was my old teacher, Tom H. Harris, now located at the Mason City (Iowa) CC. Tom is an Englishman with a colorful personality. The amateurs were always in the thick of the fight for the state championship title.

I've found if you can't inject some color into these events you are just wasting your time. The old tournament-exhibition day has become a dismal, dreary affair. So figure out something to whip it up.

As I said, these boys were all pals of mine, and as they knew I was trying to make a dollar, most generously refused to accept compensation further than a scotch-and-soda. This assured me of a profit if anyone at all appeared.

I had 1,000 handbills run off in a bright color featuring Tom H. Harris, former exhibition player to the King and Queen of England. (Which fortunately happened to be a fact.) Tom and an amateur from his club would take on another well-known pro and amateur in a best-ball match at my club such-and-such a date. I hit every club, bulletin board, business house, filling station, and cross-roads store within 50 miles with those blazing dodgers. And followed it up with a story in every newspaper in that area.

Plenty for Fifty Cents

The fifty-cent admission included golf privileges for the day, competition in a tournament for valuable prizes, and admission to the exhibition. In other words, I made the price and show so attractive that no golfer in that area could turn it down. And I gave away exactly \$25.00 in prizes out of my stock.

I left tickets for the event in every store in town, and the club cooperated by appointing committees for ticket sales. Also, I didn't overlook free passes to everyone I could think of that would be sure to bring a party with him.

I staged that first circus event, like a fool, on Thursday. Sunday would have been much preferable. But the result left me gasping, nevertheless. There were 345 paid admissions and an estimated crowd of 500. They were there in ages from 8 to 80. And as the club was easily accessible to gate-crashers, I lost plenty in that respect. But I had visitors from as far as 300 miles away.

The club held a dinner dance that night which was attended by 160 club members.

Eddie Bush says he has the farthest latitudinal span of jobs of any pro in the world. In the summer Eddie's at Norway (Me.) CC and in the winter at Key West (Fla.) CC. In both places the pleasant, competent kid is a great promoter of golfing interest. On the Maine job he has been active in organization and play at tournaments that have developed lively golf ven among natives and resorters, and at the U. S. farthest south job, Key West, has been responsible for reviving the spot as a golf resort.

The visiting stars gave talks and everyone had a grand time. The next issue of the local paper described the event as the most successful and colorful one-day affair ever staged in the community.

And I made some dough!

During my two years at that club I staged two more of those shows, one just six weeks later. But in each case I was mighty careful to cook up something unusual that would interest people.

The second show featured two 11 year old girls who could really hit a golf ball, and who had been publicized considerably in papers throughout the state. They drew 250 on a cold, late-September afternoon. One of the young stars, incidentally, was the surprising Edith Estabrooks of Dubuque, Iowa, recognized at the time as a child golfing prodigy. Since that time Edith has won the Iowa State Women's title many times and is a front-rank threat in any national competition.

The following year Lucille Robinson of Des Moines played an exhibition for me. Lucille was Iowa State and Women's Western champion at the time. She drew 225 to a beautiful exhibition to watch. But the gate warned me that the boys and girls thereabouts were beginning to cool off on this sort of thing. So I dropped the idea like a hot potato. It's fully as important to know when to quit as it is to know when to go ahead.

One of the mid-west's most beautiful golf clubs was located just fifty miles away in a city of 65,000. Each year they featured, at some time during the season, Walter Hagen, Gene Sarazen, Joe Kirkwood or some other famous star. And they advised me their attendance top never exceeded 200.

Which just goes to prove what well-handled publicity will do, even in the sticks.

Don Young continues his story of small-town pro experiences in next month's issue.

Gives Clergy Passes

DAILY fee golf course operation in the Omaha metropolitan area is dominated by Henry C. Glissmann, who manages with skill born of years' experience two 18-hole layouts—Valley View and Dundee,—and a 9-hole course known as Harrison Heights, and who this spring will start construction of another 18-hole fee course to be ready late this season or early in 1940. Nine more holes, a course for women, will go in next year.

Naturally, operating on so large a scale, Glissmann overlooks no bets that will increase patronage at his layouts. His sense of publicity values keeps the courses constantly in the minds of Omaha's fee players, and after he gets them to the courses, he sees that all possible "private club" features are available.

A typical Glissmann publicity move consists of giving season passes to the clergymen of Omaha. To many fee course operators, such a policy has the earmarks of a harmless gesture—the passes do no harm, but also not much good. Glissmann thinks differently. He says:

"I believe our plan of issuing season passes to the clergymen of Omaha should be brought to the attention of other course managers throughout the country, because when you have the clergy as golf-minded as we keep ours, they become the best missionaries for golf you could possibly get. In Omaha alone, these men have 75,000 to 100,000 constituents to whom they preach weekly. They are an advertising medium the worth of which is hard to estimate."

Glissmann is a member of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Omaha. He concludes: "I know our whole congregation is golf-minded by the Christmas gifts our members shower on the pastor—golf balls, tees, clubs and accessories."

PHIL MARTIGNETTI, pro at St. Johnsbury (Vt.) CC, began a class of free instruction for girl students at St. Johnsbury academy and made it yield an income for his club by selling playing privileges to the students at \$10 a term, the privileges being restricted to times when play of club members would not be inconvenienced.

Thirty-five girls comprised the first year's class. The first year went over so well that boys' classes were added the following term and golf made an active part of the academy athletic curriculum.