

Tank-Town Pro-ology

Don Young, of Clewiston, Fla., continues his highly interesting reminiscences of small-town pro joys and sorrows

By Don Young

OF ALL the promotional weapons available to the small town pro, newspaper publicity is by far the most effective and the least used. My first promotional step in any new job has been to contact the local editor, tell my story, and endeavor to get him thinking my way. If you can convince him that his paper is the one horse on which both the club and yourself can ride to success, you've hurdled the first big obstacle in going places at that spot.

But after you've hurdled that obstacle don't forget about it. Make use of every available inch of space he will allow you, and make use of it every issue of the season. If you can't write the stuff just jot it down in your own words and he'll have it rewritten. You'll be surprised how far these small town editors will go if they believe in you.

In some instances I've even kept a column going in my home club paper throughout the winter, even though I might be 2,000 miles away. After the New Year's headache is over, golfers like to think about and read golf chatter. Even the non-golfers will go for it. It brings to mind warm, green scenes, when the landscape is an icy blanket. And it clicks! I've even convinced some people to take up the game through that very medium.

Appeasing the Pastor

I believe one of the most amazing and fortunate strokes of publicity I was ever able to put across occurred in a certain town where I was struggling along fighting inexperience, poverty, and lack of recognition. The pastor of the largest church in town was a good friend of mine. I admired the man for his sincerity, although it did appear to me he carried his religious scruples to extremes at times. A large percentage of my club membership belonged to his church.

This pious gentleman lit on me one day like the proverbial load of crockery. It seemed he was very much put out that the Sunday morning golf activities at my

club were so attractive as to make yawning chasms of a good share of his church pews. After literally stripping me naked as a living example of the machinations of the devil, he left me with threatening gestures and in very much of a huff.

After giving the matter no little consideration, I called on this gentleman one evening. We sat in his study and hashed the proposition over pro and con. The upshot of it was—I appeared as a guest speaker in his church the following Sunday evening.

Can you harken back to years gone by and recollect certain occurrences that in spite of the healing of time shall bring a peculiar feeling in your midsection and perspiration on your upper lip? I can. And this one instance is outstanding to me.

I looked over that solemn-faced congregation and felt the back of my neck catch fire and my feet turn to ice. My knees started trucking, cold sweat trickled down my spine, and there was a feeling in my chest comparable only to the recent swallowing of an over-stuffed basketball. I tried to speak—but no sound issued. Someone, way in the back, tittered. But I gulped once—twice—and let 'em have it!

To this day I don't know what I said. But the gist of the harangue was along the lines that the pastor had been very kind in helping me solve a number of troublesome problems at my club since coming there. But in doing so he had been forced to turn over to me a good percentage of his Sunday morning worshippers. And as I had accepted this situation rather nonchalantly, and had thrown nothing his way in return, he, the minister, felt I might possibly be fudging a little on the Marquis of Queensbury.

Pretty soon I managed to draw a few smiles and the tension relaxed. And from there on in it was in the bag. I explained that both the pastor and I felt that any man or woman who played golf on Sunday morning and failed to show up at church Sunday evening was a snake of some variety comparable only to the type that



GOLFDOM runs this just as a reminder of what the greenkeeper is up against. Here's one out of the files of A. L. (Gus) Brandon, supt. at St. Charles (Ill.) CC. The afternoon of April 4, last year, Brandon mowed his fairways. The morning of April 5 his mowers were partially buried by a belated blizzard.

invaded the Garden of Eden. Consequently, we had made a gentleman's agreement. Hereafter I was to attend church every Sunday evening and bring with me a list of the players competing in my morning golf activities. And any man or woman that had gambled on my greens in the A. M., and failed to put in an appearance at P. M. church services, was to furnish the oysters for a club and church oyster supper the following Thursday night.

Well sir, I honestly feel I did a fair job of selling both the club and the church to those people. The townspeople caught the humor and spirit of fair play of the thing and went for it in a big way. One man was stuck for oysters twice, once claiming some of the boys locked him in the City Hall during services. Anyway, it brought my club to the consideration of the town in a light I had never before considered possible. My Sunday morning tournaments showed an actual increase of 25%. And the preacher claimed it whipped up his take 33 1/3. Whatever the result, a definite liability was turned into a productive asset. But—phew! I wouldn't go through that again for the Miami-Biltmore.

Building Inter-Club Play

A small-club pro can, with a little thought and effort, do a good job of selling his club to the community through the columns of the local newspaper. But unfortunately, too often the publicity plug for the club is confined to the announcement and results of the club championship.

Small clubs throughout the rural sections generally do, as a rule, engage in inter-club competition. The idea is not only a good one but an interest-stimulator and enthusiasm builder as well. The scheme can, however, be put in operation on a larger scale and to a much greater advantage.

I spent three years at two different clubs that belonged to an eight-club playing association. All of these clubs made up a regular Sunday schedule of inter-club competition for play throughout the season. Around September 1st, which I always argued was a trifle early, the association staged a championship meet. This was a 36-hole medal play affair with each club represented by a 10-man team. The medalist of this event was association champion and there was a team championship as well.

This meet was staged at a different club each year and a \$2 entry fee was charged. The host club received this revenue as well as all other income derived from holding the event.

No Patronage Lost

Of course under such a plan you'll see a goodly number of your boys trooping away twice a month to play at some other club. But every other week you welcome fully as great a number from a visiting club, and every golfer and non-golfer in your club is out to make them feel at home and see the play. So the percentage is balanced, with the added advantage of increased interest.

Competition for a place on the 10-man team was very spirited. In fact it was a veritable dog fight. I always adjusted the methods of selecting this team, as well as the two alternates, so as to make a man's chances of gaining a berth greater the more golf he played. But whatever the method, those small town golfers fought for 10-man team assignments. Which served to increase play considerably.

This playing group, the Eastern Iowa Golf Association, is the finest of its type I have ever encountered in small-club experience. Clubs or pros desiring information concerning same should get in touch with Earl Coughlin, sports editor of the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Gazette.

The merchandising problems of the pro at the large club is apple pie as compared to the problems of the boy in the hayfields. The former is, of course, always nudged by the downtown cut-price and close-out artist. But the country lad is badgered and knawed on from every quarter and angle. And he cannot, by any means, be burdened with a financial tie-up of stock at the end of the season.

It took three years of sophomoric judgment for me to get wise to myself in this respect. And when the problem was solved

satisfactorily, it left me wondering how I could have been so dumb.

The first step I made in extracting myself from the merchandising morass was to completely sell myself on one line, stock it, preach it, and sell it. No small-club pro can possibly feature several different lines of equipment, comprehensively display each, and do justice to any of them.

Consequently, when I finally got wise to myself I engaged the representative of a certain firm in conference, outlined the situation and expressed my views. He fell in with the idea whole-heartedly. And as a result that firm played cricket with me all the way. They extended me every possible courtesy, including elastic credit arrangements that would have been impossible to obtain otherwise, and full cooperation in other respects. Under this arrangement this firm enjoyed a nice volume of business from my account. And I in turn had less money tied up in stock, a better display, quicker turnover, less credit worry, faster and more satisfactory replacement troubles, and other advantages too numerous to mention. This plan, of course, cannot be applied to balls.

Many of you, perhaps, will feel that some sales will be muffed under this plan. That's entirely up to you. I know my volume showed a 60% increase the first year I inaugurated the idea. And if "Doc" Brown wants nothing but a set of Flub's irons, and you stock only Whiff's, it's up to you to see that he gets Flub's—and from you. The mails are always running and all manufacturers will honor your order—especially if backed up with money.

Line Picked with Care

In selecting such a line of equipment I chose one whose policy did not include flagrant distribution of wholesale catalogues and prices to every Tom, Dick and Harry. It's the only way out. Why endeavor to sell Flub's clubs when half the business houses in town can buy them wholesale?

Further, why fight a downtown merchant with his own ammunition? More often than not he is situated much better financially to stock a comprehensive showing than you are.

To convince you of the feasibility of this plan, I'll give you a concrete experience. In one club where I operated, practically every golf line in the country was represented somewhere in town. My chosen line simply bought up all of their representative's stock in that town and assigned

the line exclusively to me. I went to work with a vengeance. Twelve months later there were only 8 out of 16 golf stocks left in town, and of those 16, 12 had attempted to obtain the line I represented.

As regards the ball situation, any small pro who buys at one time more than enough for two week's sales is a fool. A simple stock record is easy to keep and the stock can be checked in ten minutes every Monday morning. This assures fresh stock on hand, shows you what balls are moving, and eliminates burdensome ball bills piling up at one time.

Pro-Only Policy Okay

The pro-only policy adopted by some ball and club manufacturers has my unqualified approval. The line may not be so well known, and consequently not so much in demand. But it does assure the pro of merchandise that will not appear in cut-price drug and dime stores downtown. And you can make a leader of the line in your community if you believe in it and push it. There is, however, a kick-back occasionally with those lines that forget their advertised policy.

I recall a situation of this kind in a club of 200 members, where a downtown merchant had stocked and operated the pro-shop for some time. Upon arriving there I found this man with a tremendous stock of pro-only balls, which he in no sense of the word was entitled to possess. In fact, the original stock had been so large that what was left had been carried over from the previous winter.

I immediately squawked to the manufacturer and was advised this merchant obtained the stock from one of their western distributors who had given up the ghost and sold out at a loss. Which, to my mind, did not put the house in the clear, because they could have taken the stock back.

At any rate, the manufacturer did not choose to take up this stock, even at retail figures if necessary, in order to clear the atmosphere for me. And as a result the balls were sold at cut prices downtown that season. And being dead stock, everyone who bought them howled. But the howl helped me very little—and the manufacturer not at all. It simply ruined the line in that community, and I've never bought a ball of that house since that time.

More of Don Young's
pro-ology next month