

Rockford Pros Doing Well

By Herb Graffis

GOLFDOM'S staff recently made a study of the golf situation in Rockford, Ill., as part of this magazine's persistent hunt for golf operating, market and development data. Rockford, with 90,000 population, has been developed by live pro and park department work into a city where at least 200,000 rounds of golf will be played this year. This is considerably above the national average.

From time to time there have been references in GOLFDOM to pro activities in Rockford. When Bill Gordon, now of Tam O' Shanter CC (Chicago district) was at Rockford he taught winter indoor classes of public utility company employees that established a practice now widely followed by pros in obtaining a good winter income.

Runs Driving Range

Gunnar Nelson, pro at the Rockford CC., has been frequently mentioned as a developer of young golfers who have won state and other titles. This sort of development work is one of the surest means of increasing golf play among the boys and girls and an interest that warms the parents to the game. Gunnar also has a fine practice range on a heavily-travelled road near his club, and just outside the city limits. The range does a capacity business in the evenings and is well patronized in the mornings and afternoons.

Like all other of the Nelson operations, the range is neat and equipment is considerably above the average at ranges. Patrons are supplied with good golf balls, and that helps business. Conspicuous markings of the balls and reasonable supervision keep theft at a minimum.

Nelson recently has been through a session of poor health. The reason for it is something that should warn all pros. He has a heavy teaching schedule and would come in from sweating on the lesson tee to cool off with a couple of ice-cold cokes. The belly rebelled.

A newcomer in his second year as pro at Rockford's Forest Hills Country Club, is Jock Hutchison, Jr., son of the internationally known veteran star. This is Jock, Jr.'s first big job. He was at the Four Seasons Club, a summer resort, for

one year. Two years he served as assistant to Alex Cunningham, Illinois PGA president, at North Shore CC (Chicago district).

The Forest Hills club has 330 members of whom 290 are golfers. It has an attractive course and handsome clubhouse. Membership is mainly of the younger businessmen and their families. Members are of moderate circumstances and of a lively temperament. They are intent on getting good value for their money.

Every bag rack in the shop is taken. Young Hutch sees to it that the clubs get more than just a dash of the buffer. Shafts, heads and grips are kept clean and touched up so members' attention to their equipment is developed.

Jock, Jr. competes with stores for the members' business but he won't carry junk in his shop. Careful shopping and a good cash and credit record enables him to pick up close-out lines and pass on bargains to the Forest Hills people. However, by far the greater part of his club business is in the better grades. He features leading lines of clubs and keeps dropping tactful sales talks to his members so that he has implanted in them the idea of having first class equipment.

Golfers Must Enter Shop

His shop is located at an entrance to the men's locker-room and handy to the first tee. He has new and attractive show-cases, carpeting on the floor, venetian blinds on the window, and inviting summer furniture in a corner of the shop where members and guests can loaf and look over golf literature. He has golf equipment catalogs on the table in this corner and has sold considerable merchandise from these catalogs.

The young fellow is a lively merchant in every respect. He uses the selling ideas instead of letting them lie around. The Wilson demonstration set has sold 9 sets of irons for him thus far this season. He has had repeated offers to sell his own set of clubs but deftly turns them down by putting on a personalized fitting of clubs for the prospective buyer.

His accessory and apparel business is

good. He carries a fine stock of sports hosiery, headwear and gloves and is constantly reordering. He does a highly profitable golf shoe business.

Members can charge or pay cash at the shop. Jock, Jr. does his own collecting. Last year he didn't lose a penny in bad accounts.

The Hutchison boy has an excellent assistant in Francis (Curley) Williamson. They run the shop end of the business on the platform that selling service at a pro-shop should be one of the valuable features of club membership. The members are not high-pressured to buy. They're told, discreetly, what will help them. Women who are new to the game, and children, have low priced clubs in the Hutchison stock fitted to them with as much care as received by those whose game warrants more expensive equipment.

Club Has Full Calendar

There is a lot of club tournament interest at Forest Hills. From 130 to 170 play on Ladies' Day. There are two or three twilight mixed foursomes each summer month, with a 50 cent entry fee for the team. Husband and wife cannot be on the same team. The entry fee is spent on prizes. Half the field gets prizes. From 80 to 120 enter these events.

Hutchison puts on Saturday and Sunday A.M. blind bogeys and raffles. He says he might be able to run more of these things but he doesn't want to overdo them. After all, the idea is to encourage low cost and interesting competition and the competitors have to play with clubs and balls which Hutch, Jr. has for sale in his shop.

The rain jacket business is something else young Jock has promoted. He's sold a lot of them, and of everything else. Business is well ahead of last year even though the course was closed for two weeks by heavy spring rains.

One of the great helps to the young fellow in developing his job has been the cordial interest and cooperation of Andy Gillett, course supt. at the club. Gillett has done grand work in getting the course in condition and enjoys a deserved close acquaintanceship with directors and members. He began plugging for the new pro when young Jock got on the job, and as in every other club, the cooperation of a veteran employee smoothed over many a rough spot.

A rough spot that greeted young Jock soon after he got the Forest Hills job

was a caddie strike. The kids went out on a Ladies' Day. Hutchison explained the situation to the women and they caddied for themselves. The strike ended the next day.

Since that time Hutchison has devoted considerable attention to caddie recruiting, training and supervision. This year he found the PGA caddie educational charts extremely helpful. The caddies as yet haven't voted Young Hutch in as America's sweetheart but they are respectful and very much on the job. In fact the caddying job done at Forest Hills is about as good as you'll find at any club in any city. The kids seem to realize they're in the army now.

By easing around and visiting with all the members who come to the club Hutchison has built his lesson business until it includes about 90% of the members. Approximately half of them are steady pupils. Jock, Jr. runs free classes for members' kids each Saturday morning.

The young man is handling his job like it's a real business and not simply a pleasant way of making money by playing golf.

Patty Berg Turns Pro to Plug Women's Play

PATTY BERG, 1938 Women's National champion, runner-up in 1937 and 1935, and winner of numerous regional titles, has turned pro to represent the Wilson Sporting Goods Co. in a promotional capacity.

Patty's work will be mainly among students at girls' schools and among girl members of the larger industrial and commercial employees' organizations. Later her field will be enlarged to educational work with women and girls groups as features of municipal golf programs.

Out of 60 fast-field tournaments in which Patty played she was winner of 29, runner-up in 14 and semi-finalist in 4. She was medalist in 30 of the events. As team-mates on the Wilson women's promotional staff Patty has Helen Hicks Harb, Opal Hill and Helen Dettweiler.

Miss Berg made her pro debut at a lunch given by L. B. Icely, Wilson president. She told officials of women's and men's pro and amateur golf associations and newspapermen present of her ambition in extending women's golf play.