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What Events?

The author believes he has uncovered, after many years of experiment, the factors that insure the popularity of a club's golf-event calendar

By B. F. Wysson

"WELL, what are we going to give 'em this year?" Early each spring, every golf pro in the country has these words thrown at him by his tournament chairman. The tournament committee, of course, always bobs up with some ideas of its own—and some of them mighty good ones, too. But for the most part the gentlemen rely on the pro, a perfectly natural thing from their standpoint, because the pro—well, he is the pro—and he should know about such things.

The yearly problem of staging an attractive tournament program for any active golf club is truly a nerve-racking one. Last year's program may be pulled out of the mothballs and rehashed and juggled around to look entirely new. But before the season is half gone the members begin to realize that they are merely chewing on the same old steak that was served them last year, glossed over in a figurative dress of butter sauce. And that state of mind makes a definite difference in participation figures.

The pro's realization that his tourna-

ment program is proving a gilt-edge flop generally sends him and the tournament committee into a nervous huddle. Much head-scratching and nail-chewing is in order in a frantic effort to discover or invent something that will provide the necessary spark for bolstering up a program that seems to be of little or no interest to the club membership as a whole. The condition has been aptly termed "mid-summer doldrums," and just how difficult it is to avoid this almost inevitable lethargic state, only a conscientious pro and tournament committee know.

In casting about for this elusive and necessary spark, one finds, unhappily, that there isn't very much new in golf events. It is true that some bright boy bobs up each season with something new and spicy. But you have learned long ago that this tournament-race business, in order to attract the crowd, must have not one winner but a lot of them. And mighty few also-rans.

The mystery of supplying a club, either private or public, with a successful and

interesting tournament program is probably never completely solved until the pro wakes up to the fact that the problem is not one of holding a lot of "screwball" events, but a matter of simple locker-room psychology. In other words, it's not **what** they play but **how** they play it. The guy who wrote the song "It's Not What You Do, It's the Way You Do It," inadvertently hit the tournament nail squarely on the head.

The writer confesses to having stumpled around in the tournament wilderness a good many years before getting hep to above fact. And the time necessary for penetration of same through a rather thick skull was considerably lengthened before discovering that what gets four large bells at one club will sometimes barely rate a lukewarm baby's rattle at another.

No Avoiding Cliques

The most vital necessity in considering an attractive club tournament program is to first stare facts full in the face. Probably the most outstanding—and likewise deplorable—of these facts is that golfers, as a class, are "cliquey." They have certain friends or golfing pals whom they prefer playing with, and their enjoyment of the game is, as a rule, not complete unless they are playing with these friends.

As a general thing, the first consideration by a tournament committee in regards to the year's tournament program, is consideration of the club's playing "cliques." Ways and means are advanced and launched in an effort to break up that John Jones-Bill Smith foursome, and thereby (illogically) promote a more congenial and comradely spirit among the club's golfing membership as a whole. And mistake No. 1 is born!

There's no doubt the idea has some merit. But whether you are located in Kickapoo, Maine, or Wild Pansy, Kansas, you must admit that breaking up of the club's playing "cliques" acts as a damper on the success of the tournament program. John, Bill, and all the rest of the boys will cooperate for a time, but about the middle of the season Bill will corner John in the locker-room and say:

"Look, I'm getting tired of this playing with every Tom, Dick and Harry. How about skipping the tournaments for awhile and getting the old gang together again for some real fun?"

Then the doldrums have arrived!

The sacrificing of any club's playing "cliques" for the good of the club is a sure short-cut to tournament suicide. These genial groups can be successfully disrupted about twice or three times a season. Beyond that you are inviting trouble.

Unless your club is a notable exception, a careful canvass of the membership of any average golf club will disclose that a very small percentage indeed care for what might be termed "screwball events." Driving through barrels, putting with niblicks, using clubs in rotation, etc., looks good on paper and sounds like a lot of clean fun. It is—about once a season. But golfers as a whole are competitive minded, and it takes but about two of these so-called side-splitters to sour a whole season's tournament program.

Some years ago I hit on a sure-fire solution of the tournament problem by mailing questionnaires to club members requesting them to name the events they most enjoyed playing. I used the returns of these questionnaires as a basis for arranging the following season's program—and suffered a neat 20 per cent loss in tournament entries.

Checking back in an effort to find the answer to that riddle, I discovered that the events requested were, with but two exceptions, good old tried and true ones. And by keeping my ears open in the locker-rooms and pro-shop, I finally concluded it was not the events that made the program a success or failure, but the way the events were handled.

Make 'Em Challenge

Using the same event list for the following year, I made every tournament of the season, with the exception of the club championship, handicap championship, and three other events, a **challenge** tournament. Tournament events were weekly affairs at the club and instead of working my head off getting entries and matching them by draw at the clubhouse, I let every man challenge his own opponent. And man alive, how they went for it—for a 30 per cent increase over the biggest tournament season I had ever experienced prior to that time.

To ease my conscience on the "clique" thing I made two of the season's affairs "lot" drawings, and the other a simple handicap "play against par."

The challenge idea is certainly not a

new one. But just as certainly, it has never been given the proper play generally that it merits in the average club's playing program. Golfers like the competitive spirit of the challenge. Further, it relieves the pro of the responsibility of matching (with sometimes dire results), does not disrupt the club's "cliques," and promotes the competitive spirit of any club wonderfully.

These Are Sure-Fire

A number of events that are nicely adapted to the challenge idea are:

Match play twosomes; medal play twosomes; match nassau twosomes; medal nassau twosomes; low-ball—low total foursomes; medal nassau threesomes; nassau threesomes on the popular "skin" basis; any of the above as handicap affairs.

That small list alone is good for 14 competitive events that will hold any golfer's interest from the first hole through the 18th, and from April to November. Many other variations are possible.

Best results are obtained by confining the entire season's program, for the most part, to a man-to-man competitive basis, instead of playing everyone against the field. Award prizes to the winner or winners of each match, setting aside a certain portion of every entry fee for awarding field prizes such as low gross, low net, high net, most 4's, most 6's, etc. This gives even the match losers a chance at prizes—and how golfers like to win 'em, regardless of what the prizes may be.

The challenge idea may be made an integral part of the season's program by awarding a trophy for the year to the competitor scoring the most points in, for example, 10 challenge events. Prominent, up-to-date postings of standings serves to promote discussions of same and keep interest at a high pitch.

If your club is suffering from the tournament doldrums, just throw some "challenge" events at them and watch the interest revive. Well-timed and tactful match suggestions, at any time during the week, will prove a potent promotional weapon in your hands.

This coming season analyze the events your members like best, and give them what they want on a "challenge" basis. You'll find it an effective aspirin for tournament headaches—and well within the desires and dignity of every golfer, whether his handicap be 3 or 30.

WHAT DO YOU DO With Your Used Equipment?

By "A Dealer"

Here's a warning—and a wail—from one of the best known golf course equipment and supply dealers.

The trade-in mess he mentions has been whispered about long enough. Somebody's got to bring it out into the open—so here goes.

Greenkeepers at the GSA convention in New York, and at other meetings for the past few years, have talked about phases of the trade-in mess this dealer doesn't mention. They have complained that they got unreasonably large trade-in allowances on old equipment only to have their chairmen tell them that at neighboring clubs bigger allowances were granted on equipment so far gone the man who took it on a trade-in didn't even go to the trouble of removing it. Such cases unjustly make a good greenkeeper look bad.

The manufacturers' improvement in his product, and the manufacturers' and dealers' hope of a necessary profit, both are offset by the sale becoming a matter of giving away money rather than selling performance.

However, with full sympathy for the conscientious and harassed dealer in his plight, we suspect that the greenkeeper and chairman will comment on this trade-in matter: "It's bad business, but if they try to see who can be the biggest sucker, why shouldn't we take them?"—Editor.

I DOUBT if there is a man reading this article who has not traded a used car towards another used car or a new car. Having been through that experience, he knows the problem facing the dealer every time a prospect drives up to his door.

The golf equipment business hasn't quite the trade-in trouble of the automobile industry, but it is rapidly heading towards the same dangerous position. And to make the situation more alarming, golf equipment hasn't a market of the automobile's.

The good manufacturer my firm represents spends thousands of dollars in improving his equipment. This goes to engineers, field men, shop men, and to raw material makers, all in the hope that each year his machines will be better made, will stand up longer with less trouble and expense for the user, look better, handle better, and be more acceptable to the eye.