

Long Beach Molds Future Champs

By Bob Hall

OTHER cities throughout these United States may boast of greater numbers or more varied offerings in their fine junior instruction programs under supervision of PGA professionals, but the resort city of Long Beach, Calif., will stack its record against any in the nation when it comes to itemizing the results.

Long Beach's junior instruction program was inaugurated 12 years ago by Larry Gleason, then professional at the Municipal Links at Recreation Park, and now pro at Virginia CC here. At that time the mass instruction idea was just blossoming. Every summer since then, soon after school vacations begin, a series of free, weekly lessons have been offered by PGA professionals at the city-owned and operated links at Recreation Park. First given by Gleason (1928-1930), the program has been followed annually by Heinie Maurer (1931), Dal Jeffers (1932-33), Harry Bassler (1934-39) and now George Lake, new Municipal pro at Recreation Park.

Agers Range from 7 to 20

The professionals have given a series of six one-hour instruction periods, twice weekly, open to all boys 16 and under and for girls 20 and under. Ages have ranged from 7-years-old to 20. In the eleven years never more than 100 nor less than 50 youngsters have availed themselves of the opportunity to learn correct golfing technique.

Effort has been made in this period to teach the youngsters correct grip, stance and swing and the etiquette of the game. Those without clubs are furnished them by the pros, while the pro equipment lasts, and also by interested golfers of the city.

As an adjunct to the city program, the three high schools and junior college have golf classes as an accepted phase of the physical education curriculum, with coaches and pros cooperating in stressing correct swing and grip. Each pro—Lake and his assistants at Recreation Park, Gleason at Virginia CC and Vic Baker at Lakewood—augment these classes with individual instruction throughout the season.

Through cooperation of the pros, the Recreation Park green-committee and the city Recreation Commission, a free adult

clinic was held this spring under arc-lights at the city baseball park. Nearly 100 men and women, most of them businessmen, store clerks and secretaries, reported. General mass instruction for women, for men, and mixed classes occupied a three-hour period one night a week for a two-month session.

One pro directed proceedings from a raised platform equipped with a public address system, while several others-circulated among the crowd to personally help the beginners. So successful was the first of this series that it will become an annual event on the City Program.

'Brings Up' Betty Hicks

The second of the augmenting programs is now in progress, and is the direct outcome of the most successful individual exploits of several new golf stars from this district. Miss Elizabeth Hicks, 19, was a star girls' softball player three years ago. A third baseman and pitcher, she had never played golf. In Sept. 1937 at the age of 16, she signed for a series of lessons with Larry Gleason and bought her first set of clubs. Today, three years later, she is a scratch handicap star, the reigning city champion, Southern California women's titleholder, and second only to Dorothy Traung in the 1939 state and Del Monte tournaments. Larry has taken 12 other members of the Long Beach girls' softball teams, all of the lassies being in their teens, and is conducting a series of instruction classes in golf for them. And he is confident, from early results, that there'll be a couple of champions in the crew.

But my story has to do with the results of this fine program, that touches all classes from 8 to 80. Perhaps the outstanding example of the junior lesson series is Joe Nichols, Jr., 23, now pro at the Santa Ana CC. Joe at the age of 12, was in Larry Gleason's junior class of 1929. He won the first city junior championship that same year, and the city senior title on the 40th hole from 42-year-old Barney Lucas, the next year. At the age of 13 this lean, bespectacled boy, still in grammar school, ruled as golf champion over a field of the best available amateur golfers in Southern California! In 1931 he was runner-up for the National



George Lake, Recreation Park pro, is shown in the midst of a group of golf team candidates from Wilson and Poly High Schools in Long Beach.

public links crown to Charles Ferrera, the San Francisco ironworker, in the finals at St. Paul, Minn., and lost the Chicago City open tournament to his own teammate, Doug MacKay, two weeks later.

Joe isn't the only junior, however, who has gone on to national prominence from this program for the youngsters. Ernie Combs, Jr., another pupil of Larry Gleason, was So. Calif. and state junior champion in 1929-30; Catalina Island Bobby Jones Trophy winner in 1933; quarter-finalist in the National Amateur at Brookline in 1934. He's still a top-flight golfer of the Pacific Coast.

Curtis Williams, Southern California and state junior champion of 1931; Les Hensley, 1927 winner of the same event; Miss Elizabeth Hicks, mentioned earlier; Miss Catherine Shuster, 18, runner-up for the Western Association junior girls' crown at Midlothian in 1938, and Jackson Bradley, 18, are all products of the Long Beach junior program. Bradley, Hicks and Shuster have their golfing futures before them. The two girls are rated by Pacific Coast golf critics as the two most promising youngsters in Southern California. Both have chosen golf as a career, both have competent instructors and both are pointing for international prominence. Bradley is the more recent comer of the trio. He won the Southern California junior championship in 1939 and the Interscholastic title, after being medalist in both tournaments.

After the city junior boys and girls in-

struction classes each summer, special city-wide tournaments—open to boys and girls of Southern California—are staged at the 9-hole south course at Recreation Park. This is just another phase of the program that has shown great results.

Woodrow Wilson High has won the Southern California Interscholastic team crown 8 out of the past 12 years; Poly High has won twice; Long Beach J.C. has taken the junior college title three times and the Southern California Intercollegiate championship (in competition with U.S.C., U.C.L.A. and others) once. Delbert Walker and Frank Newell, while at Long Beach J.C., won the Intercollegiate Individual tournament honors; Willard McCay, a local boy, won the Pacific Coast Intercollegiate title while attending U. of California at Berkeley. One of the two years that a local high school team did not win prep honors, Huntington Beach took the laurels. That team was coached by George Lake, now professional at Recreation Park here.

So when it comes to junior golfers, even though it does not have thousands of boys and girls engaged in the program as it would like to have, the professionals in charge have given Long Beach a foundation for developing golf champions. The professionals teach the correct grip, stance and swing, course etiquette and sportsmanship—the boys and girls do the rest. And that's about the extent one person can teach another about this game of golf, after all.