

"KEEP 'EM BUSY—AND YOU'LL KEEP 'EM HAPPY"

Veteran Florida pro—Henry Bolesta—on same job over 20 years, tells how he holds members' interest—also, why he ranks Walter Hagen as the game's greatest.

By PETE NORTON

"KEEP 'em busy and you'll keep 'em happy," is the advice of professional Henry Bolesta of the Palma Ceia CC, Tampa, Fla. And as a golf pro who has stuck with the same job over 20 years, and who has watched the parade of the great and the near-great through the Florida winter season for that long period, he should know whereof he speaks.

Almost from World War No. 1 to the present war, Bolesta has been at the same stand. And he's practiced the theory that a happy golfer is a busy golfer, and that contented memberships are built around a program that takes in every member of the club.

Just a year after the first war, Bolesta, a skinny kid who had served a trick in the Army against the Germans, appeared at Palma Ceia, at that time a brand-new golf club. He's watched it grow from a near sand-patch to a country club nestled in one of Florida's most exclusive residential sections. And in all those years there has rarely been a week in which the club members weren't busy fighting it out in some kind of tournament competition.

"Of course," he explains, "There's noth-

ing I can do about keeping the good golfers from winning a lot of the trophies, perhaps a good percentage of them. But I do arrange tournaments in which every player has a chance, in which the duffer can go out and lick the club champion if he happens to sink a few lucky putts."

He's especially keen for tournaments for the ladies and for the 20-or-more handicap players. "Keep the ladies interested and the men will follow them to the club. And give the duffer a break with the champion, and he'll tell all his friends and neighbors about it. Pretty soon, he'll have every duffer in the club anxious to take a swing at the two and three handicap boys."

Another of his theories, and it has worked out with great success, is that the kids will retain an interest in the sport all their lives if you can get them swinging early. "I'd like to show you a list of my tournament players," he told a friend recently, "You would see more 'juniors' listed than on any similar group in any kind of activity."

"The kids I taught 20 years ago, are now the men of 35, and a lot of them have started sending their 10-year-olds out for

Photo shows the veteran Palma Ceia pro (center) handing out prizes at one of his numerous tournaments. At (left) is Joe Savarese, Jr.; at (right), A. P. Coles.



lessons. I'll begin to feel like an old man any day now, when in reality I was just barely old enough to get into the Army in the first war."

Bolesta believes his club has a higher percentage of good golfers than any other in Florida. "By this I mean we have more fellows who shoot in the low eighties and often break into the seventies," he said. "We haven't any great stars. In fact, Palma Ceia hasn't had a state champion in 15 years, since Gordon Gibbons won the title. But I'll bet no club in Florida can send a team of 25 players to the tee who can lick us. This is shown up in the club championship tournaments, where a different man wins almost every year. In most clubs the same two or three fellows win the crown every season.

"I'll give you an example. Harry Root, jr., has held the Tampa city championship 5 times, and has won our title but twice, and then at 8-year intervals."

Bolesta's reputation as a tournament manager has travelled the length and breadth of his native state. When there is a big golf tournament to be managed at Jacksonville, Orlando, Ponte Vedra or Miami, you can almost bet your bottom dollar that he'll be on the first tee directing the show. He has managed the last 5 state championship tournaments, the last 5 National Amateur qualifying trials, and a dozen other important events outside his own club.

The Palma Ceia club, where 99 per cent of the players swung their first golf club under Bolesta's tutelage, has never failed to qualify at least 2 of the 4 men Florida is allowed in the National Amateur.

Believes Hagen the Greatest

In his quarter century as a golf pro, almost all the greats of the game have toured the tricky Palma Ceia layout. And like many other veterans, Bolesta believes Walter Hagen is the greatest of them all. "Hagen had every shot any other pro had at the top of his game," he insists, "And in addition, he had the greatest competitive spirit of them all.

"Take the final Gasparilla open in 1935 at Palma Ceia. Hagen was playing against a field that included Runyan, Shute, Smith, and all the rest of the greats of that day. Even then he was old enough to be the father of most of the entrants. Coming into the stretch the Haig was 3 shots behind. He picked 2 of them up on the first 7 holes of the last nine. But with only 2 holes to play he needed birdies

on both of them to win. Pars wouldn't have done him a bit of good.

"The seventeenth hole here is a 198-yard par 3, slightly uphill and with a slanting green. He banged a 3-iron 25 feet from the pin, and just as nonchalantly as a lot of golfers would sink a six-inch putt, slid the tough putt home for a birdie 2. The final hole at Palma Ceia is a 475-yard par 5, with out of bounds to the left, water to the right and deep traps guarding the green. It's a back-breaker for a lot of golfers, and many fine scores have been ruined there.

"Hagen went for the green with his second shot. The ball struck the top of the trap and bounded back into the pit. The crowd, strongly favoring Hagen, groaned. But Walter marched into the trap, took a quick look at the ball, then blasted out 2 feet from the pin and dropped his birdie 4 for first place in the tournament. I realize that's just a small feat for Hagen. But that's the kind of golfer he's been on courses all over the world for the past 25 years."

Bolesta, himself, has never been a great golfer. He had a hot streak 10 years ago when he broke several course records along the west coast of Florida. But he's never followed the tournament trail, and he's essentially a home professional. "Tournament golf is great for the game as an interest builder," he admits, "But some of us have to stay home, and I can look back on 25 years of a very happy career in the sport."

Railsback Gives Kids a New Chance; Gets Real Caddies

IT sounds like a chance that you may not want to take, but it worked out O. K. at Kansas City, Mo. Harry Railsback, supt. of the Swope Park course, worked with K. C. policemen in giving caddie jobs to youngsters the coppers thought were really right sort at heart but who had gotten into minor difficulties because they didn't have their time and energies employed gainfully.

Harry took youngsters the police suggested as prospects and trained them as first-class caddies and with the help of kindly and smart coppers enabled the kids to get steered straight as citizens.

For our dough it's one of the finest things golf did in 1941.