

Supply Dealers View Golf As In Strong Position

★ **A**UTHORITATIVE TESTIMONY on the wartime condition of American golf courses is presented by some foremost regional distributors of golf course equipment and supplies. Despite the lack of most equipment items considered essential for golf courses, and notwithstanding inability to get any more than the minimum of some repair parts, the distributors have been able to keep going on major items of supplies and to maintain phenomenally good service. They've been badly handicapped by the labor situation but by their own genius, long hours and the help of providence have kept functioning.

Generally the equipment and supply sectional dealers report that wartime maintenance has been of unexpectedly high standard and that even when some operations have been curtailed the curtailment possibly has effected some betterment in practice.

A widely known distributor in one of the nation's most active golf districts comments:

"In this particular territory we have been favored in weather, with very little winter troubles and not too much summer heat. Our courses that have survived seem to be in a most satisfactory condition, everything considered. True, we have lost some of the weaker ones, and that may have been a very good thing, because it is throwing the play that used to patronize these small, not-to-well-kept-up courses over to the better clubs and will help these better clubs, materially, in the long run.

"It is quite apparent that once the player who was used to the ordinary, small, poorly maintained fee course gets the 'hang' of playing on a better course he is more than likely to stay. That will, in the long run, I think, be very helpful to the better and stronger clubs.

"No one can get all the manual labor necessary to carry through as should be done, but I am very sure that hereabouts the old established clubs that have retained their greenkeepers are now very happy that they did so. They are and will be short of new equipment for some time. These experienced men, however, know that their equipment must be kept in working condition and they are doing just that. The clubs are adding con-

tinually to their bank rolls to the extent, that when they can again start to buy and get more help they will have the backlog of cash to proceed.

"There is one other thought which enters my mind. You know that turf has been continually and heavily fed. Now, of necessity, it is being somewhat starved. I wonder if up to a certain point that is going to increase its endurance. Its roots are going deeper and deeper seeking nourishment. When it can again be plentifully fed, won't we have some very hardy and superb greens and fairways?

"The subject probably is a delicate one to bring up, inasmuch as it may suggest an alibi for inadequate fertilizing for which there can be no true economy reason advanced. However, I do believe that the tendency in some places to high pressure turf development may have been checked during wartime, and with advantage to turf. That is something to be discussed by the turf and fertilizer specialists."

Another very highly regarded dealer in the midwest, D. R. Niederlander, of St. Louis, tells GOLFDOM:

"I am in touch with all golf clubs in this area and know very few unnecessary errors of omission of work in maintenance. Nearly all of the golf superintendents here have been on the job right along and know their courses and have devoted intelligent efforts to maintenance insofar as their budgets will permit. The shortage of competent labor is perhaps more of a pain in the neck than the short budget.

"Young boys and old men form a considerable percentage of the workmen and the labor turnover is very large. Some of the clubs are going along with five or six men instead of the usual 10 or 12. You just cannot maintain a course properly under such conditions and many items which formerly received attention are omitted. Fairway watering is discontinued or greatly reduced, fairways are mowed higher and less often, traps are given the once over when possible, rough is not leveled off, trees, shrubs and flowers are not the pictures as before. The lack of new machinery is a big headache and the superintendent is put to it to patch up old equipment.

"In spite of all these worries, the

courses have been kept up mighty well and the players appreciate conditions as they still have excellent courses to play on. The greens are, of course, the chief consideration and in this area they averaged as well as formerly last year and opened up nicely this year.

"After the war thousands of men now in service will resume their play. Golf will go on as it is the finest sport for the individual. He can play nine holes up to 72, depending on how much of a nut he is and he plays it himself, tramping over a hundred acres of beautiful scenery. I look for the greater increase in play to be on the park and fee courses. It will take time for the private clubs to get back full membership.

"I cannot think what post war actions will be most urgently advisable. All items of course maintenance will improve with increased budgets to buy machinery, fertilizers and the like and the efficient superintendent will put them where they will do the most good. No drastic changes in course design appear to be wasted, though to my mind fewer sand traps and more grassy hollows would be attractive and less costly to maintain."

Another very well qualified observer is one of the older equipment and supply dealers who has had much to do with building golf in his territory. In his section the gasoline restrictions were not as acute as on the eastern seaboard, hence play, according to his authoritative opinion, has held up "remarkably well."

He says:

"We are aware that some of the clubs are going to feel the omission of fairway fertilization during these several years and in some cases the material was well nigh impossible to secure.

"Perhaps the most important thing for clubs to bear in mind for post-war is the general plan of maintenance, as regards the overhead cost.

"We are of the opinion that golf must reach more people in order to exist on a national scale. In order to reach more people, the game cannot tax the pocket book of the player too much. The alert communities will study the cost of golf, including what it costs to keep a course in prime condition and provide golf for the public at a reasonable figure. In order to do this, maintenance must be on an intelligent basis and modern equipment must be employed to the limit.

"There will be a natural tendency for some 'old timers' to revert to the way they used to do things and the way they have been trained to do things for the last 20 years; many had from 10 to 20 or more men working on the course, doing a good percentage of the work by hand.

These fellows and these clubs had better get their ears to the ground and wake up.

"We predict that maintenance budgets can and will be curtailed over the average for the past 10 or 15 years and playing conditions on the whole will be improved in stead of suffering.

"I can remember when I was a boy on the farm that a man thought he was doing a whale of a plowing job to take four mules and put a few acres under the plow; tractors came along and most old time farmers fought against the use of power farming. Many continued to do so until the land banks took over their farms or they modernized and placed themselves in position to compete with modern farming practices.

"Golf course designing and layout may have to go through some alteration in order to accommodate and allow the use of some of the equipment that will be used to reduce the cost of maintaining the property, all of which will not penalize the enjoyment of the sport.

"We definitely feel that golf will continue to increase as a popular American game although there will likely be a decrease in the number of expensive and extravagantly operated layouts.

"Whether the trend will be toward municipally and county operated courses for the public, or alert minded private and group operated projects remains to be seen."

In Texas wartime condition of golf probably has been better than in any other state. The outdoor element in the Texans' nature has accounted strongly for maintenance of play at a normal rate. The indoor wartime duties of Texas businessmen and other workers have been intense and have called for corresponding balance in outdoor recreation.

Frank Goldthwaite, mgr., Texas Toro Co., Fort Worth, tersely reports on the main features of the Texas golf situation:

"This section of the country hasn't suffered at all in the way of losing members. In fact, 95 per cent of the clubs are having more play than ever before and are making more money than any time prior to the war. There are so many defense projects and army and navy camps located in Texas, the influx of people is really crowding the golf courses. Many, many clubs who were on the wrong side of the ledger financially are in excellent shape now, and we look for a very nice postwar business for a couple of years at least.

"As far as maintenance is concerned, the courses have not been neglected as far as we know. They are being maintained, if anything, better than before the war, as the clubs have the money to spend on labor. When any piece of

equipment breaks down at a course, they borrow another course's mower until they can get their own back running again.

"Frankly, we don't think Texas would enter into the picture regarding errors in maintenance judgment and loss of members because of same, as it hasn't happened here."

Tomorrow's Golf Business

(Continued from Page 14)

as a result are usually "half built" in the beginning. This under-financing is by no means always a direct result of economic conditions, but quite often the result of not knowing what is necessary. When the club has progressed to the point that its members realize what should have been done in the first place, they cast about for ways and means to do the job—and someone to do it. With the advice and help available to the small club today, they usually bob up with a phoney possessed of much conversation and little ability. Before too long the club is in worse shape than it was originally—and a distinct liability to the entire golf field.

Such situations are not necessarily isolated ones but exist to a quite large extent, generally speaking. It is a condition that can be corrected, and the correction should go far toward creating an additional, badly-needed market in golf.

This is not a job for an individual nor is it a job for any single group. It is a job for all of us interested in golf. Metropolitan club officials, club managers, pros, greenkeepers, and all associations related to golf should gladly cooperate in such an effort, with the firm knowledge that any benefits accruing therefrom will eventually benefit them personally through benefiting the entire golf field. Manufacturers and distributors should of course be greatly interested in a program designed to not only broaden their field of operation but possibly narrow their present channels of distribution, a costly item that has in the past been a distinct headache in the golf business. Small clubs, and their pros and greenkeepers, should welcome with open arms such a gesture of assistance that will tie them in as an integral part of the entire golf field, and should benefit greatly from it.

Our democratic economic system is based on active expansion, production, and distribution. It will be more pronounced than ever after the war, and golf certainly cannot escape its economic destiny in this scheme and continue to grow. To us then, who love the game or make our living from it, falls the duty of preparing the way for golf's great future.

Because golf, if we will help the future prove it, has just begun to grow.



Jaro Fabry

"You are the virile, red-blooded type who loves adventure. Nothing daunts you. You could fight your way through the wilds of the jungle; across the blistering desert sands. Read TRUE, The Man's Magazine!" (One of the great family of Fawcett Publications.)