

How to Build a Job in Pro Golf

By DON YOUNG



★ What's wrong with pro golf?

There probably isn't a pro in the country who hasn't had that question hurled at him—or who hasn't asked it himself. It's a query bandied around not only among pros but everyone else connected with the commercial end of the game.

Perhaps there is not a single intelligent answer to what's wrong with pro golf. However, if there is, the writer had the pleasure of hearing it recently.

It was following 18 holes of very enjoyable golf at Miami Shores Country club, in Miami, and 18 holes at the Shores, be assured, can be nothing but enjoyable. Masterfully designed and built, beautifully maintained, and capably conducted by genial and gentlemanly Willie McFarlane, Miami Shores to the writer's mind is one of America's finest municipal golf layouts.

At any rate, the taproom was crowded but I finally managed to wiggle into a vacant chair at the bar, and found myself next door to a good-natured but earnest argument. Under such circumstances one tries nonchalantly not to eavesdrop.

First I listened to a big fellow with an executive manner, a twelve buck golf shirt, and a perfectly astounded expression on his face.

"What I can't understand," he was expounding, "is how you can turn down a job like I'm offering you in favor of the one you have. Your club has but 140 members. Our club has a membership of 425."

The fellow next to me had a soft voice, brown eyes, and strong-looking hands. "It's simple," he smiled, and when he smiled you involuntarily smiled with him. "It's simple. I'm perfectly satisfied where I am and I'm making more money than I can make at your club."

The big fellow looked a little more surprised, snorted, drained his glass and slid out from the bar.

"Mebbe so," he said, "mebbe so. But I doubt it. Well, think it over some more and if you change your mind, call me. I'm at the Roney Plaza."

They shook hands and mister twelve buck golf shirt headed for the showers.

I experienced some difficulty in self-restraint trying not to make my bar introduction too obvious, but evidently I got it off well enough. After the usual formalities I got down to cases.

"You're a pro?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Who's the big fellow?"

"A golf club president."

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop," I said, "but I couldn't help but hear you turn down that job."

"Yeah. That's the second time I've turned that one down."

"You know," I said, "I believe you have a good story in you."

We drank beer and talked shop.

"Listen," I said, "I'd like to talk longer to you. How about you and me having dinner?"

"Okay," he agreed. "But about this story. If there is one—no names."

"It's a deal," I promised.

We showered, changed, and headed for Miami Beach.

I'll give you his story in his own words and let you think it over.

* * * *

Eddie was an eastern pro who came up the hard way. He had never been a caddie nor had he served an apprenticeship. The pro golf bug hit him as a senior in high school and he spent two years of college studying teaching, shop work, and general pro procedure on the side. To the layman that sounds like the easy way, but it's the toughest in the end. Anyway, Eddie spent a year as a golf course workman then grabbed himself a small pro job.

The next ten years of Eddie's career would probably parallel the experience of any other club pro with a reasonable amount of brains, sense enough to use them, and not afraid of work. He worked hard, took an active interest in his job, made an extensive study of greenkeeping, and held one straight pro job and two

pro greenkeeper jobs over a period of seven years. Each change he made was a step upward, and on his fourth step he hit the jackpot—a straight pro job at an exclusive club of 450 members.

"It was beautiful," sighed Eddie, "the club was swell, the people were swell, the salary swell, and business was wonderful. I had two assistants in the shop, two in the rack room, all the lessons I could handle, played all the golf I wished, had one day off a week, and a month's vacation in the winter. I served one year and got a contract renewal for three. I repeat, it was wonderful. I thought I had finally arrived, and I had—at the wrong place."

"What happened?" I wanted to know.

Eddie scratched his head and looked confused. "To tell the truth, damned if I know."

That statement of Eddie's voiced one of the peculiarities of pro golf. A capable pro does a capable job at a good club, then suddenly is gone. You nose through the underground for the reason. This member and this club official praises him. Another member and another club official damns him. You're back where you started—with no answer. But anyway, back to Eddie.

"But there must have been some reason," I argued.

Eddie rubbed his chin reflectively and gave the matter some thought. "Well, yes, I guess there was at that," he finally ventured. But it was so unexpected. I was going along great guns, minding my own business and liking it. Before I really knew what was under way a political situation arose in the club and there was a change in club presidents. Two weeks before my contract expired I was told I was through."

"Caught you with your pants down, eh?"

"Yeah," grinned Eddie, "and I didn't realize it then but they were to stay down for some time."

"Go on," I prodded him.

"Well, I didn't worry much, figured a guy with my record and reputation wouldn't have much trouble getting lined up again. But I was wrong. I spent the whole winter looking for a job and spring caught me without a connection. There were jobs open alright and I figured myself a cinch to get them. But when the chips were really down it seemed that no club was interested in a guy that had been let out of the swanky job I had just held. It was maddening.

"By early summer I was desperate, so I grabbed myself a job as parts clerk in a factory warehouse. It took me just 60 days to determine I would starve to death in pro golf rather than exist on a factory

job. So early in July I threw everything I owned in the car and headed for the sticks. Somewhere, somehow, I was getting back in pro golf.

"For three straight weeks I hit the road, stopping at small clubs for a round of golf with the pro and sounding him out on jobs open anywhere. It was no dice. The only jobs open paid no salary. Finally about the time the exchequer was running low I stopped for a day at a beautiful little club in a town of 5,000 population. The pro had a remarkable setup which, he told me, he had built himself from the ground up. I finally got around to the question I wanted to ask him when I walked through the clubhouse door.

"No," he said, "I really don't know of a thing. What kind of a setup you looking for?"

"By this time I was pulling no punches. I'm looking for anything," I admitted, "that will get me back in pro golf."

"That pro actually grinned at my misery, but he played 'em just as they lay.

"That's man talk," he told me, "so I'll give it to you straight. I don't know of a job but I do know of an opportunity."

"Where?"

"Not far from here. In a good town, too. About 6,000 population."

"What's the salary?" I asked.

"He looked at me earnestly and with undisguised disgust. 'My friend', and there was plenty of ice in his voice, 'let's you and I understand each other. You are now in the sticks, where your salary depends entirely on how successfully you can operate your golf club. I will say this, however. I can remember the day when the club of which I speak paid their pro \$250.00 a month and furnished his living quarters. Today I doubt if they have \$250.00 in the bank.'

"Doesn't sound too encouraging," I complained.

"No, it doesn't," he admitted, "but if I didn't have this setup here I'd be over there in exactly 60 minutes."

"Tell me some more," I urged him.

"I've told you it was an opportunity, not a job," he repeated. "That's all I'm saying. If you're interested see Mr. Conrad at the State Bank. So long. And let me hear from you—if you stick."

"I climbed into my car and headed north—not enthusiastically but desperately."

Eddie continued.

"Mr. Conrad, it developed, was a bank director, holder of a \$15,000.00 mortgage on the club, and somewhat evasive to my initial approach. However, he suggested I look at the layout before we did any talking.

"The club was a mile from town and someone had done a fair job of laying it out. The assets, however, stopped right there. The clubhouse was badly in need of repair, needing a new roof and about \$500.00 worth of paint for a starter. Caddies lounged all over the place, the caddie house having burned the year before. A sixteen year old boy was trying to run the layout. Out on the course the rough was knee high. The rough mower had broken down a month before and nobody had bothered about having it fixed. The greens were full of weeds and brown-patch, and what little maintenance machinery that would run was held together by the grace of God and baling wire. Four caddies and two women were playing golf. It was pitiful.

"We went back to the bank and Mr. Conrad got out the books. It was easy to see that the club at one time had been an active one, and prosperous from an activity standpoint. But the mortgage fell due the following January and the banker painted me a quite discouraging picture. I admitted the situation looked about hopeless. Mr. Conrad startled me by saying that very few situations were hopeless if the right man took hold of them. He suggested I give the matter 24 hours of thought and see him the next day.

"I went out of that bank feeling as low as a snake's belly. I had struck another dud and I was at the place where I couldn't afford another one. At a drug-store fountain I struck up a conversation with the druggist. Yes, he had been a member of that club but had resigned two years before. Too bad about the club, too. Had a lot of wonderful times out there. I finally got his version of the club's trouble and what he said sort of stirred my interest.

"I walked that town over from one end to the other. It was a pretty little place, busy, and right in the heart of a prosperous agricultural section. I called on another business man and got his story. By evening I had talked to six more. When I pooled their stories it was confusing. None of them had told the same story nor had the same ideas. There seemed no rhyme, reason or answer to the whole situation. But I had heard enough to get me fired up. I made up my mind that was my club and I'd run it or break my neck in the attempt.

"I sat in my hotel room that night and asked myself just what administrative policies I would pursue if it were my privilege to run a small private golf club as I chose. By 3:00 A. M. the next morning I had the answers down in black and white.

Starts Members With Supply of Selected Balls

JACK SEMPLE, pro at Rock Spring club, West Orange, N. J., started off the season for his members with a thoughtful action that Rock Spring golfers appreciated so warmly they have spread the story of Semple's idea to members of other clubs.

When members came out to Rock Springs they found nine or 12 carefully selected balls in their lockers. It practically cleaned out the stock Jack had carefully nursed along since new ball manufacture was discontinued. The balls were of leading standard brands, made to retail for 75c and 60c. There were 1460 balls. Jack distributed them so balls of varying cover toughness and windings were properly placed according to the games of the players.

During late winter, Semple had taken the old balls except those in reasonably good condition out of the lockers and practice bags and kept a record of them. The job he did saved the members the trouble of turning in used balls for reprocessing and assured them that they'd get replacements of expertly reprocessed balls of quality comparable with that of the balls Semple had collected from them.

Jack says that the enthusiasm approval of his work by the members was far beyond what he expected. He adopted his plan because his experience with cheap reprocessed balls has embarrassed him, and because he wanted to avoid in a discreet way supplying guests with balls at the expense of members.

Encouraged by being supplied with balls Semple's members accounted for excellent business in the Rock Spring shop this spring. Although his inventory is comparatively low for him he still has 222 first grade clubs that are on the books at \$3,475.

The live look of Semple's shop is commented on very favorably by members, guests and pro golf salesmen.

Western GA Caddie Plan in Demand

WESTERN GOLF ASSN. four-point program on how to get caddies, which tells of caddies quarters, sports and other recreation programs, victory gardens and caddie instruction, is being widely adopted by clubs.

The plan is outlined in a circular available from the association's headquarters at 111 W. Washington st., Chicago, Ill.