

Public Relations and the Pro

By DON YOUNG

THE phrase "public relations" describes probably one of the most potent forces as well as the least understood activities of modern American business. The radio comedian who recently wisecracked that a "hillbilly is a guy who thinks 'public relations' are people on relief" really had something on the ball.

Without the public becoming more than barely conscious of the fact, public relations during the past ten years has become a part and parcel of any casual retail purchase and an integral part of the economic activity of everything from frying pans to flying machines. It has in fact invaded practically every field but the American golf club; an amazing fact, as the successful operation of a golf club depends more perhaps on the sound application of public relations activities than any other single feature of its existence.

It is somewhat difficult to strike a compromise between this fact and the fact that the golf field can boast of a good many outstandingly successful clubs who maintain no public relations department, but at the same time are perhaps disregarding almost entirely the fact that a bang-up public relations job is being done within the club and contributing greatly to its success. Careful investigation of such cases will reveal that the pro, or a man acting as combination pro-manager, may be doing the job. If so, the club can feel that it is exceedingly fortunate, as good public relations men are not only hard to find but also command rather important compensation. To have one successfully combining the job with other duties, at a single compensation, is little short of pennies from Heaven—and a circumstance that is not likely to continue to favor the golf field for any great time in the future.

From a departmental standpoint, public relations activities in a golf club mean something more than operating a golf course that members enjoy playing, a dining room where members enjoy eating, and a pro shop where members enjoy buying merchandise and instruction. On such a basis it is probably safe to say that the above covers a continuous activity of approximately 65% of the membership. The remaining 35% are those who make comparatively little use of the various club departments aside from paying their dues because of business or social reasons and playing a few rounds of golf a year. This 35% group accounts greatly for the av-

erage club's continued necessity for membership drives and the accompanying membership turnover. It also can comprise the difference between a club "breaking even" or showing a profit. It likewise comprises the group where the least public relations work is done—and the most needed.

It is highly probable that the time is close at hand when club officials, especially those of private clubs, will be forced to look this public relations angle straight in the eye and give the problem some quite serious consideration. The forcing of this issue will be due to the return to civilian life of thousands upon thousands of new golfers who have had their first contact with and yen for golf while in various army and navy camps, and the natural desire for physical activity which healthy service training has promoted. The greater percentage of these young men will be desirous of obtaining some expert advice and instruction and will be ill equipped financially to afford it. Regardless of this fact, this influx of new golfing personnel will comprise the backbone of America's golf future from every standpoint, and the steps taken by club officials to meet the situation will gauge to a very high degree just how great this future may be.

As before suggested, public relations work in a golf club can scarcely be delegated exclusively to one department. Basically, however, a golf club is operated primarily to play golf, and a time-proven fact in club operation is that if a member can be induced to play golf he will as a natural result make use of all other club departments. Because of this it is not illogical to assume that the most effective public relations work can be done in the pro department. However, delegating the job to the pro on a general basis throughout the entire field requires some consideration.

First of all, pro salaries as a general rule are not very high, certainly not enough for the pro to live on. Most pros spend more than their salaries for assistants. As a result their sole source of actual income stems from merchandise sales and lessons. The successful pro therefore must focus his efforts on these activities, especially sales. If he is a successful pro, which means handling competently all other club pro duties as well, he will have very little time indeed for other activities.

If we ask the pro to take over this

public relations job, we are asking him to give away not only a good percentage of his professional time but fully as large a percentage of his income. So large a percentage in fact, that the average pro who has turned to or doubled up in war work may have found that the necessary qualifications for pro golf easily draws greater compensation in some other field of endeavor.

The answer to this problem is in the general awakening of club officials to the realization that a boosting of pro salaries, combined with a public relations program, will pay real club dividends. If necessary a few dollars raise in dues would not be out of line. A \$5.00 raise per year in dues on a club membership of 200 provides an even \$1,000.00 for public relations work. The pro as a result could spend a considerable part of his time in free instruction to members, rounding up the inactive 35% and making them an integral part of the club's activities, and in general do a public relations promotional job that would assert itself in real dollars and cents in club interest and income.

Quite obviously if the pro must rely so greatly on merchandise sales as a major part of his income, it is only human nature that he will avoid as completely as possible the member who may buy his clubs and balls downtown or from a whole-

sale catalogue. Certainly he can have very little feeling as regards this member's club and golfing welfare. Under his present set-up he must play the favorites and play them to the limit. He'll salvage what he can from the inactive 35% and cut the black sheep as cold as possible and still hold his job, even though his sentiment toward the club may be unquestioned.

Some years ago an eastern club solved the public relations problem in a single stroke by raising the dues \$10.00, increasing the pro's salary \$3,000.00 per year, and advising all members that the club's pro was available certain days of the week by appointment for personal instruction at no charge except caddy fee. The plan was outstandingly successful. Such a plan of course might not be applicable generally through the field, but something akin to it is highly desirable and perhaps almost inevitable in the future.

It is the writer's opinion, through twenty years of close observation, that the pro field is capable of performing this important public relations job and is in the most advantageous position of any club department to do so. Whether the pro will be asked to do it, and both he and the golf field benefit from it, depends entirely on how far and clearly the present-day American golf club official can see into the future.

Simplified Layouts Will Speed Golf's Growth

By EMIL LOEFFLER

Greens Supt. Oakmont Country Club

MORE and more sharply, as the European war approaches its climax, those who are entrusted with the administrative and operating responsibilities at our thousands of golf and country clubs are concentrating their thinking on the opportunities, and problems, that will begin to knock at golf's door when our business in Berlin is completed.

When we went to war, there were close to two and one-half million people playing golf in the United States. That total, in itself, is sufficient to clearly indicate that golf embraces qualities of wide appeal. The volume of civilian play during the war years, despite the many handicaps that beset the players and those who have kept the courses operating, plus the amazing growth in the popularity of the game

among the men in training at our service camps and stations, supports our most optimistic views of golf's postwar future.

At Oakmont we have had more rounds this year than in any year since the club was organized, and practically all of the play was by members, as play by visitors was discouraged. In the late month of September alone we had over 2,400 rounds. I have heard, and can understand, that clubs generally have been used more this year than in many years past. Acute shortages in everything pertaining to golf put the game to the acid test and I believe all will agree that it is coming through stronger than ever.

As to its future developments, we are going to see its most rapid spread toward the smaller communities where towns,