

Jones Made Good By Making a Golf Club a Business

By JOHN LYONS

MAJOR R. A. JONES has resigned as gen. mgr. of the famed Baltusrol GC, Springfield, N. J. In accepting Jones' resignation Baltusrol's board authorized its president "to appoint a committee of the Board to consider the form and character of an expression of the Board's gratitude and esteem for Major Jones' 22 years of loyal service as general manager of the club."

And there, in a paragraph, is a milepost in American country club business history. Jones has been one of the most discussed club managers in the country, and at times cussed, too. The latter because the man has held fast to the belief that he was hired to run a country club as a business for serving all the members to the fullest extent of satisfaction. Many who belong to country clubs consider themselves entitled to have the place run primarily for the service and satisfaction of themselves, families and guests, even when such desire is contrary to the rights of other members or the sound business operation of the club.

Naturally in that conflict, Jones has been the man in the middle. And a strong stand-up man, too. He never was one to pass the buck to the elected officials. They have trouble enough of their own. As long as they entrusted Jones with responsibility for operating the club, he was willing to accept all of that responsibility. Delicate problems club officials often have confronting them when decisions involving social relationships and the inescapable business realities of club operations must be made, were accepted by Jones. The piques that Jones' calm adherence to business policy sometimes aroused, vanished as Baltusrol's financial statements were read by the highly successful businessmen who constitute the club's membership.

You have to be good to be, as Jones has been, at a very exacting club for 22 years and ride serenely through the criticisms that are bound to be directed at anyone who insists on sound business operation of a country club. And a club has to be fortunate in the choice of its officials who'll stand behind the manager who won't break the club rules at the request of a member who is not particularly concerned what happens to the other members' desires as long as he gets his gratified.

Jones is good, and so is the club from which he's parting company to further



Major R. A. Jones, 22 years business manager at Baltusrol.

test his abilities in club management.

But, apart from the ability of the Major, the factor that made him pretty much a national character was the reputation he got for being a tough little man, which in turn helped stiffen the spines of club officials and managers who were trying to be hard-boiled about running their own clubs as businesses should be run. This was a paradoxical development because Baltusrol, an old and distinguished club, is about the last place anybody expected to see a frankly hard-boiled, but strictly American, business policy anywhere about the premises.

The nice soft old way wasn't working when Major Jones was hired by Baltusrol in 1923. The club had a debt of about \$180,000 and was carried on the tradesmen's cuffs for about six months. The membership was very ultra, but there weren't enough of them. Desirable prospective members looked at the Baltusrol financial statement and lost some of their keen interest in Baltusrol's prestige. It never hurts social prestige any to be ac-

accompanied by cash in the bank, and that's what Baltusrol didn't have.

Finances Are Solid

But now, 22 years later, Baltusrol is debt-free. It even has an \$18,000 mortgage owed to it. The clubhouse was enlarged and improved in 1928 at a cost of \$180,000. Twenty-eight of the club's 36 holes have been rebuilt or improved. Land needed for protection from encroachment has been acquired and taxes on this (about 170 acres) are carried in operating expenses. Deep wells and water systems on both courses were installed in 1926-28. And Baltusrol has money in the bank!

Jones doesn't say he did all that. But he was the man who got it done on a sound financial basis.

It took debate and planning and sweat. The policy was firmly set early when Jones sold the Board on the idea that a committee-operated club would be about in the same fix as a bank operated by frequently changing committees drawn from its depositors. Baltusrol, like other clubs that were learning the hard way, observed that the annual changes of unpaid officials who come to the club to play and sacrifice that right for complex work, usually mean the same mistakes are repeated by succeeding administrations. Then, too, for each member who has a knowing interest in the sound financial structure of a club there are many who would spend even if the club had to borrow to the limit.

There often are private business or social relationships between Board members or other club officials, and members who have some pet notion they want put into the club's facilities or operation. All that, Baltusrol, as other noted clubs, had to contend with. Jones by being hired as a manager to manage, took that load off the officials.

It's one of the loads that club officials will have with increasing weight now that war's ended. Clubs are operating with a fraction of peacetime staffs, usually. If members insist that staffs be enlarged at present rates of pay, there'll be red ink appearing again. It's that sort of a situation that Jones has taken in stride.

The Baltusrol performance was not the full extent of Jones' influence on business management of clubs in New Jersey. Canoe Brook and Montclair had him as a consultant in reorganizations of operating policies and methods which reflected happily on their financial statements. He also was engaged to direct the rebuilding of the south course at Canoe Brook.

Beauty All Around

Jones is a great hand at beautifying. Baltusrol hasn't lost any of its charm by being run on a business basis; it's gained.

The planting began in 1923 when Jones got seedlings from the state nursery at less than a cent apiece. They're now trees 16 to 20 ft. high. He installed lakes and filled them with trout and got mallards on them. The combination of superb championship golf courses and clubhouse landscaping that looks like the prewar parks of the fine old English estates, is unique. From the clubhouse the spires of New York's skyscrapers can be seen.

But in the Baltusrol books there is beauty too, to the financial eye. Net income in the prewar years of Jones' management ranged from \$9,371 in 1935 to \$63,032 in 1930. No years showed a loss and the bookkeeping is super hard-boiled.

Of his successful experience in being a frank realist in country club management, Jones has said:

"There is no trick to it, no white rabbits are pulled out of a hat; it is simply the 'know-how' and day-to-day concentration on a set purpose—sound management with a price tag on every bright idea. There is nothing about management to love. Nobody likes budgets or restrictions which they must entail. But everybody enjoys the results of good management. Every member of Baltusrol has 1¼ acres of land back of his certificate of \$400 par, and a share in a golf plant which could not be duplicated today for less than two million dollars, and every employee is paid more liberally and has more security in his job.

"At least one hundred of the members of Baltusrol possess the worthless bonds or stock certificates of one or more of their former clubs. Some members have as many as five such documents. To the total par value of all that paper can be added assessments and voluntary contributions made in a vain attempt to keep the clubs operating. No one has taken the trouble to estimate the total that has been lost in mismanaged golf and country clubs and few realize that the loss to the members of such clubs is a mere fraction of the total loss. Golfers are apt to overlook the fact that their club is or was a very important asset in the local community.

"A big club holding up to 550 acres of improved property pays many times the taxes the land would yield as farm land. The tax assessments rise on much more land in the vicinity of the club. The club spends much of its income locally and the money spent on caddy fees is an important item in many homes. When a golf club closes, from 30 to 50 employees lose their jobs and not all of them can dispose of their homes and find suitable employment elsewhere. Some big clubs hold about one quarter of all the land in the township in which they are located and are by far the biggest tax payers. Therefore everybody in that township as well as the members and particu-



Dr. Herbert R. Albrecht of Purdue examines turf samples at Midwest experimental station on the university's agronomy farm. More than 150 samples of turf are in the breeding plots at the station.

larly the local politicians have a real interest in the welfare of the Club.

"Fortunately some clubs which fail to operate economically as private clubs can be operated commercially or as public clubs and fill a want but the failure of most private clubs is due to committee operation under which no commercial enterprise could hope to survive. A big golf or country club, which is a million dollar business, must have for its successful operation an organization similar to that which makes for success in any other business.

"Under sound business management Baltusrol's net income from operations in the last 22 years has amounted to over half a million dollars and is filling its membership now with members from other clubs which have changed their character or ceased to exist. The earnings through those 22 years have enabled the club to rebuild its golf courses and improve its facilities so that today it is the acknowledged leader in its field."

Now, with war-time income having put many a country club in the black because it couldn't spend money, a severe test of management is going to be canny protection of this solid position when needed improvements can be made. The Jones policy has been something to heed in that respect. He's been a spender for Baltusrol, but a spender who made the outlay pay dividends on a long-term plan of club betterment.

Green Section Offers Nursery Stolons

★ ESTABLISHMENT OF A stolon nursery should perhaps be the first move in anticipation of the rehabilitation of your greens. This will not only insure availability of stolons of superior strains of bent at a time when they are needed most but will be decidedly an economic move. The Green Section has increased its stock of C 1, C 7, C 15, C 17, C 19, C 28 and C 36 so that stolons will be available to any member clubs which are interested in establishing a stolon nursery this fall. One square foot of stolons should plant a row of 100 feet and each 100-foot row under good maintenance should produce sufficient stolons within a year to plant an average green. Late summer or early fall is an ideal time in which to start a stolon nursery. Directions for the establishment and maintenance of such nurseries was given in *Timely Turf Topics* for August, 1944.

Just as a stolon nursery is a sound move, so the establishment of a sod nursery is good insurance. Every course should have a sod nursery composed of the same grass used on the putting greens and maintained under putting green conditions. Such a sod nursery makes possible the replacement of bad scars on a green simply by the removal of the affected sod and the insertion of an identically shaped piece of turf from the sod nursery.