

Play and Finances Strong in 1945 Golf

By HERB GRAFFIS

THE LAST year of the war found American golf probably in sounder financial condition than it's been any other year since it became big business. No comprehensive figures have been compiled on amount of play in 1945 but reports from representative private and public courses in various sections indicate probability of approximately 70,000,000 rounds being played. That's several million rounds ahead of the average prewar year, notwithstanding a wartime loss of about 8 per cent in courses. There's no way of checking play figures against ball sales as there was before the war.

Unquestionably the two major factors accounting for unexpectedly large play were increased wages and war workers' need of outdoor recreation. The inflationary factor of increased wages and profits might have been a wee bit eased by the consumption of funds for golf, but not enough to amount to anything. The fear that income taxation would bear down so hard on the country club set they wouldn't be able to afford clubs was proved to be groundless. Golf club initiation fees were restored, dues were raised and still waiting lists formed. Public and privately-owned fee courses where fairly well located, got substantially more play than they did in 1945.

Real estate operators began acquiring courses in metropolitan areas looking forward to the postwar building boom.

Maybe workers' play accounted for somewhat easing tension that has figured conspicuously in labor-management controversies. Considerable of that wrangling is war-nerves and jockeying for postwar position. However, it's apparently plain to golf that there's a favorable situation for the game in a condition that gives workers ample income and leisure consistent with efficient production.

The labor situation caused golf club operation less trouble than in 1944. Labor was slightly easier to get for course and clubhouse work. And it was of better type. But it became increasingly obvious to golf club officials that they were going to have to have health, accident, death and retirement insurance policies to get and retain the sort of help they expect.

Last year was a mortgage-burning year at many clubs. With the need of postwar repairs, extensions and improvements confronting many clubs the situation now is that golf clubs generally have more cash than they used to have credit. Inability to spend probably accounted as much for this favorable position as did increased income.

Beyond all expectations was clubhouse business at many metropolitan district clubs. Rules prohibiting guests except one day a week were enforced at a number of clubs. The domestic help and food supply conditions sent thousands to the country clubs regularly for dinners. Rationing on many foods ended just about in time to save managers from mental and physical collapse.

Need for clubhouse repairs and kitchen replacements become acute. But again, when you have to do without, that's just what you do, regardless of how a manager winces at comparing his operations against his pre-war standards.

Managers, like many other shoppers, are figuring that revision of the profits tax schedule will release considerable goods in 1946 urgently needed for their clubhouse operations and maintenance.

Course-Pinching Shows Up

Most-discussed development of 1945 in turf maintenance was the work in weed control with 2,4-D.

An amazing feat has been the way in

which greenkeepers have kept up their courses during wartime despite shortage of labor, equipment and some supplies. Golf course machinery in most clubs is about at the end of the line. Repairs have virtually remade much of the machinery that has been harshly handled by the type of labor available during the war. Now that new machinery is in sight, substantial advances in course maintenance equipment are anticipated.

One thing the greenkeepers are expecting is that golf will return to its fundamental principle of playing the ball as it lies, instead of playing the wartime version of winter rules. That practice of putting a ball on a preferred lie has lost, for many players, the knack of really playing golf, so competent observers say. With the trend now due to swing the other way there's bound to be more of a premium on maintenance of excellent fairways.

A great deal of new construction work is certain. Much of it will be that of building new courses, but the greater volume in 1946 will be of remodeling greens, traps and tees for machine maintenance, better drainage, etc.

Possibly most players don't appreciate it but there is a lot of difference, in the eyes of the expert greenkeeper, between the wartime standard of course maintenance and the pre-war standards at the better clubs. The greenkeepers expect that the pre-war standards will be restored rapidly by clubs that are intent on preserving highest reputation and strong positions in competing for members.

Pros Hard Hit

There wasn't nearly enough merchandise available in 1945 for a pro to make much of a living, although the smart businessmen pros went in strong for accessories to try to keep up a shop volume. Pros heard about the army and navy getting clubs and balls for shipment overseas, then heard from their sons or younger pros that the playing equipment didn't get overseas in quantities that compared with the orders the military placed. The pros will be looking to see if these military clubs finally wind up in the "army goods" stores. The clubs haven't been going in adequate numbers to the military hospitals in the U. S. as near as can be learned.

Lessons were popular last year. Many pros reported bigger lesson business than they've ever had before. There was a

fairly large volume of lesson business from executives who couldn't get away from work to play many rounds but who got their exercise on the lesson tee.

The latter part of the year the foresighted pros busied themselves arranging to get clubs for 1946. Chances still appear to be that delivery of the better clubs will be fairly closely rationed well into next year. The synthetic ball got enough play in the later months of last year to prove that for most players it was quite satisfactory.

The pro employment situation has been changing extensively with many fellows coming back from war service. There have been some bitter complaints by pros that they couldn't get their old jobs back notwithstanding the GI Bill of Rights' supposed guarantees.

A particularly noticeable trend in 1945 was revival of activity in establishing golf clubs in the smaller towns. Many small clubs that were abandoned when young men went away to war were restored to play last year in preparing for the return of the golf-minded lads.

Training at southern U. S. military establishments and duty at airfields near British courses brought legions of young Americans into golf play for the first time. A big job for golf in 1946 is that of crystallizing this new golf interest into permanent addiction. Some careful authorities who've considered the golf situation believe that this war veteran interest, plus the war workers who got into golf, and proper development of junior golf, can double today's 2,250,000 regular golfers by 1950.

Indications of a shortage of golf courses became unmistakable in some localities last year. At present American golf courses can handle about 1,500,000 golfers per day. Most of the golf architects now have about all the new course work they can handle. You're lucky to be able to get any one of the better known architects to consider taking on any job for course alterations; they're all that jammed with work.

Tournament golf, featured by Nelson's spectacular record, shared in the amusement business' flood of 1945 income. Return of Snead, Hogan and other pros from war service, added competitive interest to the fields. Prospects of stiffening amateur competition for the pros appeared in performances of Fred Haas, Jr., Lt. Cary Middlecoff and Warrant Officer Bob Stranahan, Jr.

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