

# Rating the Pro as a Salesman

By "X. OFFICIO"

Having been an official of golf clubs during the past 40 years and, naturally, in that length of time having acquired a wide acquaintance in golf, I often am invited to share some of the headaches other officials have. They call it "asking for advice."

One of the most perplexing is that of hiring a pro for a club. About the only way a club official learns about what qualifications a pro should have is by seeing some pro fail on the job. The next pro is hired on a rather negative basis because he differs generally from his predecessor. There are exceptions, of course, when a good pro quits to go to a better job or some great old-timer retires or dies. But I've seen enough of pro hiring to know that the custom usually is to pick a pro who's unlike the fellow who is being let go.

Unfortunately for the pros in many cases the separation from a club really may be based on grounds of incompatibility, just as some good people get divorced simply because they find out by unhappy

experience they are not made for each other.

In more cases than pros realize club officials are elected or appointed with the primary job of changing pros at their clubs. The pro who is being let out may think the incoming official is a nasty low character actuated only by personal malice but in the great majority of instances the official doesn't want the task of discharging one pro and hiring another. He takes it reluctantly as a duty to the club membership.

Rarely does the official understand the pro job and not often enough does the incoming pro understand clearly and fully just what the club wants of a pro. The club doesn't know for sure itself. The successful pro gives the club what it needs before the club definitely realizes what it needs.

## Scorecard on the Pro

I never have compiled a scorecard for rating pro qualifications in black-and-

## TEXAS NIPS OKLAHOMA PROS IN \$2500 TEAM MATCHES

A 20-man team of Texas pros nosed out an Oklahoma 20-man PGA team on the last green of the last match in the inaugural of interstate PGA matches at Oklahoma City G&CC. The event, which included pro-amateur, open and pro doubles and singles matches, was a great success and will be repeated annually each fall.

Texas team: Frank Ward, H. T. Hornbuckle, Gene Root, Charles Klein, Raymond Gafford, Warren Cantrell, C. W. Hogan, Bill Keith, C. B. Mims, Jim Gamewell, Graham Ross, Smiley Rowland, Lee Roy Garrett, H. W. Schroeder, Raymond Garrett, Elroy Marti, Milton Demaret, George Aulbach, Frank Baker and Ralph Morgan.

Oklahoma team: Jim Gauntt, Tex Consolver, Charles Weisner, Mike Murra, Bill Oliver, Jimmie Thompson, U. C. Ferguson, Floyd Farley, Morrie Gravatt, Jack Higgins, Jimmy Gullane, Marion Askew, George Whitehead, Bill Wotherspoon, Hugh Bancroft, Charles Worley, Frank Higgins, Harrell Butler, Robert Mair, Jack Oliver, Frank Stanard and Floyd Byrne.



white. Nor did I make such a scorecard for use in hiring salesmen for my own company. When I was sales manager of my company I hired salesmen on the basis of past records and by letting the salesman sell me on himself. In that way I missed hiring some salesmen who became highly successful with my competitors—and to my loss. So now I suggest to my sales manager that he not repeat the mistake I made but pick his men by a check list that may determine their fitness. With a buyers' market coming back faster than a good many businessmen (including pros) seem to realize, expert salesmanship again is going to be at a premium.

In a recent issue of *Sales Management* I read of a survey the Stone & Forsyth Co. made among its customers asking what type of salesman the customer would prefer. There is a suggestion for the golf club official and for the pro in that procedure although it would be impractical for the official to circulate a questionnaire on the matter among club members.

The Stone and Forsyth questionnaire listed the following 10 qualities in order as characteristics of the good salesman: poise, alertness, fluent speech, pleasing personal appearance, warmth of personality, ability to make brief, concise sales talks, knowledge of merchandise and house policies, understanding of "my" needs and buying policies, education, loyalty to his own house and to his customers.

The customers differed from the Stone and Forsyth order in selecting the most desirable quality of the Ideal Salesman. Most of the customers considered of highest importance "knowledge of his merchandise and house policies." Next in choice of customers as the prime requisite was "ability to make brief, concise sales talks." Third was "pleasing personal appearance." Fourth was "warmth of personality." Fifth was "understanding of 'my' needs and buying policies," and "loyalty" was sixth. On the other points suggested as possibly "the most important specification" the customer voting was from none to 6 votes.

Customers also were asked to name the worst faults of salesmen. The faults noted were, in order, "over-aggressiveness," "overlong sales talks," "sloppy appearance," and "inability to see my side."

#### **The Pro as a Salesman**

In everything the pro does around the club he's a salesman although in good judgment he'd better be smooth and discreet in letting the member get the idea that the pro is around the club to make money for himself. In instruction particularly the salesmanship phase is impressive. I have as friends scores of veteran pros who didn't know nearly as much about the sound and scientific basis of shotmaking as is known today but who were able to

teach with great effectiveness because they were geniuses in selling their personalities and their confidence to the pupils.

I know some pros who are wonders in getting members interested in the club events and others who seem to work just as hard with the golf committee in preparing and trying to promote a good program but fail because they haven't applied the right sort of salesmanship.

I also know some pros who have lost jobs because they could not get along with a few difficult-to-please members simply because of deficiencies in personal salesmanship. Real selling ability is that which converts the potential customer from a negative attitude into pleased agreement. There is a tendency among salesmen and pros to kid themselves that they are stronger than they really are with the customers. The salesman learns the truth when the customer buys from a competing salesman and the pro discovers the real situation when members he thinks he can count on don't come battling to his rescue when the board decides to hire another pro.

In the greater number of such cases the salesman and the pro who loses blames the customer or the member instead of recognizing how many purchases have been made solely because the merchandise or services happened to be offered at the right time and at the right price and the customer bought because nothing else was handy.

The most highly rated "essential" of the salesman in the Stone and Forsyth survey is "knowledge of merchandise and house policies," and that holds good, especially in the matter of "house policies" at the golf club. The pro has to bear in mind constantly what policy is expected of him in his relations with club members and officials. It's not an easy thing to do. Not often does any official define in full and clear detail what the policy of the club is in operating the pro department. The pro is expected to know enough about his profession to see what the club needs and supply it in service and merchandise.

That second choice of salesman's "essentials," the "ability to make brief, concise sales talks," is cared for to a considerable extent by the way the pro shows his stock in his shop. A good display of merchandise, with price tags plainly in sight, does much of the talking for the pro if he is the right combination of merchant and salesman.

#### **Appearance An Asset**

"Pleasing personal appearance" is always important around a club. I know of one case of a pro who was dressed up almost to gaudiness but who was going along fairly well until members' wives began to call their husbands attention to the pro's dirty fingernails. A detail like that can have a surprising amount of influence

on the general opinion members have of the pro.

"Over-aggressiveness" in selling isn't a common fault of pros but it does happen enough in normal times to get some members shying away from the pro and his shop. That fault of "inability to see my side" which buyers noted in the Stone and Forsyth survey also isn't the cause of many complaints at clubs where pros have held their jobs for more than 2 or 3 years. But I have noticed that the younger generation of professionals generally don't have the knack of the representative veteran in seeing the member's "side".

## JOE VALENTINE SPEAKS ON TOPDRESSING AT GSA MEET

Joe Valentine, golf course supt., Merion GC, Ardmore, Pa., at the GSA meet said, "Considering all the work and material required to maintain a golf course, I feel that the topdressing operation is one of the most essential steps in the acquisition and the preservation of a satisfactory putting surface on greens. More than 75 per cent of the game is played on the putting greens. That is why they should always be in a satisfactory condition to meet the demands of the golfers. The topdressing material is a necessary cover to create the demanded surface which you cannot otherwise obtain.

"Topdressing is a material that is usually used to foster a proper germination of the seed. Topdressing will encourage the expanding of nodes and buds of all the grass plants and it will promote beneficial bacterial action. The topdressing material should be used largely in the spring of the year after either the first or second rolling has been performed and when the grass is beginning to come back to life. It may also be necessary after adverse weather in late spring or early summer to use a small amount of topdressing in order to re-activate the bacteria.

"During the latter part of the summer, when all the weeds have been removed from the grasses, the surface of the green often becomes imperfect. The best method to regain the lost surface is to use another dose of topdressing material coupled with nitrogen. This will fill in the imperfection created by the weeding operation.

"Topdressing material should not be used as a nuisance to players but should be judiciously applied for the good of the plants whenever necessary with minimum interference with play. The topdressing material creates a wealth of food for the grasses regardless of where it is used, particularly on putting greens, tees, and fairways.

Looking over the pros I have known I think as a class they rate rather high in qualifications as salesmen. Each year their standard as businessmen seems to be improving. But to protect themselves and continue their advance I think it would be wise for a number of them to sit down in deep, frank thought and compile score-cards on themselves as salesmen. Some of them may find they are not coming up to their own idea of par for the salesmanship course. They'd better do this job and improve their scoring in this respect for their own profit, whether or not the club officials ever get the idea of making this sort of a detailed rating.

"It would be an impossibility to smooth out a rough surface without using topdressing.

"The topdressing material should contain a good portion of organic matter, granular sand and well prepared topsoil. In our club, we have been rather fortunate in that we have been able to purchase a spent mushroom soil. Our mixture has been 40% mushroom soil, 40% sand and 20% prepared soil. This mixture has been calculated by volume and not by weight.

"The method of application is simple. We have obtained our results by using man-power instead of a distributor but it does not matter what method is used as long as the topdressing is smoothly distributed in the right amount. The only recommendation that I make is: work the topdressing into the crown of the grass as evenly as possible by using either a drag mat or a drag brush. Take out the debris by using available implements, follow up with the roller, and finish with an application of gentle watering."

### *GSA Convention Talk*

#### **MANY TITLES FOR COURSE BOSS—**

Fred V. Grau, director, USGA Green Section, said that of the many who visited the Green Section exhibit at the GSA convention 210 registered. Among titles listed by registrants were 65 supts. and 47 who identified themselves as greenkeepers. Other titles included green supts., supt.-greenkeeper, asst. greenkeeper, labor supervisor, greenkeeper-pro, pro-greenkeeper, turf supt., manager-greenkeeper, groundskeeper, turf supervisor, grounds supt., supt. of grounds and bldgs., and owner-supt. Landscape architects and one green-chairman also signed the book. There were 96 member clubs of the USGA represented by signatures.