

# "Hack" Completes 40 Years As Arkansas Golf Builder

By ORVILLE HENRY

Arkansas golfdom doffs its hat to Herman C. Hackbarth, professional at the Little Rock CC who completes 40 years of state links service in September.

He came to Little Rock with his bride on September 6, 1907, to "kill the winter," but instead has helped to make pleasant living for thousands of Arkansans.

Hackbarth has been far more than pro at his home club. He has been father of the game in his adopted state, designing or remodeling a total of 35 courses, supplying their needs, lending them encouragement.

By utilizing every resource of the trade to its fullest extent he has become a wealthy man. A visiting Dallas pro recently remarked that "big name pros may pick up purses every week but Hackbarth could buy and sell any of them."

His operations for 40 years have been centered around the LRCC, located on a hilly 80-acre trace on a mountain top 320-feet above the level of the city. The scenic layout commands spectacular views of the city, five miles below and away, and of the Arkansas river for miles of its course.

There he looks after the golfing wants of 350 members—an equal number is on the waiting list—and is free to give lessons and sell equipment to outsiders. In fact, more than half of his pro shop sales are with non-members.

It all started when golf was very young in this land, still a millionaire's game. Herman—he goes by H.C. or more familiarly, "Hack," in Arkansas—learned the sport with his three brothers at their home town, Oconomowoc, Wis., then a fashionable resort. Of Scotch-English ancestry, the four tall, spare brothers all became golf pros.

Otto, professional at the Cincinnati CC, and H.C. remain in the game. Al, former pro at Hinsdale and Park Ridge in Chicago, and John C., now living in Madison, Wis., have entered other businesses.

## When "Hack" Pioneered

When Hackbarth came to Little Rock his new and struggling club's course was a short, six-hole course, located adjacent and to the west of its present site. The nearest house was two miles away over a terrible road. Today the course is surrounded on two sides by the city's most valuable resi-



"Hack" shows "how" in corner of his inner pro shop.  
—Acme photo

dential property, by bluffs dropping to the river on the other two.

"The club had about 20 golfers," Hackbarth recalls. "No hole was longer than 350 yards, since the gutta percha ball was still in play. My first assignment was the building of nine holes out of a nearby rocky, forest region. The rocks were used in building fences which still stand. Sand greens were built at the start, since bermuda grass was considered too coarse for putting greens.

"I built the first bermuda greens in 1909, with the result that the game was greatly popularized. Soon after the club had to acquire additional ground to permit expansion into 18 holes. The first nine was 2,800 yards long, so both nines had to be lengthened to give us a championship course. The full 18 holes as they exist today were completed in 1921, but they have since been trapped and bunkered."

## A Versatile Pro

The pro had to be a man of many talents in 1907.

"In taking full charge of the club and

grounds I assumed a wide variety of duties," Hackbarth says. "I was engineer, designer, laborer, teacher, and club-maker during the day, chief cook and bottle-washer at night. I supervised serving meals, and after dinner I played the piano for dancing. After 15 years of that my duties were limited to the pro shop, but I am still fairly proficient at the piano, as some of the pro seniors will testify."

Hackbarth's career as a course designer was fully launched in 1910 when he was called upon to lay out a nine-hole course at Helena, Ark., and as the game gained in popularity there was scarcely a season in which he didn't supervise the construction of other links over the state.

He designed his 35th course at Fort Smith last month. Few Arkansas links are not of his fashioning, the notable exceptions being two of the three championship courses at Hot Springs, Hardscrabble CC at Fort Smith, and the famous Texarkana CC, once Byron Nelson's home course, which was designed by Langford and Moreau of Chicago.

Courses he has planned or remodeled include seven at Little Rock, the Country Club, Riverside, Fair Park, Sylvan Hills, Rock Creek, Willow Beach, and Echo Valley; and others at Helena, Conway (2), Springdale, Fayetteville, Russellville (2), Morrilton, Fort Smith, Pocahontas, Batesville, Newport, Pine Bluff, Stuttgart, DeWitt, Nashville, Camden, El Dorado (2), Hope, Arkadelphia, Malvern, Fordyce, Rogers, Pickens, Monticello, and Hot Springs.

While he is reserved and conservative, Hackbarth still has been quick to improve on every change in the game's practices and implements.

He recalls the transition from the first rubber core Haskell, which cut easily, to the Haskell No. 10 tough cover, to the Kempshall Flyer, then the Spalding Red Dot and Wizard, the Glory Dimple and Baby Dimple, and finally the 1.62 oz. ball and the modern makes.

### Remember Those Old Days?

He fashioned himself most of the hickory shafts he used, obtaining iron club heads from local manufacturers or from abroad. Most iron clubs sold for \$2 or \$2.50. The wood heads were practically all hand made, much smaller than those of today because of the tinier ball then in use. A set consisted of a driver, brassie, and spoon, four irons, and a putter.

"The rocky character of the soil in many sections of Arkansas has often made course building and maintenance difficult," the pro points out. "By encouraging a heavy growth of bermuda over the years we have

built up a good top soil over the rocky surface at the Little Rock club.

"Our course equipment at first consisted of single units of the horse-drawn type. The horses or mules were fitted with leather boots. Green mowers were pushed by hand. Nearly all sand greens in this area have been converted to bermuda, which, with proper topdressing, watering, and mowing makes a satisfactory green in the summer. Italian rye provides an excellent winter surface."

Not long ago Chuck Taylor, manufacturer's representative, told Herman that "you are still one who really works hard at this business." It was an accurate observation. "Hack's" vigor and his alertness in looking for and applying new ideas in golf keep him on his toes.

### A Keen Businessman

Golf has been and is his life. He spends from six to seven days a week at the club and can't recall having missed as much as a week through illness. Barring heat, cold, or rain, he gives seven or eight lessons a day. He spends much of his time maintaining his pro shop, keeping in touch with every leading U. S. sporting goods house and some abroad.

He spends most of his evenings with his wife. Their only son, a graduate of the College of the Ozarks, is engaged in soil conservation work in Fort Worth.

Hackbarth's attractively-arranged, two-room shop attracts golfers from over the Southwest. He has on display, in addition to every type of golfing equipment, a collection of freak clubs he has picked up over the years. His inventory runs from \$5,000 to \$6,000. The turnover is steady.

Few go away without selecting some item from the array of woods, irons, putters (he has over a hundred of them), shoes, hats, bags, umbrellas, tees, gloves, shirts, slacks, jackets, and other gadgets and golfing items. He does a brisk business in club-making and repairing.

Pictures of the masters, past and modern, cover one wall. A straw carpet runs the length of a hallway lined with clubs and there is ample room for practice swings.

The popular pro takes pride in the fact that he was the first to design an iron club with the currently popular heavy, convex sole. That was his first H. C. Hackbarth "Streamlined" club, a 1936 model that, with changes, has been one of the state's most popular clubs. His model is marketed by Hillerich and Bradsby both under his name and through its "Power-Bilt" line. Hackbarth sells over 50 sets of his personalized clubs each season.

### Inventory for Sales Volume

Perhaps the answer to a part of his large following is the fact that he maintains such a large and varied inventory. He showed unusual foresight at the outset of World War II. He had on stock more than 1,000 dozen golf balls at the time of Pearl Harbor, and through careful rationing he was able to supply the needs of both members and non-members. He had clubs for sale throughout the war, too.

While his pro shop profits run into handsome figures, Hackbarth is also retained by the club on a salary basis. It has been a successful arrangement.

"In 40 years I have never failed to discount a bill," he declares.

While he occasionally tours his 6,400-yard par-71 layout in 75 or better, no mean performance for a man of 63 years, Hackbarth has never been much of a playing pro.

"My time has been devoted to developing golfers, catering to their needs, and creating interest in the game," he says. "I have had little time for tournaments except for the winter senior events in Florida. Fifteen pros have served apprenticeship in my shop, the most prominent being E. J. ("Dutch") Harrison. Virtually all Arkansas pros are products of this club."

"Hack" stages an average of three ama-

teur tournaments a year at his club, including an invitational that ranks among the Southwest's best, and often is called upon to direct meets for other clubs over the state.

Hackbarth feels that the opportunity for the golf professional is not on the winter or summer tournament tour, but right in his home club. He is himself testimony to his belief.

He was asked if he would encourage a young fellow with a golfing bent to take up the life of a professional.

"I would if he would take pains to get started correctly," he replied. "It's not just a matter of hitting the ball 250 yards or better, or scoring around par. Most young pros make their mistakes in not learning all the details of the game from the ground up, that ground being his greens, his fairways, and his shop. They don't wade into the business fundamentals that are so important in the running of a successful pro shop."

He could have long ago, but Hackbarth has entertained no thoughts of retiring. As able and quick as many men his junior by years, he can look forward to years of operations at his same old stand.

"And besides," he points out, "what would I do with myself? Golf is the only thing I know."

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### ATLANTA'S NEW PEACHTREE GOLF COURSE TO OPEN SOON



Dr. Fred Grau, USGA Greens Section Director, left, is being shown features of Atlanta's new Peachtree Golf Course by T. R. Garlington with Robt. T. Jones, Jr. looking on. The new layout now nearing completion is on the old Ashford estate near Atlanta, Ga.