

Pro Business Shows Good Progress in 1948

By HERB GRAFFIS

This year in pro golf has been highlighted by intelligent realization that the gravy train can't be expected to run at high speed forever.

Consequently pros whose judgment and foresight have been sound through the years already have begun to make ready for keener competition on shop sales and to accent promotion of club activities in ways that should protect clubs against membership slumps of the severity that has marked previous recessions. Pros at public and fee courses also have made this year a high spot in developing the golf habit strong enough to withstand the bumps that may be expected from inflation getting too far out of bounds.

The tournament picture is being carefully revised by force of circumstances and good sense. Drastic overhauling of tournament operations was set in motion when Lawson Little resigned as chairman of the PGA rules committee in protest against laxity brought on by miserable playing conditions at some winter circuit events. Outcome of this was that the pros decided to play strictly by the USGA rules, including the USGA 14 club rule and the stymie. Definitely another result of this agreement was a more informed and closer observance of rules in the National Open and PGA championships.

Formulation of a stronger code for conduct of the tournament circuit and capable performance by George Schneider, PGA tournament bureau chmn., seem to have settled most of the tournament wrangling that was receiving unfavorable publicity. But these actions didn't solve the problem of guaranteeing to tournament sponsors all the stars the sponsors wanted for bringing in the gate.

Exhibition Schedule Heavy

And you can't blame the stars for not wanting to make all the tournaments. The

exhibition business had a big revival this year with more demands for stars than could be supplied. Nelson, Babe Zaharias and the perennial Kirkwood were booked for exhibitions virtually every day they possibly could fill. Hogan, with an unparalleled record of tournament victories this year, had far more demands for exhibitions than he could fill. Other playing pros have discussed Ben's sandwiching of exhibitions dates between selected tournament appearances as a possible reason for his consistency in winning. They also have a hunch that Hogan's net income might, by a considerable margin, have topped that of those who played more tournaments.

To October Mangrum was top tournament money winner with \$33,005 for 115 competitive rounds in all but one of the scheduled tournaments. Hogan was in second place with \$31,347 for 22 tournaments. Demaret, Locke, Alexander, Middlecoff, Palmer, Harrison, Heafner, Ghezzi and Metz follow in the order named, as men who have won more than \$10,000 in 9 months of tournament play.

Signs point to fewer of the big money tournaments in 1949 but increase of tournaments of lesser value which will draw some of the top talent and provide ample competitive and teaching training for the development of younger pros. There also will be more star exhibition matches at the ritzier clubs next year. Most of them don't want to go to the trouble of staging tournaments and haven't facilities for handling big events.

Long View of Club Pros

This year club pros have been seeing indications that they're catching up with demand for golf goods which mounted as a result of the wartime shutdown of golf manufacturing and the reconversion period at plants.

The situation which has prevailed since 1942 could have resulted in a bad slump in

the standard of pro shop service, for pros, like other sellers, wouldn't be inclined to steam-up during a sellers' market. But when the pros had to make a living on apparel, accessories and other items they could get when clubs, balls and bags weren't available, they learned plenty about buying, display, inventories, advertising and merchandising in general.

Now, prospects are that the vast increase in the postwar count of golfers over the prewar period and much larger manufacturing facilities may bring on another marketing free-for-all such as gave everybody in the golf playing equipment business headaches during bygone years.

However, as long as competition is normal to humans and is just as much to be expected in selling golf merchandise as in playing the game, the pros haven't any worries about the future that are uncommon to retail merchants.

Pros in 1948 continued to improve their shops at private and public courses. They lightened up the places with clean, neatly displayed stocks and made better use of color. Those who saw Willie Hunter's shop at Riviera during the National Open saw a typical example of a pro shop in which light, color and a large and enticing display of golf merchandise presented a valuable service to club members and a departmental operation reflecting lively character of the club.

Pros Score with Promotion

Never before have pros done a promotion job equal to that they have done this year. Particularly have they accented junior golfer development.

The PGA finally got organized on a national basis for junior promotion under the able leadership of George Lake. Lake's job in junior promotion at the Long Beach (Calif.) municipal course has been outstanding among many fine achievements by pros in attracting youngsters to the game.

The USGA's first national junior championship, record fields in the national Junior Chamber of Commerce annual junior championship, National Caddy Assn., Hearst newspapers' national junior championships and the long established Western Golf Assn. annual junior championship, together with the highly successful nation-wide high school promotion campaign conducted by the National Golf Foundation in association with the Athletic Journal, showed the juniors as sound insurance for the future of golf.

Probability is that in 1949 the Women's Western junior championship will be revived. Patty Berg returned to the Women's Western the \$500 the WWGA Open championship first prize, telling the association to use that money for promoting golf among younger girls. Patty's been doing a great job in this field herself for several years at clubs and schools.

Women's Market Brightens

Pros are getting stronger in the women's market, having definitely overcome the old handicap of being ruled out by many women who thought that pro prices for clubs were too high and quality of accessories too uncertain.

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After the Battle at Gettysburg



Where the Blue and the Gray met at Gettysburg, Pa., in one of history's decisive battles there's recently been opened one of the most attractive 9-hole clubs in the United States.

Gettysburg CC acquired ground and buildings for \$45,000 and spent \$5,000 in renovating and furnishing the buildings as clubhouse and pro shop. Nine hole course with fairway watering, and large

practice putting greens were built for \$45,000. A member in the road building business loaned the club earth moving equipment which reduced costs on the course construction job. Course is 3080 yds., with 35 par.

Advice of Dr. Al Cooper of Penn State college, helped club get greens, fairway and tee turf in excellent condition for a new course.

helped me sell more than last year when the changes were not as frequent.

"I bought the quality of merchandise I thought would sell and was careful in ordering sizes that sold. This also protected me against carrying over a heavy inventory.

"Repainting carts and keeping them greased and in good working condition increased that business.

"By working with my assistant and shop boys on their duties I got them to take greater interest in their jobs. They perform very well.

"All of this is old stuff to most pros but maybe it will be of some help to a few who are always interested, as I am, in checking their work with that of other professionals so the members will get the most complete and competent service we possibly can give them."

PRO BUSINESS GOOD

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Now women generally have been convinced that pro stocks in price, range and quality, give them excellent buys in specialty shop merchandise. With women's club production by leading manufacturers getting to the point where a strong drive can be made for this business, 1949 prospects for women's volume in pro shops look very good to pros who have studied this phase of the market.

Generally pros are ahead of club officials in developing golf interest and play among younger people. This work was given impetus by pros at universities who have seen a rapid and wide increase of student interest. The National Intercollegiate championship has become one of the major events of the year. The number of colleges having courses already is rather imposing and numerous other schools are planning installation of courses or golf practice ranges.

Protecting Clubs Against Slump

Situation at private clubs in metropolitan districts stymies some of this promotion among younger men and women. Average age of members at most metropolitan district private clubs in the central and eastern states is between 50 and 60. The clubs are pretty well crowded and highly desirable young businessmen whose fathers don't happen to belong to preferable clubs are frozen out by high initiation and dues and waiting lists.

Pros who remember what happened after the 1929 stock market crash when an army of the older men quit playing and clubs were in sad shape, are wondering what they can do to get their clubs to protect themselves against another such crash by

having eager replacements in the membership available.

This year pros definitely helped extend the season in states north of the Mason-Dixon line. The pros saw to it that competitive events that gave everybody a chance for prizes, were conducted after Labor Day. Some pros gave the prizes themselves and found it a fine good-will investment as well as something that kept the club plant in use during the beautiful days of early fall. Course maintenance practice in cleaning off the leaves made play pleasant.

Pro Advertising Increased

Pro advertising this year was better than ever before. The smart pros spent their own money in keeping their lesson, service and merchandising stories attractively before their customers. In a few cases groups of pros in a city paid for newspaper space to collectively advertise their stocks and services.

Pros were more active in radio than in any previous year. Some were especially active in collecting interesting material for their scripts.

Golf lessons already are almost a standard feature of television programs but the television medium requires a change from practice tee methods that hasn't been satisfactorily developed yet.

NBC has made films of a series of lessons by Joe Novak in which movie celebrities appear as pupils. It's all in earnest instead of in the style of previous Hollywood golf instruction picture jobs which dragged in the movie stars as comedy relief or as window dressing. The NBC-Novak production follows a distinctive pattern which seems certain to have strong attraction and instruction value for those who want to take up golf, the novices and the advanced players. No announcement has been made of date when the series will be made available for extensive television presentation.

Northern California PGA has bought radio time enabling it to broadcast buy-from-pro commercials and carry pro air programs past the point of general free publicity.

Consider Pro Schooling

Consideration of professional business training courses continued to be in the talk stage. Leading pro businessmen have repeatedly remarked that the greenkeeping short courses conducted at state agricultural schools have accounted for advances in course maintenance that have been unparalleled in golf. Pro golf needs similar organization of its merchandising, teaching and general service research and instruction.

Business conferences, especially in Minnesota and Indiana sections of the PGA, each spring bring out ideas that have added to the incomes of veteran pros and younger fellows in the business. These and other test runs of the training school idea have demonstrated that there is need for schools with officials collaborating with college athletic departments and faculty members in the planning and conduct of the pro educational courses.

Some boost was given to the organization of pro training by the GI Bill of Rights deal which called for defining what kind of training a professional golfer should have. When an ex-GI qualified for that government help he had to take a course that professionals and educational authorities agreed eventually should make him able to handle a master pro job. Assistant's training also has received a lot of attention from pros lately. Many candidates for assistant jobs want to play golf and develop their own games but don't want to work at the other less glamorous, but highly important, phases of the golf department job.

It all adds up to pro planning of business education having progressed during 1948 although it has some way to go before the pro schooling is on a basis comparable to that of greenkeepers.

Youngsters are jumping directly from amateur ranks into pro jobs at clubs, notwithstanding the PGA Class A membership requirement of years of apprentice training. Observant experienced professionals have expressed the belief that unless the PGA takes action on a definite program of education for the pro golf business inexperienced club officials are bound to consider the main requirements needed to hold a pro job are ability to score rather well, reasonable understanding of the methods of the game and a pleasing personality.

IMPROVEMENTS SUGGESTED

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with difficult maintenance conditions they're always a headache to the supt. and players, as well as costly in maintenance.

In layout of watering facilities Linkogel also urges that the man who is going to maintain the course be allowed plenty of time to go over the plans. Then there won't be need of 200 ft. of hose for green watering from the nearest outlet, which is the case when pipe and fitting cost rather than long-time operating expense, has been the governing factor. He also points out that increasing high speed of mowing is going to call for foresight and practical knowledge in planning bunkering for machine maintenance.

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