

# Change Basis of Pro Teaching to Strengthen Club Position

By WALTER KELLER

The American public is fundamentally sports-minded. Americans like to play, to go places and watch sports events, and to read about them. There's more attention paid to spectator sports because of the ease of sitting but the most intense interest in any spectator or participant sport is shown by those who are proficient at the sport.

Interest in a sport increases in direct proportion to proficiency. The pro sees that in noticing that his lower handicap players play more than the high handicap golfers. The golf clubs certainly learned in the years closely following the 1929 depression that golf interest and proficiency were closely related. The low handicap golfers, despite their financial set-backs, found some way to retain club membership. The higher handicap golfers quit the clubs and gave up the game.

Although this basic fact of the direct relationship between golfing proficiency and financial soundness of the golf club is constantly in evidence nothing of consequence has been done to apply the fact. The average of all golfers' scores is higher than 95 and it is certain that the 95 golfer can't be considered to be getting full advantage of his golf club regardless of his enjoyment of the bar, the restaurant and companionship.

## Lesson Basis Is Obsolete

It isn't the pros' fault that the average scoring is so high. The pro, when he gets a chance, takes athletically inept older people and when an instruction program is kept, brings them down into the mid-80's. This is an amazing achievement considering the awkwardness of most of his adult students.

The fundamental reason for lack of proficiency of golf club members is an obsolete basis of pro-member instruction relations. The same old system of lesson booking and payment by individuals which was in effect when professional golf started still prevails. That is the fault of directors of golf clubs. They haven't thought about making their clubs sounder by increasing

the golfing proficiency of the club's members.

There is an urgent need of stimulating interest in the membership of country clubs with ideas to get more members interested in golf and the other related activities and facilities of the club.

Prospective golfers have been accustomed for many years to sign up for either a series of lessons or to take lessons singly, but, all in all, most golfers spend very little for golf instruction. However, when a member is inspired to take lessons, there is every probability that he will not only purchase golf clubs and other golfing accessories, but, also, because he is spending more time at the club, he will make use of the dining room facilities. All of this builds up his house account much more than the member who is not as active.

Directors can easily determine which club members are active — those who take lessons and play golf — and strike an average of their monthly accounts; then compare it with the average account of the inactive members. This will show the Board how many thousands of dollars the club has lost in revenue due to the lack of a good golf instruction program for the entire membership.

## A "Club" with 8000 Members

In the practice fairway business, my plan was to get the golfers to use and enjoy our facilities by giving them personalized attention, and by using a simple, understandable method of instruction. The result was that my fairways grew in size and in volume of business, until it necessitated employing six other golf professionals to assist me to serve some 8,000 golfers who were listed with us. If this can be accomplished at a practice fairway, surely it can be more easily done at a country club where there is a closer relationship between the club members and the golf pro.

A golf pro who can arouse enthusiasm among the members is worth real money to his club, and some of the best jobs

in this country are held by golf pros who rarely have time to play competitive golf, but who do outstanding promotional jobs at their clubs.

#### Lessons for Every Member

My suggestion is this: If a nominal fee was added to each member's bill for golf instruction, entitling him to a given number of lessons for the season, it would mean that the golf pro would receive a minimum fee from golf instruction alone, and require him to employ a better staff than he usually has been able to afford in the past. At the same time this would increase the percentage of active golfers, and would result in a more active use of the club by more members. Is it not, therefore, reasonable to assume that the monthly accounts would increase?

There are very few clubs who at first would be willing to operate in this manner, because in most cases the clubs are trying to get by as cheaply as possible. But as George May advertises: "You've got to spend money to make money." You would not, in this case, be spending the club's money, but would be giving the member something for which he joined the club in the first place, and encourage him to take advantage of golf instructions for which he has already paid. Also, you as the Board of Directors will be making every effort to see that the members get their money's worth, besides creating a situation for your help where-by they will work from the heart and pocket-book and not from the clock.

George May has done an outstanding job at the Tam O'Shanter CC, and gives his members as much per dollar spent as at any club I know of. This is particularly noteworthy when it is remembered that he took over the club when it was practically bankrupt, and built it up to where, among other things, it stages the largest tournaments held anywhere. This was all done by careful planning, and by spending money to make money. But even George at his club with an outstanding pro instructor, Bill Gordon, has a multitude of high handicap golfers who can't be considered fixed assets.

No doubt most of you read the financial pages of the newspapers from day to day, and have learned that competition is again here in the business world. Don't think for one moment that your club won't have stiff competition with other restaurants and places of entertainment, and with other sports. While one sport

will advertise for your member to be a spectator, another will appeal to him to participate, and they will spend thousands of dollars in an effort to get him to patronize them. The golf industry must be right in the middle of this group, getting more people to play and to use its facilities, if it is to meet the tough competition offered by other sports and amusements.

Golf as a business depends on teaching people to acquire a skill that is natural to comparatively few young men and women. In no other sport is the element of instruction as important to the business phase of the sport as it is in golf. And as long as golf clubs continue to allow the lesson situation to be handled in an out-grown manner the clubs will be exposed to abrupt changes of membership and financial condition.

I learned that in switching from club pro jobs to successful operation of golf ranges where I quickly saw that I'd have to develop steady and increasing patronage through instruction or go broke. I didn't go broke by a long way, simply because I applied the same principles of business promotion and increasing customer interest and proficiency that golf clubs should have applied long ago.

#### Iowa Short Course Scheduled at Ames, March 14-16

The Fifteenth annual Iowa Short Course and Conference for greenkeepers is scheduled to meet at Iowa State College at Ames, March 14-16. Speakers for the program will include noted educators including Drs. Fred Grau, Dir., USGA Green Section and O. J. Noer, Milwaukee. A feature of the conference will be a question box at the beginning of each session. A printed list of questions will be compiled in advance from those sent in by greenkeepers prior to the meeting.

Sessions will start at 1:00 pm. Topics will include discussion of the following: fertilizers for fairways, greens and other turf areas; the latest information on fungicide experiments; watering; aeration; machinery; and DDT and other insecticide developments.

H. L. Lantz, Head of Pomology Subsection at State College, handling arrangements for the conference, anticipates an attendance of more than 150 from six states. Inquiries concerning meeting and sessions should be forwarded to him.