

# Reservations Solve Tee Time Problems for Muny Course

By JIM MORRISSEY

When the reservation system of starting took hold on golf courses throughout the country, it looked as though a solution to the problem of weekend congestion had finally been reached. Golfers and starters felt that signing up during the week to play on Saturdays and Sundays meant that the two or three hour wait on the first tee was about to be eliminated. On many courses this has been the case, but on others the reservation system has been abandoned, or the golfers are not satisfied with it.

There is nothing wrong with the system itself. The trouble lies in the fact that many pros have not handled reservations properly. Since the system has worked out well in many cities there is evidence that reservations, if properly handled, are the answer to weekend congestion problems.

We experimented with reservations at the Bonneville golf course in Salt Lake City four years ago, and after we overcame the early problems the idea became so popular that few golfers would think of going back to the old, first come, first served, system. The main reason for our success was that Professional Dick Kramer and City Commissioner Fred Tedesco outlined a four-point plan and insisted that it be followed — without exception.

## No Telephone Reservations

The first thing they ordered was that there were to be no telephone reservations. Many courses take reservations over the phone, but this is the main reason for the failure of the system in many places. A Seattle golfer summed up this weakness recently when he said, "It's enough to make me quit the game. Every time I try to make a reservation for Sunday morning it is the same story — nothing until noon. I even got up before the sun one Monday morning to make a reservation for the following Sunday morning, and the course was all booked up. I know that a couple of hundred golfers did not call before I did. It is just too easy for these guys to play favorites when they take phone reservations."

At Bonneville we overcame this problem by making the golfers come out to the course and pay their green fees before making a reservation. In this way we accomplished two things. Since the golfers have already paid they are more likely to show up at the right time and thereby avoid de-

lays on the first tee over the weekend. The second asset of this system is that the golfers know that there is no favoritism in taking reservations. If they come out to the course at 8 o'clock Monday morning they can be assured of getting the time they want. We do not permit the golfers to register for the next week when they play over the weekend because we want to insure everyone an equal chance to reserve the more popular times. If we permitted weekend golfers to sign up from week to week, others would not have an equal chance to play at the more desirable times.

At first it was hard to sell the golfers on this idea. They felt it was unfair to expect them to make an extra trip out to the course, but after the first week they realized that the 15 minutes spent making the reservation was much better than two hours wasted around the first tee over the weekend. Many golfers now sign up on their way to work, and others take care of this when they play during the week. This, incidentally, has helped to boost our weekday play.

## On Tee Ahead of Time

The second requirement of Kramer's system is that the golfers be on the tee ready to go one minute before their starting time. This proved to be a big headache. The first day we used the system the first five foursomes ran off smoothly. But when number six came up on the register the tee was empty, and we had to send someone else out. About five minutes later the golfers showed up, but we had to tell them they were out of luck. This was an unfortunate incident, but they were on the tee ready to go ten minutes ahead of time the next week. We had a lot of trouble with tardiness during the introductory period of reservations at Bonneville, but today such occurrences are practically unheard of.

Another technique we employed helped us to send out players who did not have a game until the last minute. At the end of each eight foursomes we set aside a seven minute "starters' time." Usually this time is taken up by the fact that we have trouble getting each group off the tee and out of the way of the next group. However, if we are able to keep the players moving we can send out another foursome made up of lonesomes or twosomes during this time and make a few more golfers happy.

This is especially helpful in the case of

tourists or those who are unable to arrange a regular game. A travelling salesman from New York was so pleased with the manner in which we were able to help him play on a crowded weekend that he wrote Kramer a letter after he returned home and said that the local pro was seriously considering setting up a new starting system modeled after ours.

### Foursomes Only

Kramer's fourth step is aimed at boosting receipts and at the same time speeding up play once the golfers get off the first tee. Only foursomes can make reservations. This is the step that is hard on the golfers, since many of them cannot be sure of a game until late in the week, but we insist that this rule be followed to prevent twosomes from fouling up the steady flow of golfers. As the system progressed we overcame this, since there is usually someone hanging around the clubhouse who is willing to fill in a foursome. Instead of paying his green fees to the course he can reimburse the person who made the reservation and no one is hurt.

Our reservations system is extremely flexible. The hours during which reservations must be made can be adjusted to the needs of each course. At Bonneville we book the golfers from noon until 5 p.m. on Saturdays and from 6 a.m. until one on Sundays. At first our reservations ended at noon on Sundays, but increased play forced us to extend the time. The other two courses in Salt Lake City have different hours, but the basic rules are the same, and the results have been favorable.

This flexibility also enabled us to find a place for our ten-man team matches. For a long time these matches caused a lot of gripes, since the golfers did not like the idea of being held up while five foursomes teed off ahead of them. Under our present system we can make reservations for the team matches and no one feels that he is being deprived of a starting place. The same thing can be done for weekend tournaments, and you still will be able to handle your regular golfers.

When the system first went into effect Kramer felt that it might hurt his clubhouse concession, but after four years of reservations he has found that his business has increased considerably. Under the old system many golfers used to hang around the first tee and bother the starter in the hope they might get out a little earlier. Today they can stay in the clubhouse while waiting to be called. This gives Kramer an excellent chance to show the golfers some new equipment, or he can shoot the breeze about that hook or slice that is giving one of his customers some trouble.

There is one weak spot in the system we are using. Golfers with season tickets often try to sign the register two or three times

to help fill in a foursome for a friend. Occasionally we have to let a twosome leave the tee as a result of this, but most of the time we are able to fill in a foursome with stragglers. The only way to completely overcome this problem is to get more cooperation from season ticket holders. For the most part they have been cooperative on the Salt Lake City courses, and when they all begin to help us in this matter we will have conquered the whole problem of weekend congestion.

As you can see, it doesn't take much to carry out a smooth-working system of reservations. But it's up to you if you are to make a success of such an operation on your course. You will have to educate your golfers at first, but the system can work if you stick by the rules.

### WHAT'LL YOU HAVE JOE; \$2,750?



Joe Kirkwood, Jr., gets the \$2,750 winner's check and the trophy for the Pabst Blue Ribbon Open at North Hills CC (Milwaukee) from Fred Pabst. The check and Mrs. Kirkwood, who is Cathy Downs, one of the sweetest and most talented kids in pictures, are in young Palooka's hold with a strong right.

### BOOST GREENKEEPERS

Indiana sportswriters seem to have more of a habit of recognizing course superintendents' good work than sports scribes elsewhere. Recently Bill Fox, Jr. in Indianapolis News lauded job done by Jess Ashby of Anderson (Ind.) CC and Daniel W. Scism in Evansville (Ind.) Courier praised work done by Ernest Schneider at Evansville CC.