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Big Work on Small Club Professional Jobs

By HERB GRAFFIS

CRAIG Wood probably has had the widest and most successful experience of any pro in playing and home club job phases of professional golf business. With a National Open and many other triumphs in his record, with club jobs from a small start to the big job at Winged Foot in the NY Met district, and as a developer of younger pro playing and home club pro talent, Craig observed, studied and learned all the way along.

He's had considerable business experience outside golf, too, which had qualified him as a competent appraiser of the pro business. Now he is running the Ford agency which he and Claude Harmon own.

During a talk Craig and I once had on pro business he said something I've never heard mentioned by anybody else in golf. He remarked that the pro who could run a small job exceptionally well always was a "man of the year" in golf.

"The very good man on the small job who may not be known outside of his own state — maybe not that widely — probably is doing more for golf than fellows who have a string of titles or who are in big jobs," Craig remarked. "He has to arouse golf interest among the men, women and youngsters in his neighborhood. He has to get them so keenly interested in the game they'll keep the club alive and growing. He has to stretch every penny farther than a record drive. He has to know how to maintain the course and often has to run the clubhouse.

Big Work at Small Clubs

"Sometimes he has to teach, tend bar, sell the right clubs at the right prices to

his members, take a turn at running the tractor, run club tournaments for men and women, teach school kid classes, speak at luncheon club meetings, be active in the Legion post, maintain good credit rating on a small volume of business, be a good friend of every member without playing favorites, be a good caddie-master, be his own assistant, be a good shot when members want him to go hunting, playing such a good game when he gets a chance to play that he can beat the best-scoring members, do pretty well in the state tournaments, practice when he can get a chance, have his wife and kids as well as himself, take an active part in community affairs, and see that club news gets in the local papers. Then he reads about pros who are getting a lot more money for less work."

Wood's comment got me talking with other professionals in big jobs about the performances of pros on the smaller jobs. Without exception the successful men at the larger clubs said it was more difficult to run a small club pro job exceptionally well than it was to successfully operate a big club pro department. They all spoke from experience.

"It's not only that the pro is learning the hard way, and on little money and with little or no help," explained the professional at one of the large midwestern clubs, "but the members, too, are learning. At a big club you have members who know golf, who have money, and who have been educated to know that the members are expected to buy from the pro in providing the revenue necessary to



Wm. (Sonny) Ryan in attractive shop he built at end of grill room at Madison (S. D.) CC.

conduct a first-class pro department.

"At the smaller clubs the pro has to build golf and golfers. He and his members are governed by the fact that smaller town incomes aren't at big city levels, so both the pro and the member have to get more fun for their money and learn how to make whatever money is available do the most work.

"The small town pro job is the best possible training for handling a big club job very well. The main changes in moving to the big job are not being 'clubby' with the members and not being scared about the increased size of the business and the money involved. Good judgment, sound personality, constant study, and carefulness in handling money, solve the problems of a fellow growing from a small town to big city job in golf," this veteran concluded.

Enthusiast on Small Town Job

I recalled these conversations as I read a letter from Wm. (Sonny) Ryan, pro at Madison (S.D.) CC. Madison has a population of about 6,000. According to Ryan the 160 members of the club are the liveli-

est bunch of golf enthusiasts you'd ever see. Five years ago they hauled rock on working parties and built an attractive clubhouse.

The team idea sticks out of Ryan's letter. I've noticed that is always present when a man who is making good at a small town club tells about his work. Ryan wrote: "All these men deserve a lot of credit for the club's great progress in a short time. We've got a nice clubhouse and our greens are as beautiful and as fine as any in the Northwest." That's what makes the successful small town club pros click. They are sold completely and fervently on their clubs. But the main reason for that is ambitious, enthusiastic working members. I've seen some good, experienced older pros go to small town clubs and flop on the job because the clubs haven't aggressive, hopeful leadership making use of the pros' experience and effort.

Ryan says: "Our members are live workers. Our president, Wally Klein, and our directors, Delbert Laughlin, Jock Mc-

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served as an artillery officer, he went with the Ravisloe CC in 1920. He resigned as Ravisloe manager in 1936 to go as Glen View Club's mgr., and in 1952 went to North Shore CC, also in the Chicago dist., as mgr. Illness caused his resignation from North Shore in 1952.

Murray was one of the most widely known, best liked men in club management. He was a highly competent, hard-working, cheerful fellow. Not a word of complaint came from him during his prolonged illness and he kept going around until compelled to enter a hospital.

He is survived by his wife, Ruby.

WORK ON SMALL CLUB

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Millan, Ed Weber, George Regan, Walter Kundert and O. J. Tommeraasen, are the kind of men you would expect, if you knew them, to make a club like ours the best club that any town of Madison's size or two or three times its population, can show."

Maybe Ryan is guilty of poetic license in bragging about his club, but he can't be arrested for that. Such confidence is worth money to the club and to Ryan.

When Ryan came to the club from California all the members' clubs were on carts and were parked in the middle of the grillroom floor. He wrote: "We needed the space for tables and card playing on stag nights. So I built racks along the walls and put two carts to a rack and now we have the floor space we need for members in the evening."

That's not the fanciest arrangement in the world and not the most desirable answer to the problem of cart storage which bothers so many clubs, but it worked at Madison.

Improvises A Pro Shop

Something else that Ryan did that shows the resourcefulness of a good small town club pro is the way he built the pro shop shown in accompanying illustration. "I figure that supplying our members with the best, most suitable playing equipment they can get anywhere is a very important part of my service to the club. So I built my shop at one end of the grillroom, where I can take care of customers at the shop and care for the bar business also.

"In the summer I have an assistant who takes care of the shop and bar while I'm out teaching."

At a larger club the arrangement wouldn't fit but in the smaller town clubs



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the tie-up of the grillroom and pro shop frequently is a necessity and quite a few of the smaller town pros do the job very attractively and effectively.

And why not? Some of the best pro department selling done at the larger clubs is when the pro is in the locker-room talking over clubs with members, then leading them into the shop. Al Watrous at Oakland Hills; Wood, and now Harmon, at Winged Foot; and Joe Novak before the new pro shop was built at Bel Air; are merchandising stars who showed that locker-room selling as well as the lesson tee could be made tremendous factors in increasing shop sales volume.

COURSE RECORDS THAT HELP

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used whenever possible. They, along with the marginal notes should contain enough information for the superintendent to be able to intelligently report to his chairman the entire situation at any time. Although your methods of turf management may be highly effective, unless you can answer questions in a positive manner, backed up by recorded facts and figures, the club officials may hesitate to accept your conclusions.

Sound business practice provides for recognition of ability. Demonstrate that you are capable of handling the club's valuable investment. Too many worthwhile accomplishments go un-noticed only because the superintendent fails to submit a business-like report. There is a common tendency to be lazy. This is a vice, and like all vices, it is destructive. The appointment of committees often results in much apathy by its members. If such a condition prevails at your club, don't succumb to the same course of inaction. The committee usually has a brief tenure of office. You, on the other hand, are engaged in a profession which requires full time concentration. Do your job well; even if you are never called on, to make a report. Think of the valuable reference material contained in your records.

Maintain Library

Speaking of reference material, the superintendent should maintain a library. It is just as important to him as it is to other professions. Set up an index file. It will enable you to put your finger on any subject you wish to study. Treating turf is not unlike treating humans for illness. Did you ever notice that a medical doctor