



Decatur Herald and Review Photo

Top five caddies at Country Club of Decatur (Ill.) assembled around table of prizes given at turkey dinner at end of 1953 season. Responsible for the successful caddie program were (standing in rear, L to R) Pro J. D. Ruffner, Golf Chairman Dr. Paul Berryhill, Assistant pro Gene Smith.

(The caddies, L to R, are George Madding, Charles Lofland, Bill Loughnane, Danny Hogue and Bill Risley—in the order they were rated after the season.)

How Caddie Problem Was Solved at Illinois Club

By FORREST R. KYLE

THE TALENTED caddie is becoming too rare at many clubs and municipal courses. There may be bag carriers available, but not enough are caddies in the full sense of the word.

The caddie problem has been a particular stickler for many country clubs since the war, both from the standpoint of quantity and quality. The Country Club of Decatur, Ill., was one of the clubs which had been fretting along with a caddie problem which seemed to defy solution — until last summer. Then things happened.

When President Merrill Lindsay and Golf Chm. Dr. Paul Berryhill of the club started screening applications for a new professional, they were looking for someone who would, among other performances in his department, solve the caddie problem.

They found just who they wanted in J. D. Ruffner, who had been an assistant to Errie Ball at Oak Park (Ill.) CC. And Ruffner

knew just the young assistant he needed to make a success of what his employers regarded as a highly important job. From California, Ruffner summoned Eugene Smith, a young pro who was assigned to the caddie operations.

Recruit Thru Schools

In rounding up a group of boys last spring, the Ruffner-Smith-Berryhill team worked through the Boy Scouts and public school officials. A lot of brand new faces turned up, many of whom had never set foot on a golf course. And in the group were a number of former caddies.

One of the first things the group saw was a sign which hadn't been around the caddie grounds before. It said: "No Smoking, No Drinking, No Gambling, No Profanity."

An older caddie eyed the sign and sniffed. "Wonder who will enforce that?"

Gene Smith flexed his rusky shoulders when he heard of this and allowed he was the man to do it, if he had to. The older

caddie was noticeable by his absence thereafter.

Other caddies who had been considered trouble-makers in other years took the hint and either improved their conduct or didn't come back. Consequently, the summer passed without many of the undesirable incidents which had marked the previous season.

The Ruffner-Smith instruction periods not only schooled the young caddies in their duties on the golf course but included training in politeness, discipline and good sportsmanship.

Caddie fees were increased 25 cents for each class of caddie and a rule against tipping by the members was enforced. Fifteen cents of the increase went into a caddie fund; the other 10 cents, per custom, went to the pro department.

Caddies were graded by their players after each round and received points. Good grades meant an addition to their season total; a poor grade meant a deduction. Missing a caddie class without an excuse was costly, but showing up on a day when the weather was nasty was good for a bonus. Caddying double was financially better, but it didn't gain any extra points.

Recreation Program Lively

In addition to the training program, a full-scale recreation program was carried out. Picnics were held and the club turned over the swimming pool one day for a caddie party. The usual caddie tournaments were held.

When the season was over there was \$325 in the caddie fund. The club tossed in \$175 and when the caddies assembled for their season-ending turkey dinner, there was \$500 in prizes for them. The accumulated points by each caddie determined in what order he selected his prize.

The prizes ranged from a \$75 bicycle to pocket knives. A table was piled high with 13 wrist watches, 11 cameras, golf clubs, fishing sets, fountain pens, tennis racquets, footballs, basketballs, baseball gloves, bats and balls and table tennis sets.

"When the word spreads about this layout of prizes," remarked Dr. Berryhill, "we're liable to have more caddies than we know what to do with."

Prizes were purchased on the basis of a list of hobbies submitted by the caddies. The attention given in selecting prizes was best exemplified by the presence, among the golf clubs, of three woods for a left-hander. It happened there was one first-time caddie who played left-handed and who gave prom-

ise of developing into a good player, even though using a mixed-up batch of borrowed clubs. Now he has a set of matched woods.

Caddie Insurance Planned

At the caddie dinner, Dr. Berryhill reported that everyone was so pleased with the way the caddie program had turned out the club is hoping to establish a caddie scholarship at Millikin University in Decatur in the near future. This year the club also plans on an insurance program for the caddies' protection.

Getting caddies during the week on special days before school was out in the spring and after it started in the fall was no special problem. School officials co-operated in allowing boys to caddie on these special days with their scholastic standing the one and only requisite for getting excused. Grades went up and caddies were available.

"We had fewer complaints by members about caddies last year than I can remember, remarked Dr. Berryhill. "And we have had almost no complaints from parents of caddies that their sons came home at night without the money they earned or with a bloody nose."

Caddies Rate Players

The caddies, incidentally, had an opportunity to register their complaints, too. At the caddie dinner, Dr. Berryhill had each caddie list the three things he thought least desirable in a player and the three things he liked best for players to do. No names were mentioned but Dr. Berryhill plans to submit the lists in a letter to all golf playing members.

"We had about 50 regular caddies last summer," Ruffner said. "Next year we hope to have twice that many so there will never be a necessity for a boy to caddie double."

Ruffner will tell you that any professional leads a less complicated life during the summer if he has a group of good caddies and a good assistant pro.

"I had both last year," he said.

Unfortunately, right-hand man Gene Smith won't be back for the 1954 season. He plans to enter a theological seminary in San Francisco and study for the ministry.

Which may explain why Gene was the "secret weapon" in forming a high-class group of caddies in one summer.

Pros at smaller clubs frequently write GOLFDOM saying men and women tournament pros getting around for exhibitions at the smaller clubs is very effective promotion of play and sales but there's not much of it.