

Members Need To Be Told Why They Should Buy from Pros

By HERB GRAFFIS

A COMPETENT and conscientious young professional, now in his third year as pro at a pretty good club, asked me recently "What can I do to let members know that members of a good club are expected to favor their pro with their business?"

The young man had served as assistant to two fine pros at good metropolitan district clubs. He's a good businessman, a good teacher, runs his shop well, and is liked by his members.

But there's a lot of golf equipment being bought outside his shop by members who apparently don't realize that part of the deal in belonging to a private club is patronizing the professional when buying golf goods.

If club members didn't do that they wouldn't be able to afford the kind of professional and assistant and other shop help that they want—and which a good private club operation requires.

In this particular case I happened to know, very well, several of the club officials and members, even better than I know the pro, and I've known the pro for a few years before he took time out to serve his military hitch.

So, after talking it over with the young man's employers, and doing it (I hope) diplomatically because the pro wasn't complaining but merely asking, I got some jolting information.

I was surprised to learn that club officials had only a vague idea that the pro wasn't getting nearly what he might reasonably expect in members' business. And this they didn't appreciate despite the fact that the club did the pro's billing.

The average per member of pro shop business per month was less than the monthly average per member of the club's bar business. And for that income the pro was expected to have an assistant who helped in shop and teaching, in running club events and in some supervision of caddies; another shop boy on weekends, and a club cleaning boy.

No wonder there were differing opinions about that club being attractive and

profitable to a desirable pro.

The pro, I knew, was dipping into his savings to keep his credit good with the manufacturers.

After looking into that situation I went a little further and wrote friends of mine who were officials at other clubs around the country, asking them for confidential opinions of what they thought their members' attitude was toward really owing the pro their business. I put the case bluntly, wanting frank answers.

Mind you, these men to whom I wrote had been golfers for years, and good customers of their pros. They thought that almost every member was. Incidentally, they didn't have much of an idea of the heavy increase in the pros' cost of doing business and providing the type of service the pro knew the club needed.

What came out of this limited investigation was the hunch that many club officials and professionals fail to have an understanding about educating members concerning the pros' business status at the clubs. The properly qualified professional goes just about as far as he can in attractive shop display and pleasant, intelligent service at the club but he can't be too direct about telling members that he wasn't employed to compete with "buy it wholesale" sources or retail outlets that offer golf goods at cheap prices, although the goods aren't of the value the private club member would want—if the member went to any trouble to investigate.

That part of the educational job is up to club officials; if the club officials want to get and keep a good professional.

How the education must be conducted—by bulletins, publicity in the club magazine, by tactful word-of-mouth, or other means—is a matter for the club officials to decide.

But it must be done. And it is by no means a responsibility only of officials at smaller clubs where members are people of good but not opulent financial rating. Some of the clubs whose members are far above average incomes aren't especially good as places of pro employment for the

simple reason the members don't realize that the pro isn't paid a lot but has to earn enough out of equipment sales and lessons to keep him earnestly on the job.

It used to be that the club cleaning income paid at the start of the season would come fairly close to financing the opening inventory of the pro shop. That's seldom the case any more. The club-cleaning income and the pro's salary, at a lot of clubs, are considerably short of handling the pro's part of the pro department payroll.

The young fellows don't want to work Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, and start early and work late, as the pro department duties require, unless they're paid plenty.

The pros know that and they don't moan unduly, even among themselves, about the high operating expenses, if they can get a good and warranted break on the total volume of golf business at the club.

What officials and members seldom realize is that were it not for the great increase in apparel sales at pro shops many professionals would not be able to afford holding their jobs. An interesting thing

about this increase in pro shop apparel and shoe business is that it's done on a basis that's keenly competitive in price, value and style, and the pro meets and beats that competition, and provides great convenience and expert advice in purchasing as a bonus.

The same thing is true in pro merchandising of clubs, balls, bags and other strictly golf equipment; yet members will buy elsewhere, principally because they haven't been advised—or reminded—of what is due the professional, partially as an unspoken contractual understanding between the club and the pro and partially because the pro willingly, eagerly provides a great many free and valuable services to the members and their families.

Our little investigation into this matter of what's due the pro in business preference from his members, revealed that club officials have a big job to do in this respect, among women golfers.

Many women are fairly new to golf. They haven't the faintest idea of what is customary among experienced members of good clubs in doing business with the club's professionals. They buy a great deal of sports wear for themselves, their hus-

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bands and their children, at the pro shops because the women know values in this sort of merchandise. But the women don't know values in golf equipment so quite a percentage of them will buy anywhere that they can get equipment cheap, regardless of the type of equipment it is.

Gradually the professionals are correcting this condition in women's golf business, often with the great help of women's golf committee members, and probably more frequently by open sets or more of a price range.

But there remains an educational need in this women's golf equipment buying that calls for the attention of club officials.

Course Building Increases, Neer Added to NGF Staff

The National Golf Foundation, in gearing up for an expanded golf course development program for 1955, announced the appointment of Don Neer as field representative, beginning May 1.

More than twice as many golf courses were opened for play in the U. S. in 1954 than in the previous year, according to the Foundation report presented at the annual meeting in New York City, April 20. The report stated that 126 new courses were opened in 1954, compared with 52 in 1953.

Golf courses under construction as of December 31, 1954, totaled 259; an increase of 137% over the 109 courses under construction at the end of 1953.

Courses in the planning stage increased 68%, from 225 to 378 in the same period. Foundation records now show more than 400 courses in some stage of planning.

Neer's appointment as field representative gives the Foundation three field men for the purpose of personally following up on the growing number of inquiries from all over the country by groups and individuals interested in planning and building new golf facilities. Other field representatives are Verne Wickham, of Los Angeles, who joined the Golf Foundation on March 1 this year, and Dan Sheehan, with the Foundation since early in 1953.

Neer, 36, former national sports chairman for the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce, brings a wealth of experience and training in community sports and recreation promotion activity to his new job which will consist of assisting groups and individuals in planning and promoting new golf facilities all over the country.

As sports and recreation director for

the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce, Don Neer built the Jaycees National Junior Golf Tournament into the biggest event of its kind in the world with more than 25,000 entries annually. Last fall he organized and managed America's leading junior golf champions in a goodwill tour of Europe with outstanding success.

Neer had ten years of municipal recreation experience as superintendent of recreation in Zanesville, Ohio and in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and four years in the capacity of recreation specialist as a navy officer during the war. He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor's degree in Recreational Leadership, adding to this a master's degree in Physical Education in 1946.

Neer's practical experience includes the planning and construction of all types of recreation facilities, planning and staging of major tournaments and programs in many sports, along with actual radio, newspaper and magazine sports reporting. He is an active member of the National Recreation Association, the American Institute of Park Executives and the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

Wilson Leaves Green Section, Bengeyfield Now in West

The USGA announces with regret the resignation of Charles G. Wilson as Western Director of the USGA Green Section. Wilson will leave the Green Section June 30 and go with the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission as agronomist.

Charley amply deserves the "grand job" rating for his work in getting the Green Section solidly established as a valuable service organization on the Pacific slope. He will be succeeded by Wm. H. Bengeyfield, Green Section agronomist who is transferring from Beltsville, Md. Bengeyfield now is working with Wilson, prior to taking over.

Bengeyfield graduated from Cornell university college of agriculture and was Asst. County Agent in Westchester County, N.Y. prior to joining the Green Section last fall. During World War II he was an Air Force navigator.

About July 1 the USGA Green Section's Western office will move to 1709 W. 8th st., Los Angeles 17, Calif., the new quarters being made available by the Southern California GA which has its headquarters at that address.