

## Elkhart Kids Grow Up Learning to Play Golf

**A** GOLF instruction program that was started two years ago when a 13-year old boy told his father that his schoolmates were itching to learn to be golfers has blossomed into one of the most active junior undertakings in the country.

As luck would have it, the father in the case was Gene Conway, pro at the Elks CC, Elkhart, Ind., and this hint from his son was all that was necessary to start the wheels rolling.

Conway immediately got in touch with Harold Oyer, principal of North Side Jr. High school and volunteered to conduct golf classes in the school gymnasium. Nearly 200 students signed up for the instruction making it necessary to limit the program to two 25-member freshman classes which were given lessons each week. By springtime, when Conway was ready to move his charges across the street to the Elks CC, several youngsters had developed such fundamentally sound swings hitting Ensolite balls off cocoa mats that they showed surprisingly good results once they got out on a course and started to swing at the real thing.

Having put over the Junior High program to the satisfaction of everyone concerned, Conway then undertook a class of summer instruction for children in and around Elkhart who were under 16 years old as his contribution to the Elks' youth activity program.

Tuesday mornings were set aside for this activity and from eight until noon the Elkhart pro was kept busy giving group lessons and then taking the kids aside and giving them the individual instruction he thought would help take some of the rough spots out of their game. At the same time

he filled them in on golf etiquette, safety and the rules of the game. Classes were continued throughout the summer and were constantly attended all the way through August by upwards of 50 kids.

When the 1955-56 school term rolled around again, Conway went back to conducting classes in the gym, and as soon



There's no letup in the year-around Elkhart, Ind. Junior program. Youngsters take over gym in the wintertime to sharpen up swing so they'll be ready to play championship golf when they get out on Elks CC course in the summer.



Pro Gene Conway helps youthful golfer get straightened out on his iron shots. Indoor classes are held in what is claimed to be the largest high school gym in the world.

as school is out in mid-June, he'll resume where he left off last summer with the junior program. Next year, the golf program will be broadened to take in Elkhart's Senior high.

#### Pro Needs A Lift

To get a kids' golf program started and keep it going requires, of course, a professional who is interested enough to devote part of his spare time to promoting the game among youngsters. But he can't do it alone. In Conway's case, he has been fortunate in having members who have donated equipment to the juniors and have helped him with some of the details of conducting classes. School authorities also have lent a helping hand whenever possible.

One of the most encouraging things about the whole undertaking, Gene Conway says, is that parents of many children attending the classes have either written him letters or stopped him on the street and commended him on the fine job he is doing. One typical letter, from an equipment manufacturer, reads in part:

". . . My son has attended your golf classes and I know he feels you have

helped him a great deal . . . He can hardly wait for the Spring opening of the club so that he can start putting your teaching to practice . . . Keep up the good work!"

Last year the local newspaper, the Elkhart Truth, devoted a full page to describing Conway's summer school, and the National Elks Magazine paid tribute to the great job Gene did, citing it as one of the best examples of what the lodge was trying to do in fostering its youth activity program.

#### 25-Year Background

Conway has been running junior programs off and on for the 25 years he has been a pro. None has given him the feeling of achievement the Elkhart program has. "I suppose it's because these kids, their parents and, in fact, the whole town have been so enthusiastic about junior golf," he says. "I've donated my services to keep the program going, but already I am deriving some benefit from it. Many older people around Elkhart are taking up golf as the result of the junior program and I think any pro who promotes the game among youngsters is storing up old age security credits for himself."