

Come Rain or Come Shine— Pros Plan to Be Ready

**If You Were Foiled by the Treacherous Spring of 1957
Here Are Some Ideas that May Help You Get Your
Selling Season Started Early in Spite of the Weather**

Painfully recalling the miserable weather with which they had to contend in the spring of 1957, Midwest professionals and others in sections that were equally hard hit, have been giving a lot of thought in recent months to promotional ideas that will get players thinking about golf early in the 1958 season and bring them into the pro shops even if adverse weather again delays play.

As things turned out, 1957 proved to be a very profitable year for the pros. Exceptionally fine golfing weather from mid-June through October plus a record Christmas volume enabled them to increase sales nearly 10 per cent over the previous year. But in the opinion of many golf shop operators, the poor spring start put them in the position of walking a tight-rope to profits. They hope to avoid a recurrence this year.



Horton Smith calls this 'reasonable rain.'

A majority of pros, queried by GOLFEDOM as to what steps they intend to take to counteract poor spring weather if it plagues them again this year, plan to make extensive use of indoor practice facilities. But, if it is impossible to do this at their clubs, they hope to set up some kind of sheltered practice ranges or teaching sheds. Indications are that more advertising literature will be sent out than ever before. Golf clinics, golf nights, greater encouragement of women's and junior's play and early tournaments also will be widely exploited, but generally the pros are looking to the practice nets to stir up enthusiasm among their members, especially if the weather tends to dampen it.

Horton Smith, the Detroit GC pro, who is just as resourceful when it comes to operating a shop as he was when it came to winning major tournaments a few years

back, is one of those who feels that a teaching shed should be a permanent fixture at all clubs. "It's the best kind of insurance against poor spring weather," Horton says. "Ordinarily, we can get our season underway by mid-April but with a shelter available there's no reason why we can't get our members thinking about golf long before that."

Detroit GC doesn't have a shelter at the moment but Smith has been planning on getting one for some time. He'd like it large enough to accommodate three golfers and portable so that it could be moved around the driving range and thus minimize turf damage.

Horton feels that many pros aren't stirring early interest because they don't encourage their members to play in "reasonable" rain. A relatively large percentage of his spring stock consists of rainwear, spiked rubbers and umbrellas. These are strongly pushed by his sales staff in March and April along with a pep talk to the effect that a golfer doesn't have to forego his pleasure just because the weather isn't what he'd like to have it be. Even cotton gloves are made available so that there can be no complaints that the player can't hold a club firmly in his hands.

Golf Night, held early in the season at Detroit GC, is one of the big events of the year. It is marked by introduction of the various golf chairmen and the pro staff and climaxed by the showing of golf films and a clinic staged by Smith and his assistants. After the Golf Night rally has been staged, Horton avers, interest in the game perks up. He suggests that if pros have been waiting until rather late in the spring to hold golf rallies at their clubs that they move the date up because these events are assumed by the membership to officially start the season.

Uses Nets Until May 15

Jock Hendry of the Town & Country Club, St. Paul, Minn., is another who feels that the answer to getting early season patronage lies in having nets available. He has two of them installed in his clubhouse. They are constantly in use from the time the season unofficially starts in early March until well after the weather is right for outdoor play. They bring a good deal of revenue from lessons and sales of accessories and equipment. Hendry takes no chances on having the weather close in on him after spring apparently comes to St. Paul for good. He keeps the nets up until May 15.

Philadelphia PGA Section Sponsors Spring Golf Show

Philadelphia Section of the PGA will sponsor a golf show on Apr. 8, at the Sheraton Hotel in Philadelphia. The show will run from 1 until 10:00 p.m. Leading manufacturers will display equipment and wearing apparel.

The show will include golf clinics conducted by local PGA members with nationally known professional stars, who also will give demonstrations, as their guests.

Golf driving nets will be made available for visitors to try out their early season swings. PGA instructors will be on hand to assist golfers seeking help with their games and to answer all golfing questions.

This is the first time in the history of Philadelphia that such a show has been conducted. It is expected to attract thousands of the area's golf addicts.

Leo Fraser, pres. of Philadelphia, has announced that in addition to the show, there will be a short Section business session in the morning. The day's activities will be concluded with a dinner in the hotel in the evening.

Howie Atten of the Dubuque (Ia.) also goes to the nets when spring seems far behind. He has one set up in the men's locker room and a second one in the main ballroom for the distaff swingers. Free instruction for a limited time are further inducements for Dubuque members to get out to the club early and start practicing.

Practice nets, in the opinion of Chuck Tanis, pro at Chicago's Olympia Fields, have saved his lesson business in several different years when the two courses at his club have remained unplayable beyond the customary starting date. He has indoor spots where both men and women can receive instruction and polish their swings. Tanis also recommends that the pro work closely with the club manager in fitting spring golf parties into the regular club entertainment schedule. Another thing that helps to start the pro's merchandise moving is to keep year-around displays, if possible, in the lounge and locker rooms. But once they are there, Chuck adds, they have to be changed frequently to give fresh appeal.

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Just about all the pros queried by GOLFDOM say that they are going to use more mailing pieces this year than ever before in attempting to get their golfers off to an early start. One Easterner puts it this way: "In other years we sent out postcards notifying members that the pro shop was open. Probably half of them were ignored because it seemed that about every other person who finally got around to coming into the shop said he didn't know we were back doing business. This year it's going to be different. We're sending out first class mail to announce the opening of the shop and we're going to follow it up with letters describing new equipment and accessories and our lesson program. We got off to a poor start last year because we kept telling ourselves that the weather would soon break in our favor. It was awfully slow doing that. This year we're not going to wait for it."

Suggests Repairing Game

Joe Brown of the Des Moines G & CC, located in West Des Moines, Ia., also is a great advocate of bombarding them with letters. He lures members out to the club by suggesting that their games may be in need of repair after the long winter's lay-off and then works in the merchandise angle. He has been successfully using this approach for several years because he is enough of a psychologist to know that golfers would rather talk about their games than anything else and most of them, when it comes down to it, would rather talk about it around a course or in a pro shop. And once they're in the latter location, they'll buy.

Brown also is giving some thought to wrapping early season clinics or golf parties around the All Star Golf TV show which will continue to be shown every Saturday at 4 p.m. through April 5. Several other pros also feel that this is a natural for getting their seasons launched.

An idea used by Bruce Herd, Flossmoor (Ill.) CC pro, that undoubtedly would produce good results at many clubs is that of setting up a display in the clubhouse. Herd doesn't do it in a picayunish way, either. He goes all out, moving almost half of his stock from shop to lounge and keeping it there for at least a couple days. Flossmoor does a bustling restaurant and bar business at this time of the year and

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Herd's "show" is visited by quite a large percentage of the membership. Bruce, incidentally, gets nearly 100 per cent patronage from his members because he not only starts with strong promotions in the spring but continues them throughout the season.

Ford E. Ames of Alexandria (La.) G & CC feels that in addition to having a movable canopy for sheltered practice sessions, pros should take it upon themselves to

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have caddies available on those days when the weather doesn't look promising for golf. Last year, at his urging, the Alexandria club guaranteed five boys an 18-hole fee to put in a daily appearance even when rain and cold threatened to keep golfers miles away from the course. On a couple occasions the club lost money but usually enough players, who hoped to get in a round, showed up at the club and made up the cost of retaining the caddies by amply patronizing the bar and grill. And, once they were there, they usually got around to visiting the pro shop.

Keeping regular hours in the shop even when prospects of playing are poor pays off for the pro, in the opinion of George Apalakos of Sagamore Spring GC, Lynnfield, Mass. George reasons that even though spring weather is treacherous in his part of the country, enough fine days are interspersed with the cold and rainy ones to make it profitable for him to be around daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. after mid-March. On many occasions in season's past it hasn't been uncommon for 40 or 50 golfers to suddenly descend on Sagamore on one of those rare and unexpected perfect matinees. With George in constant attendance in his shop, days like that have more than made up for those when the cash register remained untouched.

Both Bill Hook of Kenwood CC, Cincinnati, and Gene Root, who presides at Lakewood ((Colo.) CC, are of the opinion that sprightly promotion can touch off the spark that gets the golfers thinking exclusively of their favorite game. "Put the right kind of literature in their hands at the proper time," says Root, "and you'll find they are eager to get out and resume where they left off last fall."

Bill Hook has never had too many complaints about March and April weather

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holding him back. He has always thought of these months as being perfect for kicking off his selling and lessons campaigns. He does it by supplementing a steady flow of letters and postcards to his members with numerous telephone calls. It isn't long after this until they get the urge to launch a new season and from then on Bill starts unloading his stock. "It's simply a matter of getting them stirred up," Bill declares. "A little imagination and some hard work in the early days of spring will do it."

Gene Root, incidentally, always keeps the door open between his shop and the adjoining men's grill. When weather doesn't permit play, the golfers usually congregate in the grill and while away the time playing gin rummy. Gene has made it known that a fellow can make no better investment than to put his winnings in new equipment or accessories. With the shop only a few feet away and this idea well circulated among the Lakewood members, Gene allows that his take from the card players goes a long way in helping him pay his assistants and handle the bills while he is trying to get business moving in the early part of the season.

Holds Early Tournaments

At the Monterey CC in Fayetteville, Pa., Pro Dick Wile has found that the best way of avoiding early spring doldrums is to start holding club tournaments as soon as the weather gives the slightest indication of breaking. As soon as the news gets around that Monterey's tournament season is about to begin, the course is practically overrun with players who want to get their games in shape so they will fare well in competition.

Wile also advocates pro shops that are large enough to accommodate a kind of lounge arrangement where players can sit around and talk golf. Whether it's two or twelve golfers replaying the greatest rounds of their lives, someone invariably takes a club off the one of display racks and starts swinging it. Pretty soon someone else is doing the same thing. The upshot is that the players usually start making sales for the pro. This not only applies to clubs but to practically every item in the shop.

Pros, in general, are now taking a different view of the weather and business than they did in 1957. Last year they kept telling themselves that that dismal season, technically known as spring, would soon

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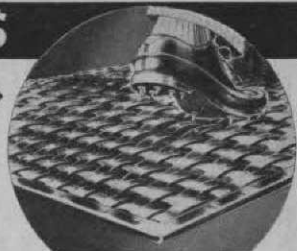
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pass and the golfers would start coming out to the club again. But it didn't turn out that way and it was nearly mid-June before quite a few of them started getting acquainted with money again. Many were totally unprepared for what happened and quite a large number, by their own admissions, couldn't devise any solid ideas for pulling out of the tailspin before good weather finally came along and rescued them.

But this year will be different. They've had nearly a year to plan strategy and if the spring of 1958 turns out to be a first cousin of the one they endured last year, they'll literally be lying in wait for it.

Women's Trans Mississippi

The Trans-Mississippi women's golf tournament to be played at Hickory Hills CC, Springfield, Mo., June 8-14, will be limited to 176 players. To be eligible, a player must have a handicap of 15 or under and belong to a club in the Trans assn.

Metropolitan Survey

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are set aside for women's play. Seventy clubs hold regular men's championship events; 69 clubs sponsor women's championships while only 25 hold club competition for Juniors.

Golf cars are permitted at 30 of the 73 clubs. Several clubs, which do not permit their use, stated that the rules are waived in cases where members are medically certified to use the cars. Where cars are rented, the charge per round averages \$7.75. In cases where members own their cars, the clubs charge about \$15.00 a month for storage and servicing.

Swimming pools generally are of uniform size at the 43 clubs that have them. In most cases, dimensions are about 35 x 80 ft. However, costs of installing the pools were shown to vary widely. At lower dues-income clubs, construction costs were estimated at from \$22,000 to \$25,000. These costs increased sharply with increases in dues-income, costing an average of \$90,000 in top categories.

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