

Denver Caudill Makes Career of Pro Merchandising

THE trend in recent years among home club professionals to becoming as capable merchandisers as they are instructors is exemplified in Walter (Denver) Caudill, who is Jack Bell's "inside man" at River Forest CC, near Elmhurst, Ill.

Denver, who 30 years ago was running Pittsburgh's Valley Heights pro shop at the callow age of 16, has followed a rather singular career in golf. He has specialized more in moving merchandise than in improving players' games although he is certainly no stranger to the lesson tee.

When Denver started caddying in 1925 at the Oakmont CC, Willie Rowe, one of the famed old clubmakers, was professional. Caudill watched Willie repair a driver one day and became so fascinated with the process that he asked permission to help in the back end of the shop when he wasn't on call for any bag toting jobs. Out of this grew an early familiarity, first with the equipment that is used in playing the game and later, with sportswear and the like, when it was introduced in some volume to the pro shop merchandising picture.

Assistant to Rogers

Caudill stayed on his assistant's job at Valley Heights until 1933 when he moved west to become second in command to Big John Rogers, one of those fabulous fellows who worked very hard all day so as to justify playing through most of the night. The locale was the Denver CC where Caudill took charge of most of the inside operations and picked up his nickname. He stayed with Rogers for eight years.

After the war years, Denver transferred his talents to Jimmy Hines and shuttled between Hines' shops at the North Shore CC in Glenview, Ill., and Thunderbird in Palm Springs, Calif. This is Denver's second year at the River Forest shop.

Through the years, Caudill says, he has got as big a kick out of selling golf accouterment as the average fellow does out of taking a big, rawboned swinger and making a finished player of him. "Maybe it goes back to the fact," says Denver, "that buying new things makes people feel



Denver Caudill (left) and Jack Bell.

good. I try to get this into every sales talk I make whether I am pushing clubs or shoes or sportswear. It works particularly well where women are involved."

Helps the Youngsters

Denver also has taken a great deal of pride in properly indoctrinating assistants in the art of running a golf shop and in helping young pros get off the ground in their first headmaster assignments. Among those he has tutored are Dale Andreason, Rip Arnold and Bill Ogden. Jack Bell, by the way, is in only his second year as a head pro and, incidentally, swears by Denver. "He knows more about this business than 90 per cent of us," says Jack. "Denver approaches every sale like staying in the black depended on it."

Since his career in golf has been so closely tied to helping young fellows get a start, Denver has sage advice for assistants or young fellows who are thinking seriously of getting into the pro end of the game. "Contrary to what you may have heard," says Caudill, "being able to shoot par or subpar golf is not essential. You are actually better off as a home club pro if you can shoot only what might be called a respectable game, but know how to teach. This latter point is extremely important. If a young fellow thinks as much about how to get across to the golf student as he does about how he is going to demonstrate a certain shot, he will be a better instructor for it.

"What it amounts to," Denver explains, "is that the instructor isn't there to show how beautifully he himself can execute a

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Caudill—Pro Merchandiser

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shot but to tell and show the pupil how to do it."

As for selling golf goods, a subject to which the River Forest specialist warms up in a hurry, Denver has this to say: "Long ago I came to the conclusion that we are selling merchandise at such a high price that it carries a lot of responsibility with it. Go into an exclusive men's shop and you'll see a continuous demonstration of what I mean. There is no haphazard handling of customers. Everything is carefully measured and selected — hats, coats, shoes, etc. — by the fellow who is making the sale. There's none of this tossing an item across the counter to a customer and saying 'Do you think a medium will do?'

Sell More Than Quality

"We're in a very exclusive business, too. We can't justify our prices by simply saying, 'We sell quality.' We've got to sell the highest type of service along with it. That is what I keep drilling into every new assistant who comes into a shop where I'm working."

As for the mechanics of pro shop operation, Denver advocates making a complete display change every week, the idea being to give the merchandise the appearance of just having been received from the manufacturer. In the ordinary shop this takes no more than four or five hours' work. Daily records also are kept on sales of merchandise along with all other income producing items. As regards merchandise reports, Caudill has got them down to such a science that the daily records not only show income from sales but the cost of all items sold. The gross from these sales plus miscellaneous income show the exact status of cash and receivable balances at the end of the day.

Sideline Items

Denver is a great believer in carrying not only a lot of diversified merchandise but quite a few offbeat items, such as imported knick knacks. This is something he learned from John Rogers who maintained that country club members usually have enough money to indulge their whims in exotic articles and that the pro operator should have some of them around when they are in the mood to buy these things.

As an example of how knick knacks or sideline items move, last summer Denver imported several dozen high price, heavy glass Swedish ash trays, displayed them

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prominently with a sign showing where they had been imported from. "Every Swedish person in the club rushed in to buy an ash tray," Denver recalls, "and before long they had many other members interested. I won't say we cleaned up on the idea but the markup was comfortable.

The above is a typical example of how the onetime Pittsburgh caddie goes about bringing them into the pro shop. Selling is just as much of a game for him as the one that is played directly outside on the course. And, he contends, buying in the pro shop is as much fun for many golfers as playing. "All you have to do," Denver adds knowingly, "is sell them on the idea."

Heart of America, Kansas Groups Hold Meeting

Annual joint meeting of the Heart of America GSCA, and the Kansas Turf Assn., was held Apr. 15, at the Shawnee CC, Topeka, Kan., with Cecil Smith as host supt. Ray Keen gave a talk on zoysias, bents, and Bermudagrass in the turf plots at Kansas State College. H. J. "Bud" Elmer, supt., Indian Hills CC, Kansas City, and D. W. Adams, supt., Topeka CC, also spoke of changes in their courses.



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