

# Many Pros Work to Extend Length of Golf Season

*Compete with Bowling, Football, etc. for Bigger Slice of Golfer's Dollar*

**R**ECENT trends in the weather cycles of the northern half of the U. S. pretty definitely show that the golf season is no longer a Mar. 15 or April 1 to Labor Day proposition, but that the season can be extended through October and even well into November.

As was pointed out in *Golfdom* in both 1956 and 1957, October is very definitely a golfer's month with an average of from 22 to 25 days during this month being suitable for play all the way from Portland, Me. to Portland, Ore. Much of this excellent golfing weather spills over into November and it is not uncommon for quite a large number of northern clubs to keep their courses open until Thanksgiving.

Add to this the fact that club maintenance depts. are no longer finding it much of a problem to keep roughs and fairways swept free of leaves, thus cutting down on the number of lost balls, and another argument for prolonging the season can be made. Daylight savings time is another boon to playing golf at least halfway through the fall and so is the regular Saturday TV All-Star golf show that was exploited by some pros last year.

## Plenty of Competition

However, traditional early club closing dates plus competition from football, bowling, hunting and fishing, the re-opening of school and even the retention of or reverting to standard time in some cities and counties are working against the lengthier season.

Many clubs are sticking to the rather hidebound idea of closing their courses in September even though they continue their regular schedules of social events. Quite a large number of pros report that bowling, in particular, and hunting and fishing detract from the enthusiasm for golf at this time of the year. These sports also drain off dollars that might be spent on golf.

Communities that don't have daylight savings time, or go back to standard time in September, don't give the game much of a shot in the arm during the fall months

since twilight golf is almost completely throttled during week days. But Bob Schappa of Rockledge CC, West Hartford, Conn. has at least a partial answer for this, suggesting that more 9-hole rounds be encouraged.

Football, too, makes serious inroads, especially in those sections which are gridiron hotbeds. Len Schmutte, pro at Findlay (O.) CC, for example, reports that he is competing with Ohio State, Michigan and Michigan State plus several lesser college football teams throughout the fall and many of his members prefer to spend their weekends on football holidays rather than play golf. On Sundays, pro football siphons off much potential play.

The re-opening of school in September, some pros say, is a kind of double-barrelled detractor from the continuance of golf for many players. For one thing, it creates a shortage of caddies; secondly, parents are obligated, or want to devote more time to their kids after school starts. On the other hand, though, when the youngsters return to school, more women have time for golf.

## Bright Side of Picture

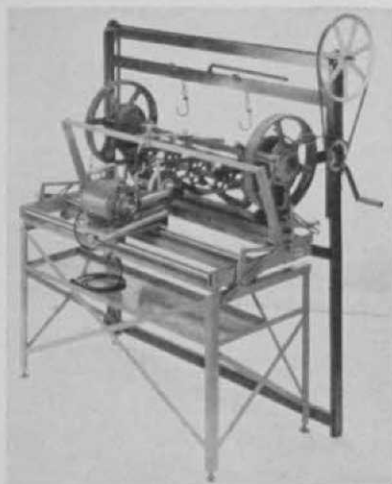
Notwithstanding these difficulties, many Northern pros are doing a fine job of keeping their players interested in the game during the fall months. John E. Boda, pro at Andover (Mass.) CC and secy. of the New England PGA, who speaks for many of his fellow members in the latter organization, says that numerous club and sectional tournaments are played throughout the Northeast throughout October and well into November. At Andover, for example, a major club tournament is played on Oct. 12 and there is even a 9-hole Thanksgiving morning event that is well supported.

"Many players want competitive golf right to the end," Boda says, "and it is my observation that they want the course maintained right up until the snow flies."

Leland (Duke) Gibson, pro at Blue Hills CC in Kansas City, has prevailed upon his tournament committee to keep the course open until November. The club championship was pushed back and held in September for the first time last year. September of 1957 at Blue Hills, incidentally, turned out to be the biggest month of the year from the standpoint of rounds played and was one of the best for pro shop sales. Gibson adds that the Midwest PGA is scheduling several of its important tournaments for September and October in an effort to influence golfers to continue to play through the early fall months.

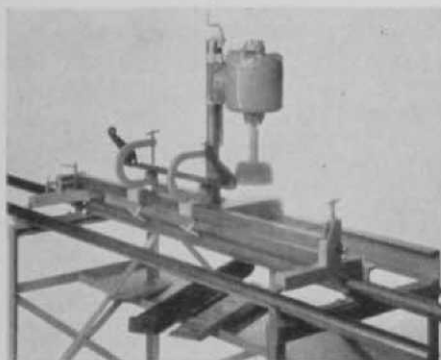
*(Continued on page 56)*

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## Work for Longer Season (Continued from page 36)

Gordon Leishman of River Road CC, Louisville, comes up with a theory that many pros probably haven't thought about. "By extending the season," he says, "I get a chance to play practically every day with my members. Shop duties keep me from doing this during the summer. I'm sure that this works to my advantage because it creates a lot of goodwill that ultimately is reflected in increased shop sales."

These fall outings, Leishman adds, give the pro a wonderful opportunity to capitalize on Christmas gift business. The River Road master's records show that in the past two or three years he has moved more "heavy goods" — clubs, bags, etc. — in October than in any other month.

Since the course is not as crowded as it is from May through August, River Road golfers play in what are called ganggames during the fall — 8 or 10 players in a group — and it is Leishman's observation that a kind of mass buying psychology is created by these large groups playing together. "They come into the shop after playing a round," Leishman says, "and a purchase by one person sets off a chain reaction that may result in pretty handsome volume of gift sales before they leave. Maybe it's the autumn air."

Bill Hook of the Kenwood CC in Cincinnati says that most pros in his area save some of their heaviest promotions for October and November in order to catch up with the business that is lost in July and August because of the extreme hot weather. Play sometimes drops off 50 per cent in the latter months because many players won't budge off cool verandas or come out of the lounges. But autumn in the Ohio valley is ideal for golf and pros take advantage of it by scheduling numerous club events. Hooks goes a step further by ordering heavily in September and October so that there is plenty of merchandise on hand for gift as well as regular buying.

## Move Tournaments Back

The trend to more golf in the fall in central and southern Indiana has been quite noticeable in the last four or five years, according to Jimmy Scott of the Lebanon CC. As a result, more club tournament dates are being moved back. Scott also uses this period to unload merchandise that he doesn't want to carry over until the following year and to plug Christmas buying.

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Reports from the Cleveland district indicate that quite a few pros in that area took advantage of the All Star show last fall by holding golf jamborees, starting around noontime on Saturday, which were climaxed by the 4 p.m. TV exhibitions. Doubtlessly, this was quite prevalent throughout the country and probably will be exploited even more this fall. At any rate, this is a natural for helping to promote golfing parties.

Nobody, of course, can say with certainty that the northern climes are going to go on indefinitely enjoying a fine run of golfing weather well into November. In the last two or three years, perhaps, it has compensated for the rather miserable stuff the pros have had to put up with in the spring. But regardless of how the weather cycle turns in the future, the smart golf operators are going to continue to be set up to take advantage of all the balmy autumnal breezes that blow their way.

### Obitz — Man on the Move

*(Continued from page 35)*

Moosehead Lake, Me.

Although he is basically a businessman-pro, Harry Obitz is more popularly

known as the man behind the "Swing's the Thing" show which has been seen by millions. Both Harry and Farley perform with the trick shot group that includes in addition, John Chimenti, Vince Yanovitch and Ronnie Ward, all of whom work in the Shawnee shop. The five men have more than 100 trick acts in their repertoire and remarkably enough they perform practically all of them in unison. They have put on hundreds of shows for hospitalized vets through the UVS Swing Clubs and every Saturday afternoon the show goes on at Shawnee.

### Run on Supermarket Basis

Obitz's operation at Shawnee is somewhat different than that at most clubs because of the resort atmosphere. However, about 25 per cent of play at the Inn is by regular members who live in and around Stroudsburg. Because so many patrons are transients, the pro shop is run on something of a supermarket basis with displays being set up to encourage self service. Two large island counters dominate the main shop with merchandise being arranged so that customers, most of whom are casual shoppers, can readily pick up and examine every item. Shelf