

Behind-Scenes Maneuvering Causes Trouble at Many Clubs

Consultant says members are the real victims when manager has to overlook infringements of favored employees

(Second of two articles)

By **JOSEPH W. DRAGONETTI**

Leo Fraser, Philadelphia club owner and consultant, was asked to cite some case histories obtained in his and Harlan Will's consulting work to show some of the weaknesses in country club management and how they can be corrected. For obvious reasons, names of individuals and clubs are omitted but the cases point up some important lessons.

Case No. 1 concerns a club in the East which called in Fraser to make a survey about a year ago. He was asked to make a complete study of the operation. It was a good club and had excellent prospects. The members were fond of the pro and supt. The pair had done a good job, but Fraser was told by the mgr. himself that other employees seemed to be under constant tension. This was frequently reflected in the services provided in the club. There also was a heavy turnover of personnel. Fraser discovered that the membership was about equally divided in being in favor of and against the mgr.

Fraser discovered that much of the trouble at the club was caused by the lack of leadership on the part of the pres. He had been a compromise candidate in the annual election and so the membership wasn't 100 per cent behind him.

"In my conversation with the mgr.," Fraser says, "I concluded that he was experienced and capable. The pres. and board of directors had given me a month to find out what was wrong. I discovered the trouble in three days and informed them of what was causing it. They seemed to be rather small things in themselves but certainly affected the morale of the whole organization. And they weren't uncommon, by any means.

Atmosphere Not Good

"Mr. Manager had some difficult situations. For instance, about three times a week it was the custom of one of the members to play gin rummy and drink

with the bartender. These two were real buddies — a favorite bartender and a favorite club member. It was a nice friendship but the atmosphere created in the clubhouse certainly was not good.

"I also discovered that the chef was an excellent cook but a poor supervisor of kitchen help. He was not a leader. The head of the office was a woman who had been at the club for 20 years and seemed to feel that she had proprietary rights. She had seen several mgrs. come and go. I am not against veteran employees. Usually they are an asset to a club, but in the case of this woman her attitude was just not right.

Arranged Own Schedule

"In addition, there was a waitress who had been there fifteen years and had become accustomed to arranging her own work schedule. She also felt that she had proprietary rights. Common sense shows that taking advantage of seniority and such things tears down the morale of other employees. But nothing was done to correct the situation. One of the unusual things about the whole case was that the club paid above average wages, yet quite a few people were unhappy because of the behavior of a few."

Fraser recommended to the manager that he fire the three people — bartender, office head and waitress — who were causing the trouble.

"They wouldn't let me," the mgr. replied. Anyone familiar with golf and country club operations, of course, knows who "they" are.

Fraser made his report to the board in less than a week. He recommended to the mgr. that he resign unless he was given real authority to run the club.

The report was accepted by the directors. It included recommendations that the mgr. be given full authority and the offending employees told to change their ways or face dismissal. Fraser said he would like to report that the "old favorites" changed their working habits, but

such is not the case. They toned them down. However, the mgr. is still on the job and the club is doing better than it was.

When things like this happen, says Fraser, the members unfortunately are innocent victims of conditions that many don't even know exist.

More recently, Fraser was consulted about a mgr. about to be hired by a club. He was from the South but wanted to relocate in the northeastern section.

The man was hired on a temporary basis to see if he could fill the post. He was not given a contract. After observing the clubhouse operations, the temporary mgr. told officials of the club that according to the duties they assigned him they didn't want a mgr., but a maitre de. Apparently the members and committees were running the club, not the mgr. As Fraser pointed out to the officials a man can't manage unless he is given the authority to do so.

Financial Trouble

Still another case involves a club that was in financial trouble. A survey made by Fraser disclosed that all employees were paid the first of the month. In this particular month, after all salaries had been paid, there was \$30 in the bank and about \$21,000 in debts. The manager had resigned about six weeks before.

The club had about 300 members. After discussing the situation with the pro and the supt., Fraser concluded that the club had a great potential for rehabilitation and sound management. What it needed was some immediate administration and operational control. Fraser hired, on a temporary basis, a man who had been trained in the hotel business and a start was made toward setting up a better system. But the trouble continued. Some firms, to which the club was indebted, wanted to reclaim some of the equipment which had been purchased on installment because the payments had lapsed. The club was slipping into the throes of bankruptcy.

Looking further into the books, Fraser discovered that most of the transactions in the past were done about 60 per cent on a cash basis without proper controls. Any diligent mgr. would have understood that something was wrong. There were other troubles. The supt. did not have the proper equipment to work with. The clubhouse was in poor repair and needed to be brought up to date. Fraser estimated that it would take from \$80,000 to \$100,000



Mary Lena Faulk, who seems to have suddenly found herself, is seen accepting Triangle Round Robin trophy after victory in that event, played in June at Wykagyl CC, New Rochelle, N. Y. Carl S. Menger, pres. of Triangle Conduit & Cable Co., New Brunswick, N. J. makes the presentation. Mary Lena nosed out Louise Suggs to win the Triangle after having won the Women's Western the week before. The following week she came back to win the Women's Eastern for three in a row.

to do the job properly. But where was the money to come from?

Appeals To Members

Fraser was retained to supervise a long-range program. The club had a substantial membership which turned out to be very cooperative. A new bookkeeping system was installed and tight auditing controls established. All members were asked to deposit \$100 in advance payments for future services. Nearly \$30,000 was raised to pay off debts and to provide a little working capital. The members also were asked to deposit fifty cents as an assessment for each round of golf they played.

Within a few months confidence was restored in the club. A young and aggressive mgr. was hired to promote events that produce revenue and he succeeded in uniting the membership behind the rehabilitation program. In the first year it was in force the club showed a substantial profit.

Advice Not Always Taken

Consultants like to think that their advice always is taken. But that doesn't mean that it is. Fraser tells of one incident where a club came to him asking what he thought about building a Par 3 on a piece of property owned by the club. Fraser and his partner, Will, looked into the matter and decided that everything was favorable. The pair, at the request of

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Behind Scenes Maneuvering Causes Much Dissension

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club officials, figured on what it would cost to install an irrigation system on the proposed course.

Fraser says that the figure he gave for building the Par 3, including the watering system, was, if anything, on the conservative side. But officials of the club were aghast when he told them what the total cost would be. They had the impression that the short course could be put in for about half the price he quoted. Leo's wry conclusion: "It's surprising how unrealistic some club officials are when the subject of costs is brought up. I've run into that on more than one occasion." At any rate, the course never was built.

Advice Not Taken

On another occasion, Fraser was visited by the green committee of a club. The group wanted him to look at their course and recommend changes. It was relatively short compared with some layouts.

He looked over the property and told the committee that it has one of the finest courses he ever had seen for an average membership. He recommended no changes.

Fraser says his advice was not taken. The club decided to change two holes. They were made more difficult, but were not nearly as interesting as they had been. They worked a real hardship on the average players who supported the club — at an added cost of \$15,000.

Tough on Average Player

There is a tendency on the part of quite a few clubs to change their courses in an effort to imitate the so-called championship setups. But Fraser does not usually advise such a drastic step because it works a hardship on the average player.

"I do advise occasionally," he says, "that extra tees be installed for championship play but that they be used only as such."

Fraser and Will not only act as consultants to golf and country clubs but design courses. Will is working now on a new 18-hole layout at Millersburg, Pa., and Fraser on a Par 3 course in Absecon, N. J. Fraser also is designing an 18-hole course for a utility company.

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