

Club Hustling Offers Burglars Job Insurance

But it doesn't have to be this way, says an inmate of one of our state prisons, if you're smart enough to bar the door

By ROBERT SCHRAMM (No. 76821)

Burglaries occur in the United States at the rate of one a minute, twenty-four hours a day — more than half a million every year. According to FBI figures, burglary is the most common and the fastest growing crime on the books. And, according to people like me who pull the jobs, it is also the safest and the most profitable. As a longtime professional thief, I lived very well just by specializing in the burglary of pro shops and clubhouses.

To most people, golfing is a sport; to some it's a challenge — but to a growing number of burglars it is fast becoming a profitable business. While many of the old criminal dodges have become as dated as the daffy, "club hustling" — as it's known in the trade — has enjoyed a steadily increasing popularity. And for good reasons: the attractions are such that no thief worth his parole can afford to ignore them.

Most obvious, of course, is loot. This comes in the form of negotiable goods and money which is often present in surprising quantities. Just as attractive from the criminal standpoint, the field of operation is usually comfortably remote from the more militant organizations of the law. The working conditions are more than congenial.

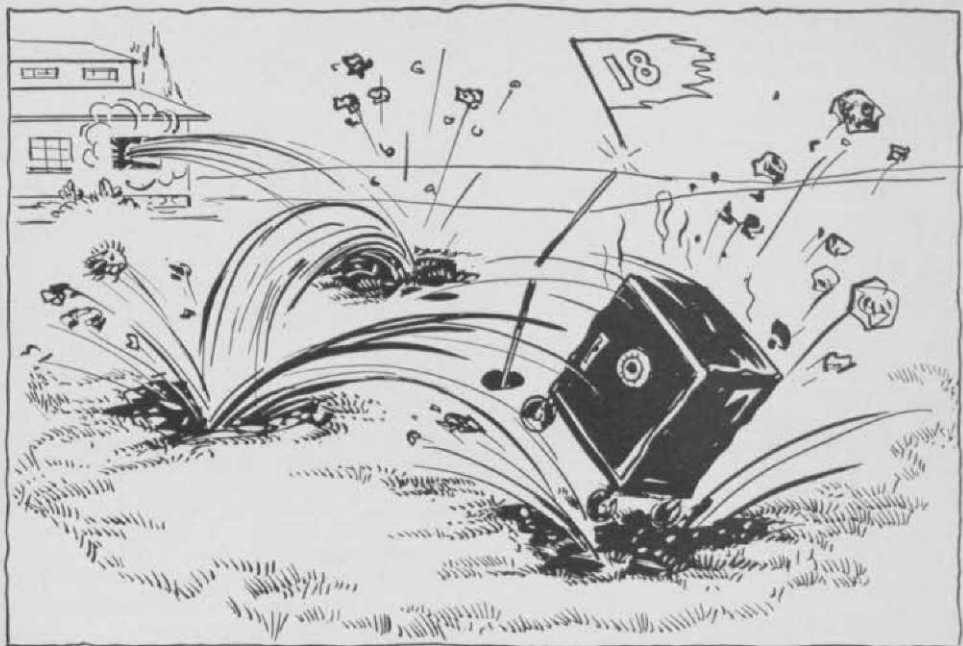
Anything Can Be Fenced

A clubhouse hustler's working season doesn't end when the snow falls. This is to larceny what job insurance is to honesty. During the summer I used to spot places that I could return to when summer sports were over in the northern states. With little or no cash on the premises, most of the owners didn't regard themselves as targets for theft. This made it all the easier to tap this source of income.

Any burglar who devotes his time only to cash and jewelry would either have to retire or get into some simple, straightforward profession like picking pockets. The fact is, most of a thief's profit comes from the discount resale of valuable merchandise. And there is usually plenty of that even in the off season. Such mundane items as can be found in a pro shop or a clubhouse maintenance room — golf clubs, power hand tools, etc. — anything that can be resold for a good price is rated high on a thief's list.

Even Swizzle Sticks

I used to specialize in bar equipment. I had a ready buyer for anything I could lay my hands on from stools and ice



"I gave Chauncey his head and he blew that safe out on the 18th green"

buckets right down to swizzle sticks. This particular businessman (known among the vulgar as a "fence") would accept anything and some of the boys got to the point where they were hauling it to him in trucks. When conditions were favorable, these guys would take everything except the sand traps.

By exercising extreme caution and selecting only the softest touches, I managed to acquire quite a pile of loot over the years. But all was not clean getaways and the counting of ill-gotten gains. There was the time, for instance, when I broke into a clubhouse near Chicago with another burglar named Chauncey. Notwithstanding the fact that the safe in this place was small enough to put in your pocket it was Chauncey's unshakeable conviction that we should blow the thing. Chauncey was always getting weird ideas like this — one week he would be sandpapering his fingers so he could make like Jimmy Valentine and the next week he would be frying somebody's money to a crisp with a cutting torch. Like an idiot, I decided to humor him.

It Takes Some Talent

There are some purists who insist on using explosives as the quickest possible means to open a safe. But blowing a box is an art that I never had much talent for.

It requires a certain coolness and finesse that always seemed to escape me. In theory, the technique is simplicity itself. You just plug the crack around the door with a little soap. Then you make a funnel of it at the top where you pour in a jigger or so of nitroglycerine. You hide behind something while you touch it off — then you collect the money and lam out.

In this particular case, the safe Chauncey insisted on blowing had a loose door. And instead of just filling the crack we filled the bottom of the safe. When we touched the thing off, the door blew right out through the wall and tore up about 20 yards of the 18th green.

Easy to Handle

After that experience I picked my shots more carefully. Many places, for instance, put a great deal of unjustified trust in wall-type safes. These jobs look solid enough to the uninitiated, but you can remove them from the wall with nothing more than a screwdriver and carry them off in a golf car. Almost as vulnerable are the small "portable" floor safes used in many clubhouses. These can be carted off, too.

Clubhouse manager and pro shop operators with enough foresight to install a good heavy safe have absolutely nothing

to worry about. Even the most determined thieves will find them impossible to move.

Actually, only a small percentage of club burglaries are committed by professionals. The majority are the work of amateurs — vandals and drunks who operate largely on impulse. Aside from the fact that amateurs rarely profit from their crime, however, the results are much the same: a heavy financial loss, and possibly an expensive loss due to ruined equipment and general breakage.

How to Defend Yourself

But the smart clubhouse and pro shop owner can easily protect himself from such losses.

If an experienced burglar wants into a place badly enough he can generally make it, in spite of all practical barriers. But he can be discouraged from trying. And, what discourages a professional will completely demoralize the amateur. By taking a few simple precautions, you can put the odds very much in your favor.

Know Where the Keys Are

Good insurance is a sturdy set of locks with deadlocking mechanisms that can't be opened by the first burglar who comes along with a strip of celluloid in his pocket. It is also good practice to limit the number of keys and know exactly where each one is. If any turn up missing, the locks should be replaced.

If you have a small safe in your shop it should be bolted to the floor. The New York City Police Safe and Loft Squad recommends that the bolt be enclosed in a steel pipe to hamper attempts at sawing. It is also a good idea not to have any wheels on your safe. A technique gaining much favor among less sophisticated criminal circles is to smash in the door of a shop — regardless of light, alarms and noise — dash inside, grab the safe, roll it out to a waiting car and drive off with it, all in less than two minutes.

Get A Real Noisemaker

Burglar alarms are an effective deterrent, but be certain yours is a good one and have it checked periodically. To be really effective, an alarm should operate independently of the building's electric service. Aside from this, the only major requirement is that it make one devil of a lot of noise — which is very unpopular with people in my line of work.

Since most country clubs are outside city limits, and in relatively deserted areas, they usually have to rely for police protection on infrequent checks by the sher-



Pro Einar Andersen and S. A. Paulini, president of Saddle Hill CC, Hopkinton, Mass., are widely known for their encouragement of high school golf. Rules instruction is accented in the kids' teaching sessions and Andersen and Paulini claim the youngsters are better informed as to the regulations than 99 out of 100 adults. In photo, Andersen is instructing and Paulini is making notes for the players' reference.

iff's patrol. This is a serious loophole. The best way around it is to employ a night-watchman or some one who sleeps on the premises. An equally good safeguard is a watchdog. Having been chased down many a fairway by snarling dobermans and such beasts, I can well vouch for their effectiveness.

Light is still one of your best protections. No burglar with half his wits about him would dare to turn a light off. He has to assume that the police, supt., nightwatchman, etc. are familiar with it being on. If it is out someone is sure to investigate. The bulbs don't have to be large and the small addition to your electric bill is the cheapest insurance.

Don't Set Yourself Up

By ignoring any one of these precautions you are setting yourself up to be burglarized. It might be this week, next month or next year. Sooner or later some enterprising burglar is going to take a crack at you. And if he's only a mediocre craftsman it's going to cost you plenty.

To insure that this does not happen, just look your shop or clubhouse over from my point of view and compare it for burglar-appeal with other places. Burglars always pick the softest touch and there are plenty of other places where they can ply their trade — places with no lighting, weak locks and plenty of negotiable merchandise.

See to it that *your* clubhouse or shop is too much trouble to burgle . . . and it won't get burgled.