



He Goes Out and Rounds 'Em Up

Bill Slavik (left) has imported golfers from 100 miles away . . . converted 400 women to golf . . . encouraged the kids . . . put the Chico muny course on a paying level . . . Here's how he has done it

By JOHN R. HEATHERINGTON

Bill Slavik, 31 year old professional at the Bidwell Municipal GC in Chico, Calif., has, in three short years, lifted the local muny course operation from a \$10,000 per year deficit to a sound financial investment.

Today, in the words of one city official, a non-golfer, "our golf course is the wisest investment the City of Chico has ever made."

Slavik, who began his golf career at the age of nine, is a quiet, determined young man with ideas. Those ideas have paid off in doubled play, increased revenue and a tremendous rise in area golfing interest.

Slavik has successfully parlayed his career from a beginning as a club cleaner at the Sunnehanna G&CC in Johnstown, Pa., through caddy, caddiemaster and assistant pro at that club; to a post as resident pro at the Lake Merced G&CC, Daly City, Calif., where he remained for three years; to his present position.

"When I heard of the opening at Chico," Bill recalls, "I figured I had nothing to lose by looking the situation over."

Saw the Potential

What he found out, after thorough investigation, convinced Slavik that the Chico course offered the challenge and potential that he had been seeking. But, while the potential was there, Slavik's instincts told him that something was lacking.

Out of an area population of 35,000,

the course was drawing only 18,000 rounds per year. The pro shop sales were down. The ladies club had only slightly more than 30 members and there were no Juniors playing at all. The operation was showing a more than \$10,000 annual deficit.

Additionally, when Slavik was hired on Mar. 15, 1960, he found he had inherited 40 free memberships, which he has since pared to 12, and that, while spring and fall play was fair, summer play was practically non-existent.

"There was only one way to tackle the situation," he remarks, "and that was to go to heavy promotion and an active schedule."

Package Price

During his first year in Chico, Slavik brought golfers by the busload out of Sacramento, nearly 100 miles to the south and, for a package price, provided lunch, transportation and daylong golf. He also started free clinics for ladies and Juniors.

Slavik operates on what he considers an ideal setup. He is employed by the city on a contractual basis, providing for yearly renewals, with the contract cancellable at any time by either party. In addition, all course concessions are his.

"In order to function effectively," he emphasizes, "you must keep the course, snack bar and pro shop open at all times — from sunrise to sunset. Anytime there are players on the course the concessions must be available."

A strong advocate of group lessons for beginners, Slavik conducts teaching sessions for ladies and Juniors, both in morning and evening hours. Since 1960 he has started more than 450 women in golf and nearly half of them have returned to him for private lessons.

"I stress only two things in group lessons," he says. "Those are golf etiquette and fundamentals."

For Juniors, Slavik provides free lessons during summer months, preferring to limit teaching to kids no younger than 10 years of age. "If they're below that," he says, "they aren't able to concentrate very well."

Plenty of Trophies

To keep up interest in Junior golf, Slavik conducts an annual eclectic tournament with putting, chipping and driving contests, and lots of trophies for the winners. Although he provides the trophies at his own expense, Slavik feels it is money well spent.

"The real secret to developing golf interest in a community," Slavik observes, "is to concentrate on the kids. They are tomorrow's golfers and, if you get them, you get their parents."

Adults Not Neglected

While focusing attention on the younger golfers, Slavik has not neglected the adults. To build his summer play, he stresses early morning and evening tee-off times and has organized a Twilight League. On the last Sunday of each month he conducts a Scotch Foursome tournament with merchandise prizes for winners.

Although summertime temperatures in the Chico area often reach 110 degrees, hot weather play has reached the point where it is as good as it was at the height of the season when Slavik first arrived.

Constant Rebuilding

Slavik stresses that even though operating on a close budget, a muni course must be continually improved and maintained. During the past three years, the Chico pro has replaced three greens and three tees. He feels that proper public course operation demands at least one major rebuilding project each year.

"The key to merchandising at a municipal course," Bill points out, "is no high pressure selling. If you try to force sales you lose more than you gain." Slavik operates his pro shop in the same easy going manner in which he runs his course. "If

you make the merchandise available, and display it in an attractive manner, the golfers will buy when they are ready," he explains.

The success of Bill Slavik's methods can, perhaps, best be measured through a City of Chico revenue comparison between the 1959-60 and 1962-63 fiscal years.

In those three years course dues rose from \$7,377 to \$15,281, green fees from \$23,838 to \$35,717, and rounds played from about 18,000 to more than 36,000.

Since 1960 Bidwell Municipal GC has been entirely self-sustaining; in the black and not subsidized by taxpayers.

Pacific Northwest GA Introduces Electronic Handicapping in 1963

The introduction of electronic calculation of handicaps by Pacific Northwest Golf Association was a highlight of 1963, according to the PNGA's 65th annual report. Used by several PNGA clubs, it is hoped that all member clubs will adopt the electronic system in 1964 so that a uniform and consistent handicap procedure will exist throughout the association. Annual cost to individual contributing members is \$1.50 and to non-contributing members, \$2.50.

In tournament activities, Ken Storey regained the PNGA crown at Spokane CC, the same course on which he won the 1934 tourney. Edean Ihlanfeldt won her fourth Ladies' title since 1949. Nationally, three of the four semi-finalists in the USGA Women's Amateur were from the state of Washington.

Peggy Did Fine

On the Junior golf front, PNGA Girls' Champ Peggy Conley was medalist in the Western Women's Amateur, co-medalist and runnerup in the finals of the USGA Girls' Junior, and runnerup and the youngest finalist ever in the USGA Women's Amateur.

Six caddies at PNGA courses were awarded scholarships in 1963, bringing the total now attending colleges and universities to 16.

In 1964, the PNGA will hold its Men's and Ladies' Championships in Portland, Ore., July 13-18. The Junior Boys' tourney will be held at Shaughnessy G&CC in Vancouver, B.C., Aug. 24-28, and the Junior Girls will compete at Sand Point CC, Seattle, Wash., July 20-24.