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More Firms Encourage Their Executives to Learn to Play Golf

At least one of the rungs of the corporate ladder of success is fashioned from a golf shaft, says Helen MacDonald, one of the nation's first women golf professionals and owner of the MacDonald Golf Studio on Chicago's near north side.

Helen, who has been teaching golf for 32 years, has detected what she feels to be a discernible trend in golf. "More companies than ever before have come to realize that a good golf game is a valuable asset for their executives," she says. "These firms are emphasizing the importance of having their junior managers and salesmen learn the game's fundamentals properly."

Most young men who have taken the hint and shown up at the MacDonald studio are not would-be Arnold Palmers or even aspiring amateur champions. They merely want to advance their games to a point where they can stay in touch with their golfing companions, and not be side-tracked by whiffs and shanks. "A conversation is much more pleasant when held in the middle of the fairway instead of the adjacent woods," Helen observes.

May Pay for Lessons

"Of course, businesses never demand that their young men take up the game but they definitely encourage them to do so," Helen notes. "Sometimes the companies even pay for the first series of lessons. However, as eager as they may be, I never take them on as students unless I feel I can definitely help them. I can tell within the first few minutes whether or not they have any potential. If they have, they may find their position within the company is enhanced, or their chances of getting a new and better job is increased considerably."

A pioneer in indoor golf instruction (she turned professional in 1924), Helen has been at her present location for the past six years. Her second-floor studio is a testimonial to her interior decorating talents as well as her instructional ability. Covering well over 2,000 square feet, the bright and neat studio contains five practice nets, two washrooms, a women's lounge, Helen's office and a large foyer

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with attractive merchandise displays.

Here Helen and her assistant, Bob Rakow, pass on the tips she has gathered in more than three decades of teaching. Because of her near-downtown location she finds she has a year-round enterprise. Many nearby executives, even in the best summer weather, would rather take a quick trip to her place for practice than head for outlying suburban clubs.

Ten Sessions A Day

"I could be booked for lessons at half hour intervals all day long for the whole year," Helen comments, "but I prefer to hold down my teaching to about 10 lessons a day and use the remaining time to keep my books in shape and chat with the people who have dropped in to practice."

By cutting down on her working schedule, Helen finds that she is faced with a waiting list of people eager to learn her techniques. "I only take those who are definitely interested and whom I feel I can help," she says. "I require all prospective pupils to sign up for a series of 10 half-hour lessons and pay in advance. This way I weed out those who aren't really interested in improving their games."

Helen foresees a large increase in indoor lesson business because of the soaring numbers of golfers and present limited instruction facilities. "If downtown establishments are run correctly they do a good business," she says. "But the pros who run them must have the patience to build their reputations and clientele."

Final Test on Course

The final test of instruction is the pupil's performance on the course. But Helen debunks the theory that indoor lessons have little value. "Once on a course, you have to learn to estimate distance, but you would have to do that anyway," she says. "When learning indoors, a pupil has an easier time in concentrating on his objectives. A few years ago I had targets on my training nets but when I noticed that the students were too intent on seeing where their shots struck the target to pay attention to what I was saying, I had the targets removed. I also have placed curtains around the nets and allow no spectators. Now there are no outside distractions to handicap the student. He can build up confidence in his ability to manipulate all the clubs to a point where each becomes a part of him."