

Ladies Learn About Clubs at Rainy Day Clinic

Portsmouth (Va.) professional points out need for literature telling how golf clubs are made that can be distributed to players

By JOE DOAN

Rain is fine for the golf course, but more often than not a pro is inclined to write off a rainy day as a total loss. Especially if he has a teaching clinic scheduled.

One day last spring, however, J. B. Harris, the young pro at Elizabeth Manor GC in Portsmouth, Va., turned the rain to an advantage that should go on paying him benefits for years to come. A women's clinic that he had scheduled was driven to the club dining room by a Virginia downpour. Wondering how he would keep the ladies entertained for an hour or so before lunchtime, Harris hit on the idea of describing how golf clubs are made and what is meant by such mysterious terms as "swing weight," "flex," "hosel," etc. He had some misgivings as to whether his audience would become enraptured with his lecture, but within a few minutes he sensed that the women were absorbing practically every word he uttered. His talk, followed by a lengthy question and answer period, ran to more than two and one-half hours. The ladies insisted on delaying their lunch until the subject of golf clubs was thoroughly discussed.

Harris was completely surprised by the fact that the women showed so much in-



J. B. Harris, Elizabeth Manor pro (l), and Bob Roland, whose mission in life is to find the perfect set of clubs, check face of a new driver. Floor in Portsmouth pro shop is unique; it's made of sawed-off 2 x 4 ends.



Mrs. Sue Kelly, Mrs. John Phillips and Mrs. Doris Leigh inspect a jacket that Harris holds. J. B. would rather be selling them clubs but he isn't passing up any sportswear sales.

terest in how clubs are constructed. Like most people, J.B. thought that was a subject in which only men are interested. He admits that he had to leave some answers to some of the more intricate questions thrown at him hanging in the air. At the end of the session there were numerous requests for booklets or pamphlets illustrating how clubs are manufactured. Unfortunately, Harris had none to offer.

Thinking about this later, the Portsmouth professional decided that the PGA and club manufacturers should seriously think about collaborating on a pamphlet that describes how clubs are made. It

could be distributed in pro shops as point-of-sale literature. "Something like this," says J.B., "would give us one more tool that would help sell pro-line clubs."

Following his lecture, Harris made several unsolicited, on-the-spot sales of woods, wedges and putters to the women. During the remainder of the season, his sales of clubs to women proceeded at a much brisker pace than they ever had before. He is convinced that this single, rainy day clinic made the ladies much more club conscious than they previously had been. He feels that the men, too, were indirectly influenced by it. At any rate, he is scheduled to give his talk

Having the practice putting green located directly in front of the shop front door is one of the little things in the pro picture that helps business.



on club construction to both men and women this spring.

Selling clubs to male members never really has been much of a problem for Harris. It's because Bob Roland, Elizabeth Manor's green chairman and a 200-round a year player, kind of sets a club buying tempo for many men who belong to the club, although none tries to match Roland when it comes to sheer numbers. It's little wonder since Bob, described by Harris as a "clubholic", exchanges a dozen or more sets of clubs a year. He is obsessed with the idea that someday he is going to find what for him is the perfect set. He turns clubs over so fast that the varnish on the woods is hardly dry when he trades them in.

Doesn't Lose Money

Many pros will contend that you can't make money on a fellow like this, the difference between new clubs and trade-ins being what it is. But Harris maintains that he has yet to lose any money through the rather involved transactions with Roland. "A fellow like Bob is reasonable enough to know that I have to make a profit on every club I sell him," says J.B. "He doesn't haggle on new club prices, nor on trade-in allowances. When I sell the clubs he returns I always get a fair price for them. Many players are anxious to buy the near-new clubs that Bob turns back."

Roland's rather furious buying of new clubs is a widely discussed topic at Portsmouth Manor. "What kind of a set did Bob buy today?" is a question that often is banteringly asked of Harris. The question may wear thin at times, but as long as it is asked, people at least are thinking about golf clubs. Harris knows of no better way to keep them in that mood.

Head Pro at 21

The handsome young Elizabeth Manor pro has been at the Portsmouth club for 13 years. Five of these were spent as a course laborer and assistant pro. Born in North Carolina, J.B. lived with the family of the former pro, Fred Sappenfield, the last two years he was in high school and worked as Fred's assistant. In 1956, when Sappenfield left the club, Harris was named head pro. He was only 21-years old at the time.

Merchandise Show to Go On; Other PGA Events Listed

The PGA's sixth annual merchandise show will be held at the PGA National GC in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., Jan. 27-31, according to John Vasco, director. The show, as in other years, will be housed in a huge tent pitched in a paved area.

Booths for exhibiting golf products are 12 by 8 feet. No more than four booths are allotted to any exhibitor. The deadline for obtaining booth space is Jan. 11.

The PGA Match Play Championship will be staged during the week the merchandise show is held.

Other PGA activities scheduled for January and February are:

Jan. 18-22 — Business school in Clearwater, Fla.

Feb. 2-4 — PGA Senior-Junior tournament, sponsored by Golf Pride — Palm Beach Gardens

Feb. 11-14 — PGA Club Championship, Palm Beach Gardens

Feb. 16-17 — PGA Quarter Century Club Championship, Palm Beach Gardens

Feb. 25-28 — Seniors' Teacher Trophy Championship, Ft. Lauderdale (Fla.) CC

Harris has doubled sales in the eight years he has been Elizabeth Manor's shopmaster. He carries an average inventory of around \$10,000 and estimates that it is turned over four times a year. Clubs, as you may suspect, account for a larger percentage of his sales than sportswear, something that isn't quite in keeping with the latterday trend in pro shop merchandising. Besides having Bob Roland working for him as a "behind the scenes" salesman and seizing on such innovations as a club clinic for women players, Harris uses every possible workaday opportunity to improve his club sales picture. Mainly, this means talking about them in the shop and suggesting the purchase of them on the lesson tee.

"From what I've seen and heard," says
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Ladies' Club Clinic

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Harris, "other pros have kind of given up on selling clubs. Or, at least, they regard sportswear as their No. 1 selling item and think of clubs as a fill-in. I think that is reversing the horse and the cart. There is more money in selling clubs . . . if you work at it.

"Everytime a member comes into the shop and talks about his game," Harris continues, "he's giving you a chance to sell him a club or a set. If he is not hitting a particular shot well it may be due to the club he's using. There's no law saying that you can't spirit him over to the club department and get him looking at and trying out new clubs. You don't push him — merely make suggestions and let him do the buying.

"The same thing applies on the lesson tee," Harris goes on. "I give five or six lessons a day through the regular season and I never pass up an opportunity to try to sell a club. Once again, I do nothing more than make suggestions.

Some of the other pros tell me they don't always do this because with many members they feel they'd be wasting their time. As far as I am concerned, every person who plays golf at Elizabeth Manor is a potential customer. Maybe he hasn't bought anything for five years, but I still keep after him. I make it a point to cultivate 15 or 20 slow buyers a season. Many of them eventually turn out to be my best customers."

Appreciate Correct Fit

One of the most promising developments of the aforementioned women's club clinic is that the majority of distaff swingers at Elizabeth Manor are fully aware, undoubtedly for the first time, of how important correctly fitted clubs are to their games. The attitude once was, "Well, clubs are clubs." But that is being changed. Most of the Portsmouth lady players no longer are willing to accept sets that are handed down to them by their husbands. They have an understanding now of what is meant by the flex of a shaft and swing weight and they

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intend to have clubs that are matched to their strength. Harris uses several coordination tests in fitting both men and women.

Elizabeth Manor has about 400 playing members, one-fourth of whom are women. About 40 per cent of the male members are military personnel. Harris operates the 16-car concession. With the exception of his club department, which is always kept in the same location, he and his assistant, Jimmy Ellis, change the arrangement of the shop every month. If, however, it is found that some sportswear items aren't selling, these are moved around every second or third day. Extremely slow moving merchandise is moved as close to the club department as Harris can get it, the idea being that if it isn't seen there it simply isn't going to be seen.

Considering the success J.B. has had in selling golf clubs, that is a theory that makes a good deal of sense.

Venturi's Rebuilt Game

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don and Miss Joyce Wethered and seeing some difference in action in the hitting area which he attributed to the wood-shafted clubs they used.

Hogan Still A Topic

Ben Hogan's fine showing in his few tournament appearances last year made him a subject of study and conversation at the PGA teaching session. Venturi opined that Ben was the best driver who ever played. Ken remarked that Ben was a guy who learned that it was better to be 10 yards shorter in the fairway than 10 yards longer in the rough. There was much chatter after this observation. Casper commented that he'd never seen a fellow who really was good in the rough. They all got muttering about Hogan's putting yips. Venturi said he had recovered after 2½ years of the yips and as an authority could hazard a guess that the reason Ben got over a putt and froze was that he got too tight in the hands.