



Sarazen's Advice Heeded by LoPresti

So, Tom headed west . . . and if you don't think he didn't become an outstanding pro, read what he has done at Haggin Oaks in the way of merchandising and teaching and training assistants

By **DON CURLEE**

In establishing Haggin Oaks Municipal GC in Sacramento, Calif., as the "public course with the country club touch," Pro Tom LoPresti has carried out the advice given to him 35 years ago by Gene Sarazen, who said: "Quit the tour, go west and become the best darn club pro in the business!"

After 32 years at Haggin Oaks, LoPresti, who was named pro of the year by the PGA in 1962, is in a position to give some advice of his own — about the operation of both public and private courses.

Whether golfers are members of your club or just fee-paying players, the key to successful merchandising, LoPresti contends, is a desire to please them. "It's a kind of worn-out phrase but the completely satisfied customer is the best public relations your shop can have," he says.

In the photo above, Tom LoPresti leans, but not wearily, against a rolling rack in Haggin Oaks pro shop. He carries average inventory of around \$50,000 but doesn't permit shop to have a cluttered and overloaded look.



Morgan Barofsky (center) and Bob Love, rival Salesmen, try to convince LoPresti that their firm's wares should be spotlighted. They are seen with a mobile putter display rack Tom designed.

"You begin simply by expressing an interest in the golfer's game. To him it's the most important thing in the world," LoPresti says. With an average of 600 golfers turning out each day to play at the 36-hole Haggin Oaks complex it takes a ton of interest, but LoPresti obviously enjoys the challenge.

Tom admits that remembering the names of all his players and customers is too much, but that doesn't keep him and his staff from expressing personal interest. "How's your game?" or "How did you like the course?" LoPresti will ask. When they reply, he listens . . . and looks and waits for an opportunity to suggest ways and equipment that may make their enjoyment even greater the next time they play.

Three on the Floor

An extremely outgoing person, LoPresti always finds time for anybody who wants to see him. What's more, you get the impression that he enjoys every minute of it. He has a ready welcome for everybody and has stamped his friendly personality all over Haggin Oaks.

He's the first to admit that running the shop is more than one person can perform alone. On weekends Tom assigns three assistants to floor duty in

the pro shop, with no other responsibility than to greet each person who shows an interest in the merchandise.

Operations of the pro shop, a club and cart repair service and a daytime driving range requires a payroll of almost \$60,000 annually at Haggin Oaks. Even though LoPresti's is a big operation it's built on the little things that public fee golfers long for, but don't always find.

Among the little things that count are minor club and pull cart repairs, a lost-and-found for clubs and personal articles (*with a special bin for head covers*), and custody of ladies' handbags or men's coats or street shoes while they are on the course — all without charge.

Head Start Comes Here

Atmosphere alone doesn't make the cash register ring! It takes heads-up merchandising and careful buying. LoPresti is a master at both, but he insists that the atmosphere created by personal interest in his customers gives him a head start. He believes that traffic is so heavy at many many courses that pros neglect to



Ken Morton, Haggin Oaks assistant who installed women's department in shop, discusses merchandising ideas with Bud Werring, golf sales rep.

You can't sell bananas from an empty wagon

express enough personal interest in their customers.

His merchandising premise is simply stated: "You can't sell bananas from an empty wagon." He adds that his average inventory is from \$35,000 to \$60,000. In the fall his stock is increased sharply and then levels off after the Christmas season. He picks it up again in the spring.

Although December normally is gloomy in Northern California, the Haggin Oaks shop is bright and bustling. Every purchase during December, from 50¢ to \$500, is gift wrapped without charge.

Uses 1,000 Shopping Guides

LoPresti sells golf bags specially imprinted with the Haggin Oaks identification during December. He mails 1,000 copies of the GOLFDOM Christmas shopping guide each year and credits this with increasing his holiday traffic "tremendously!"

When the Christmas season is over, customer service goes on with the same enthusiasm as before. Refunds are granted for as long as three or four months after a purchase is made. LoPresti and his crew always try to make an exchange, but they never balk at giving a cash refund if that is what the customer prefers.

Borrow for A Discount

"Always take your cash discount on purchases," LoPresti advises, "even if it means borrowing money for a short term. The amount of the discount over your interest can buy you a new suit of clothes every year, and maybe in a good year, a new automobile."

Being an interested listener, he has learned that the putter is always at fault when a golfer's touch on the greens is lost. So, he carries at least 200 putters in stock.

With clubs it's a slightly different matter. A member of one manufacturer's staff for more than 25 years, LoPresti avoids what he calls, "shoving this company's equipment down my customers' throats."



Tom LoPresti is all over the place. Here he is rummaging through a bin in what may be the world's busiest pro shop repair section.

He keeps a wide selection of clubs in stock. "I carry enough so that 90 percent of my customers can buy from stock," he says.

LoPresti drills his assistants in the fine art of knowing their customers. He insists that they avoid overloading a beginner with too much equipment. Rather, they may steer him toward used clubs or a skeleton set that can be filled in later. The assistant pros are taught to point out to customers the mis-matching that occurs when they buy clubs elsewhere simply by taking them to the swing-weight scale. "Don't stand around crying that the discount and department stores are taking business away. Stand up and fight with alert merchandising," is Tom's advice.

Arranges Financing

His customers have a choice of three types of accounts — 30-day open, 90-day with 1 percent per month charge on the unpaid balance, or outside financing for longer periods. This LoPresti arranges. By working with a finance company payments can be extended for as long as 24 months.

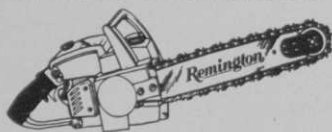
If golfers are dissatisfied with clubs they purchase, LoPresti goes out of his

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the manufacturer and the pro. Perhaps he has seen a fellow player with a new set, made by a different golf company, tries them and finds they work much better for him than does his own new ones. He doesn't realize that the other clubs just happen to be of proper specifications for him while those he had selected were not. Here again a custom-made set, when he originally decided to buy new clubs, would have been completely satisfactory!

Another thing that comes up frequently is the question of the design of a wood head suitable to the golfer's playing requirements. Here must be asked the question: "Does he fly the ball, or not? Does he have a problem getting the ball up in the air?" With these answered it becomes possible to determine what model head will enable the golfer to realize his potential.

What is the length of time to expect for delivery of a custom-made set of clubs? At Spalding it is approximately four weeks from the receipt of the order, plus shipping and delivery time.

Sarazen Was Right

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way to make an adjustment. Often it means loss of the profit on a sale, but he has found that the customer's satisfaction is worth more in future sales and referrals.

Chances of customers damaging try-out clubs are lessened by letting them get the feel of them on the practice range *only*, and then while LoPresti or one of his assistants stands by. Only low handicappers who are regular customers and seriously in the market for new clubs are allowed to take a demonstration set out on the course. He tries to "trade regular customers up" to a new set every two years.

Big Service Business

LoPresti runs a fully stocked repair shop. His cart repair business has made him the largest dealer in parts for this equipment in the world. Golfers who buy their carts from him receive free service for three years — the only charge

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One of the ways in which the pro shop at Haggin Oaks resembles a fine country club is its uncluttered attractiveness. LoPresti insists that merchandise must be displayed attractively. He has modernized the shop a number of times.

The most recent remodeling turned half of one wall into a separate department for women's soft goods. Its planning and early success is a story worth telling. The whole venture has been under the direction of 24-year-old Ken Morton, LoPresti's associate who began as a shop assistant and range helper six years ago.

Women Dictated Stock

"We wondered how women would react to being waited on by men," Morton recalls. "We were pleasantly surprised. They don't hesitate to discuss their golf clothing needs with us quite frankly."

Morton discussed the women's apparel corner extensively with many of Haggin Oaks' regular women golfers before ac-

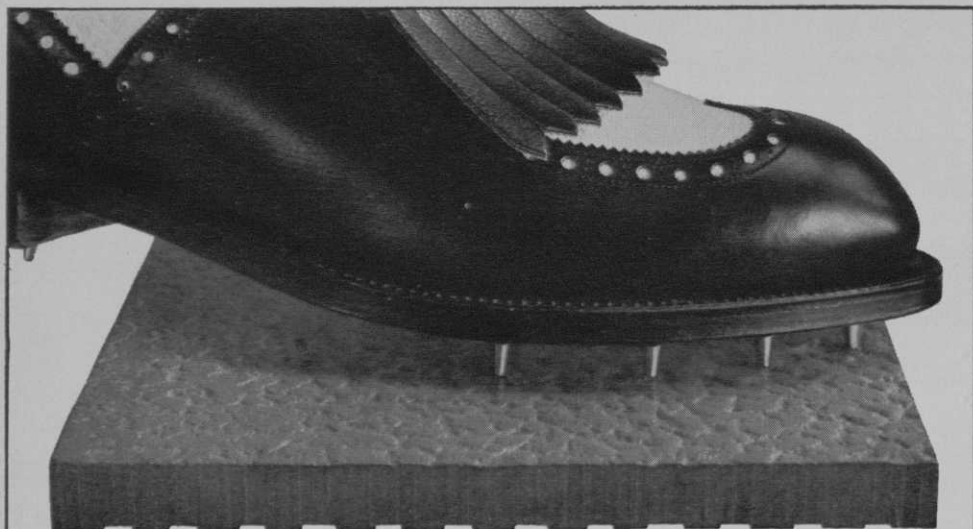
tually stocking it. He listened carefully when they told him what they preferred. He was able to supply their needs and still keep his stock to about three major lines, and all are selling well.

He asked the salesmen representing those lines how best to discuss with women the feminine matters of fit, and learned that it could be done without embarrassment. Women are invited to use the ladies locker room close by to try on wearing apparel.

Price Tags on Everything

Every article of merchandise in the pro shop is price marked. Large signs call attention to special items. Everything is arranged spaciously, but carefully so there is never enough room to swing a club in the shop.

In spite of strong emphasis on merchandising, LoPresti remains a dedicated teacher. He relishes his time on the practice tee with pupils. That's where the fun is. He does a lot of teaching by listening, learning just what his pupils' troubles are, and trying to phrase his suggestions for correction so they are



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Several Outstanding Grads

Tom considers it part of his responsibility to teach his assistants how to teach. His reputation for doing so insures him far more applicants for assistants jobs than he can accept. He tries to take the cream of the crop and points with pride to those who have gone on to full time jobs. Among them are Bill Ogden, North Shore, Chicago; Buddy Porter, Palm Springs — Indian Wells; George Gargovich, Sacramento — Northridge CC).

Teaching how to buy is done by having salesmen call at the end of the day, often after dark. LoPresti gathers all his assistants and they have a free-for-all session with the salesman. It works to his advantage too, of course, because all suggestions for profitable merchandise get a hearing.

The Haggain Oaks pro believes in developing a close personal relationship with his assistants. Several times a year he has social outings for them, a steak barbecue at his home or perhaps dinner at a res-

taurant for the entire staff, wives and girl friends. When he goes to tournament a or other out-o-town golfing events he tries to take one of his assistants, rotating the favor among them equally. This helps them become acquainted with a wider segment of the golfing fraternity, and it makes for a pleasant relationship.

Chicago District Report

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draw a salary of around \$200 a month.

Club Managers' Salaries

Club managers' salaries at 50 clubs in the District average \$11,375 annually . . . Managers at 12 NorthSide clubs draw an average of \$13,200, but this tapers off to around \$10,700 at West Side and Out of Area clubs . . . More than half of the managers are provided lodging, practically all are given their meals, and meals are provided for families of nearly 40 per cent of the managers . . . Three out of five managers receive bonuses in addition to their salaries . . . Two weeks is