

# Running a successful Par-3

*A well-maintained, not too difficult course, a well stocked pro shop and range rack up profits at Parkbrook.*

By R. H. DOOLITTLE

The operation of a Par Three golf course is similar, in many ways, to the operation of a championship course. Yet, there are many situations completely unique to Par Three professionals, situations that never arise before our fellow pros on the par 72 courses.

After five years as a pro-manager at the Parkbrook Par Three course in Southwest Cleveland, I have drawn several definite conclusions that lead toward the successful operation of the short course:

- a. Don't make the course too difficult.
- b. Electric golf carts *do not* add to the business, although they do have a defi-

nite "novelty" value.

c. It is necessary to light *only* the last three or four holes.

d. A high-quality pro shop is most important.

e. "Jar" balls play an essential role in pro shop sales.

f. A range, even if just for *irons*, is important.

First of all, let me say that Par Three golf courses give the beginner—youngster and oldster alike—the opportunity to learn something about the game. The courses are definitely a challenge for golfing neophytes.



*"Jar" balls, starter sets and trade-in policy have built shop business to \$10,000 per year.*

This is why Par Threes should *not* be made too difficult. People who play the short course do so for recreation, although at Parkbrook we do have several very interesting holes. Some of them certainly are challenging even for the better players.

The condition of the course and the quality of the pro shop is important. The better it is the more respect the people have for it. They like to feel that everything at the course—greens and fairways, especially—are as fine as at the better clubs.

Sand bunkers are important, too, as long as they are not too difficult. People like to have them. They feel it is more like a championship course. Traps also can serve another purpose if they are placed in strategic positions. They can catch a stray ball, and keep it from rolling into water, for example, thus saving time.

Because the Par Three courses do lack length, electric golf cars do not, I find, play a vital role. People do use them

once or twice until the novelty wears off. Since the holes are short, the cars do not speed up play. In fact, they even can slow down play, while everyone rides around. Cars are helpful, though, for the older and handicapped people.

The trend at Par Three courses is to install lights for night play. A few regulation-size courses are doing this too.

Lighting is wonderful in theory and would be magnificent if all the participants were Arnold Palmers and Jack Nicklaus. But people will insist on hitting the ball sideways, out of range of the lights. This results in lost balls and delays, at our peak crowd periods, while the victim spends time searching.

Because of night play, it is impossible to have any rough. All the grass must be cut to within an inch so that the ball easily can be spotted. Grass over an inch long causes trouble. Trees can also cause problems, as they cast shadows.

After dark, there also is a problem with wet greens, because of the dew. As a result, the greens on our back nine,

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*Players at Par-3's like to feel everything at the course is as fine as at the better clubs.*

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which is not lighted, are much better than the greens on the lighted front side.

The biggest evening play comes approximately 1½ hours before the official sunset. By 10 o'clock, providing the temperature is less than 50 degrees, it's almost over for the night. That's why I believe it's necessary to light only the last three, maybe four, holes. This will give the course an extra hour or so of play. This even applies to regulation size courses. Few people come out at 10 o'clock and decide they want to play a round—and they usually are problem players.

Many of our golfers will play the unlighted back nine first and then move over to the lighted front nine. Many nights, around 8 o'clock, there will be 80 to 90 people stacked up on the tees, waiting for a chance to play. And play doesn't move as fast as you'd like. It takes a foursome 10 to 12 minutes to play each hole, instead of the usual 7 minutes, by the time each golfer takes four and five strokes—or more.

The pro shop at Parkbrook has been an important segment of the business. In five years, it has grown from \$175 a year to almost \$10,000, with an ample supply of high quality equipment.

Parkbrook sells many of the name brands of balls and clubs. The beginners start with rental clubs—a real necessity—we have over 30 sets and on a busy day we run out more than once. One in four gets the bug and purchases a starter set. With each set, the purchaser is assured that he will be given a trade-in on the first set if he comes back and buys a better set. It is surprising how many people do come back and eventually work up to the high-priced professional line.

Our shop sells approximately 9,000 golf balls a year. This includes the finest to the "jar" balls, those with cuts, etc., that are fished out of the two lakes. Last year alone, 16,000 balls were taken out of the lakes. They are repainted and sold five for \$1. There never are enough to go around.

For the beginners, we suggest one

good ball to putt with and the others to smack around. If they lose one of the "jar" balls, they haven't lost much. Besides, a high-priced ball with a cut or two still flies much better than a cheap, low compression ball.

It becomes sort of a game here. The people kid each other about "how many balls did you lose?" One fellow knocked

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### *Fast-buck operators may hurt the game of golf*

My overall attitude on Par-3's is perhaps a little on the discouraging side, not that our business is bad (by the way my wife, Louise, who is club manager at Parkbrook, is one of those great, but unsung heroines of the golf business), but because I really feel that Par-3's have taken over the place that Miniature Golf held 30 years ago. By this I mean that years ago 10 or 15 thousand dollars could be easily obtained and put into a miniature for a quick return with little or no concern as to whether this would be good for golf or not. Today, I think, with money being easier to come by, that a great many people want "on the band wagon" and are willing to invest 100 or 150 thousand dollars with the same thought—quick and easy profits—get in on the harvest and publicity that golf is generating through the Tour. To \*\*\*\* with the good of golf, the gentleman's game, the upbringing of juniors, etc. Most of these fast-buck operators will eventually go broke, particularly when they find that the fast profits are just not to be had without proper capitalization and especially proper planning. They usually do not play golf themselves and can see no reason for a PGA professional, and just use a ticket taker, and very seldom hire a qualified superintendent. This could—and I admit that it is unbelievable at this time—start a general downswing for the entire golf industry. Naturally, my views do not include any well planned, well run Par-3's such as the ones at Augusta, Miami or some of those in California and a few other places.

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17 into one of the lakes one night, and then tossed in the clubs!

Parkbrook is open from March until November, seven days and nights a week. The course, pro shop and snack bar have been successful operations but a range almost is a necessity, too. The range enables people who don't have time to play to hit a few golf balls and keep their games in shape. Lights on the range, naturally, are essential and allow more time for giving lessons.

The most important thing about Par Three golf is to make certain the people are happy. They are playing the short courses, generally, for recreation. It's the responsibility of the professional and manager to make sure the participants are having a good time, while trying to improve their game and are also learning both proper golf safety and etiquette. •

### TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

Craig Wood, so-called "hard luck champion," won both the Masters and Open by three strokes.

## Long Jim Barnes dead, former U. S. Open champ

Long Jim Barnes, star professional golfer of the nineteen-twenties, died last month in his apartment in New Jersey. He was 79 years old.

Mr. Barnes, a tall (6 foot 4), angular man, was regarded, along with Walter Hagen and Jock Hutchinson, as one of the "Big Three" of professional golf during the 1920's, now remembered as the "golden era" of sports.

He won the first National Professional Golfers Association Championship in 1916, again in 1919, and won the British Open in 1925. In 1921 he won the U. S. Open by nine strokes, a margin which still stands as a record, was runner-up in the P.G.A. twice, tied for second in the British Open in 1922 and won the Western Open three times.

He is survived by two daughters, Mrs. Noel Thompson of Roseland, N. J., and Mrs. Joseph A. Manda of Springfield, N. J., and five grandchildren.

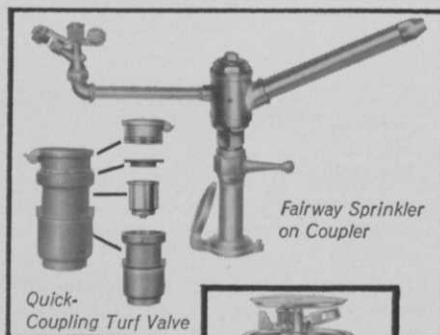


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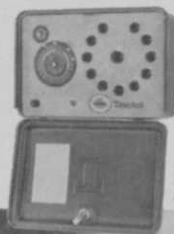
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