



Ex-**pga** champ goes public

*Jerry Barber is happier
and does a better business
since becoming head pro
at Griffith Park*

by Robert Joseph Allen

Two years ago Jerry Barber gave up his job at Los Angeles' exclusive Wilshire Country Club to become head professional at Griffith Park Municipal Golf Course.

It is interesting to see not only how he takes care of the operation, but how he coped with the change of moving from one of the most posh golf clubs in the world (where tee times are plentiful), to one of the busiest public courses in the country.

It was quite a cold plunge from the tender atmosphere of the private club, where a member pays an initiation fee of about \$10,000 and monthly dues of \$65.

"This job is far more complex, and interesting, too, I've discovered, than Wilshire was," Jerry says. "I used to have quite a bit of time to teach, play or practice there, usually as much as

I wanted. Teaching was my main lucrative activity then. Now merchandising is. The number of players here is so great, and the rest of the operation so correspondingly large, that I never have a dull moment. This keeps my disposition oiled, and I'm more considerate."

Surprisingly, Jerry was happier and more content about his work than he had ever been. "Though there isn't as much golf played at Wilshire as here," he said, (Wilshire averages about 100 players a day to Griffith's average of some 500, plus about 200 to practice and take lessons) "it cost me about 40% as much to staff Wilshire's golf operations. We had to keep their pro shop open almost as many hours, by and large, as we do here. We have the same quality merchandise here as we did there, but our sales weren't 40 per cent of what they will be here.



The main difference, as I see it, is that they were a little more demanding over there when it came to individual attention and they were generally a bit harder to please.

"My operation here is much like it is at almost any municipal course. I pay my help, buy my merchandise and range balls, pay a percentage on our sales and rentals to the city, and I'm entirely responsible for the finances of the whole operation.

"Incidentally, I've noticed that when club managements take over the concessions and hire clerks to take the place of the head professional, and then get some substitute for a proper professional to give golf lessons to the members, a lot of things, especially the service, usually don't work out quite as well as when the golf pro handles it for them on a lease basis.

"Also, I've seen club-operated shops that weren't as nice to go into as most of those which PGA professionals run. The pro should be the actual heart of the club. The club is better in every way because of the pro. It's only natural that a professional, who must of necessity make a profit on the operation and guard his reputation, will put his heart and mind where he has already put his money.

"We have two courses and a driving range here. And, it takes a bit of doing to keep the average of 500 players a day, 365 days a year who tee off, sorted, serviced, managed and happy, but I'm having a ball as a sort of ringmaster over it all."

The course opens up very early in the morning, 15 minutes before daylight, and closes after the last addicts straggle off, ordinarily well after dusk.

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A second tier was added to the driving range (below), which helps defray expenses. Pro shop (r) though quite big, is slated to be enlarged because the volume has grown so. Jerry Barber (with cap) talks to customer. Photo on preceding spread is of clubhouse, which is to be replaced by a new one.



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Griffith Park's 9th holes on each of its two courses don't end at the clubhouse; they end out in the middle of the courses—which makes the hours mostly regulated by the amount of daylight available.

Expansion at Griffith is currently going along at a rapid pace.

- A 21-tee second deck, with lights, has just been added to the existing 20-tee driving range. (See photo above).

- In April, 1968, 60 electric cars were bought. (The charge is \$6 for 18 holes).

- A new and bigger clubhouse is on the way. (Photo on preceding spread is of huge current one).

- Although the pro shop (see photo next page) is quite large—the volume has outgrown the space available—so it too will have to be enlarged. (The volume is currently about \$70,000). Under the terms of the contract, Jerry must put up the

money for this project, but the city will reimburse him.

"Our operation at present costs me between \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year, and maybe more," he revealed. "It isn't only the payroll. You have to come up with money, as in any other business, for state disability insurance, unemployment insurance, and for your F.I.C.A. which is hospital insurance and social security. All of these run into rather a large sum of money. Then there are the taxes you pay on your merchandise, and the 'Possessory Tax' which you pay for having possession of the area, etc. For example, the insurance just for fire and theft on my merchandise alone is between \$2,000 and \$3,000 a year. Then there is the usual percentage of loss on merchandise that didn't sell, and the thousand and one 'little' expenses that are always cropping up.

Altogether I have 15 people on my staff, two of them are on contract, my bookkeeper and one of the buyers. The rest work for me outright.

"The merchandising of golf is the biggest consumer of all the staff's time here. Ordering goods is the toughest part of the problem. The golf professional today has to be a good businessman. He has to be forever on guard that he doesn't wind up with a lot of goods that don't sell. In addition, he must be able to select and employ people who are also above average in the business field because he has to put up his own hard



are here because they love the game, and want to learn the business and, perhaps, become head professionals themselves some day."

Getting back to the merchandising aspect, Jerry believes that "not many golfers these days will just walk in and buy something because the pro is a certain person. In the field of merchandising—and make no mistake about this—you will mostly earn what patronage you get because there's too many other places they can get it at competitive prices. You have got to be competitive! And, here, we are competitive, and we intend to stay competitive.

cash for the merchandise, and if he gets stuck with some of it, he has to suffer the financial loss.

"I pay my assistants a salary," he said, "and let them keep all the money they make teaching, with very little restriction on the amount of time they devote to teaching, as long as the shop is well covered. For instance, on Saturdays we are extremely busy in the shop, and it is also the day when the most people want lessons. Therefore, we have a chart, and my four assistants (all qualified for teaching) divide the time available for teaching on this chart in such a way that two of them are in the shop at all times. I charge \$8 per half hour for my lessons, and my assistants get \$6. I do a lot of teaching on Saturdays also, so I can't be in the shop much, but we have a shop manager, Al Edwards, who handles all contingencies."

A problem that is indigenous to courses located in sunny California, or similar climates, is that it's necessary for the staffs to spend a lot more hours and days at their jobs, as compared to those in the east and north where a golf pro works eight to nine months a year and has three or four of the winter months off. The compensation for this is higher salaries all around for the staffs located in these climates.

"Practically all of my assistants here are not in golf because they hope to make a lot of money out of their jobs," Jerry emphasizes. "Mostly they

"Often you have two or three hours a day consumed by conversations with people who merely want to talk. You get no income from it, directly that is, but don't knock it. You can make these talkers into a valuable asset if you train yourself to be a good conversationalist. Always have a few funny stories on tap, for instance.

"In a large operation like we have here there are also bound to be many people coming into the shop who are just looking around. Many of them have time to kill while waiting for their tee-off time. We therefore avoid approaching them unless they more or less unmistakably indicate they want something. We adopted this policy because we don't want to embarrass them, but want them to feel comfortable.

"In other words, we try to run our shop with good public relations in mind. If a person buys something and is dissatisfied with it we try to be fair, often generous, with them when they return the merchandise. Shop personnel who are not trained to be adept at this can rapidly create widespread dissatisfaction. We don't want even one former customer saying to golfing friends and acquaintances, 'Don't buy it at Griffith Park,' if we can help it. My assistants know I would rather lose the profit of a sale anytime than have a customer dissatisfied, let alone leaving angry.

"We particularly like golfers to come and ask our opinion about things, such as: should the

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grips on their clubs be smaller or larger, or should their swingweight be heavier, etc. We take them to the practice tee, watch them hit a few balls and then tell them what club we think they should have.

"Also, if we convince them that the advice we give them about rules, regulations, etiquette, practice, etc, is well-intended, we not only have a very satisfied customer, but a friend too.

"But when a person is dissatisfied with the advice we give him, and this sometimes happens, I would, rather than have it end there; either refinish that club or put the club grip back on at my own expense, and do a personal soothing job on him to boot.

"**A**nother extremely important phase in the operation of a golf course is the running of tournaments. It is a very complicated operation, if done properly. We have

tournaments coming out of our ears here, but we're happy to have them and we know what's what when it comes to running one. We start right on the first tee, doing the announcing and generally helping with the whole operation, including the collection of fees and keeping track of the entries."

Among other things at the course that Jerry is involved with are:

1. Night meetings having to do with the club. They consume four to six hours, and on occasion, one of these meetings will run until around midnight.

2. The men's club. It has some 700 members who pay dues of \$20 a year to belong, with green fees extra, which are \$3 for everyone. The men's club, however, is just one of his concerns there; it's a public golf course and he has to be equally concerned with all who come to play golf.

The golf range is another important function of the course. "Our new two-decker practice range is tremendously well patronized," says Jerry, "which helps shoulder an ever increasing share of the expense. But, if you're a good range operator, you'll put a lot of that money back into better than average range balls and other range equipment. We certainly do, and we keep the brushes and mats, and the whole facility, slicked up, generally. We feel this will make them come and practice more and be better satisfied while doing it."

Turning to the personal side, Jerry feels "There's something about a golf professional's vocation that most golfers seldom consider. He ordinarily works six days a week, and from eight to twelve hours a day, and every weekend, the year round. (Like everyone else, he'd love to be off weekends). In fact, I remember when we first opened here, we were short-handed and were coming in at 6 a.m. and staying until about 6:30 or 7 p.m. And we did this seven days a week for about two months. I merely cite it to show that any golf professional worthy of his name always puts his responsibilities to his players first, whether they're members or pay a fee." □



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