

GOLFDOM SPEAKS OUT

Club managers hit with tough charges

It would seem unnecessary to defend the honesty and integrity of a profession that has devoted itself to service and "customer" satisfaction for nearly 200 years in this country alone. Yet, a national magazine has cast doubt on the ethics of over 5,000 professional club managers. In so doing, it has also laid open to question the operations and policies of an equal number of private and social country clubs by descending to vague generalities and unsupported allegations, all of which we believe to be untrue.

Any club member who reads "The Wedding Racket" by Peregrine Pace (Mrs. Kendall Stebbins Bryant) in the June 10th, 1969, issue of *Look Magazine* may feel justified in looking askance at his club's manager. In this article, under the blurb, "Grafting club managers would put a Chinese warlord to shame," the article states:

"Most club managers are such artful grafters they would make an old Chinese warlord cut off his queue in shame. I suppose they consider themselves underpaid. In any case, they are exposed to temptations to 'get theirs' as fast as possible. They take graft from every firm that hopes to get, or keep, the club's business. Their greatest sources of cash commissions are the liquor distributors and their salesmen.

"A 'wrapped' bottle is something you must never let a club manager put over on you . . . And don't let him suggest the brands of champagne and liquor for the party . . . *You* tell the club manager what you want served, and instruct him to close the bar on the last note of the music . . .

"Get your own florist and don't tell the club manager his name . . . And never let him suggest an orchestra. That's worth a 15 per cent commission to him."

GOLFDOM deplors this "broad brush" approach in critical writing, particularly when it jeopardizes the reputation of an entire profession. It would be naive of us to deny the possibility that among such a large professional body some individuals are involved in unethical practices, but generally we have found in our 42 years of experience that club managers are as honorable a group as any.

If someone has discovered that certain members of the profession are engaged in unethical activities,

the proof of their behavior should be presented to the appropriate officials so that they may take action against the offenders. But simply indicting thousands, perhaps, upon the misbehavior of a few—and without supporting the accusations—constitutes a smear rather than a constructive, responsible piece of criticism.

Individually, professional club managers hold rigorously to a strict code of ethics; collectively, the Club Managers Assn. of America polices it carefully. It reads, in part:

1. We will uphold the best tradition of club management through adherence to sound business principles, and will assist our club officers to secure the utmost in efficient and successful club operation.
2. We will consistently promote the recognition and esteem of club management as a profession, and conduct our affairs in a manner to reflect capability and integrity . . .
5. We will not permit ourselves to be subsidized or compromised by any interest doing business with our clubs . . .
8. We deem it our duty to report to local or national officers any willful violations of this code . . .

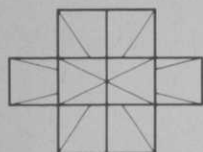
The 42-year-old professional association numbers among its membership the managers of nearly every major, bona fide, private country club. In addition to their code of ethics, club managers attend summer workshops in food and beverage, personnel and property management, marketing, executive development and financial management.

Held in major university centers across the country, the educational program has set the standards for the hospitality industry. Indeed, a degree in club management is offered at several colleges.

Partly because they have set such high educational and moral standards and partly because they are simply dedicated and hard working professionals, club managers as a group rank in the top 5 per cent income bracket—hardly the type to "consider themselves underpaid," or to be tempted to "get theirs" as fast as possible."

The most serious charge in the article is that club managers—or at least "most club managers"—accept graft, particularly from liquor distributors and

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their salesmen. Perhaps, in their evident desire to be sensational, the author and editors of *Look* have failed to realize the full implication of their accusations.

Most states and/or counties bar such practices by law. In many, the penalties include the loss of their license to dispense liquor and usually apply to both purchaser and seller. I am not qualified to speak for the liquor distributors, but few reputable clubs or club managers would be willing to risk such action.

The 'wrapped bottle' inference is plainly stated as a charge that the manager is substituting a cheap champagne for a fine one. However, the fact is that every club manager wants to enhance the reputation of his members and of his club. About the only time I have ever seen a manager wrap a bottle was for the purpose of keeping accumulated moisture from dripping on the guests' clothing. Occasionally, though, the wrapped bottle is used to spare the member the embarrassment of exposing the low-priced champagne the member has purchased from his regular liquor dealer. In normal circumstances, the club wouldn't even permit the stuff in the back door.

Club managers *do* often strongly recommend one or two florists. Again the motive is a helpful one, however. Too often florists unfamiliar with the club will tend to over-decorate. Florists who have provided flowers to the club in the past will know the upper and lower limits of the club and can advise the member according-

ly, thus saving considerably on the decorating bill and providing tasteful and appropriate floral decorations.

The instruction to tell the club manager when to close the bar has comical overtones, if you like that type of comedy. Most hosts *do* leave strict instructions on closing times. The problem arises when the host is left with a few friends—anywhere from 10 to 100—and wants the manager to reopen it.

The statement that the club manager receives a commission from the orchestra is a new one to me. In 15 years in the private club industry and with over 1,000 personal acquaintances among club managers, I must confess to never having heard this suggestion before.

These accusations, painted with a broad brush in a magazine of nationwide distribution, constitute an example of sensational journalism. A cloud has been cast over the integrity of every club manager in the country. These accusations cannot be dismissed without denial.

While we are certain that most club members are aware of the integrity of their managers, there may be some who have come to have doubts as a result of these charges. Every professional manager we have talked with about these charges has affirmed his personal adherence to the industry code of ethics and has further responded to our queries by saying that these unethical and illegal activities are unknown at reputable clubs.

—Ken Emerson

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