

# Confessions of a Pro

**A**fter working almost 50 years in pro golf, I retired. My wife and I live contentedly and belong to a good golf club with an interesting course and congenial members.

These days there's talk about millionaire golf pros and pros who, although almost unknown, get a quarter-million in prize money in two years, yet complain about what pro golf and the golf public have not done for them. Are my ambition and performance as a club professional hopelessly out of style?

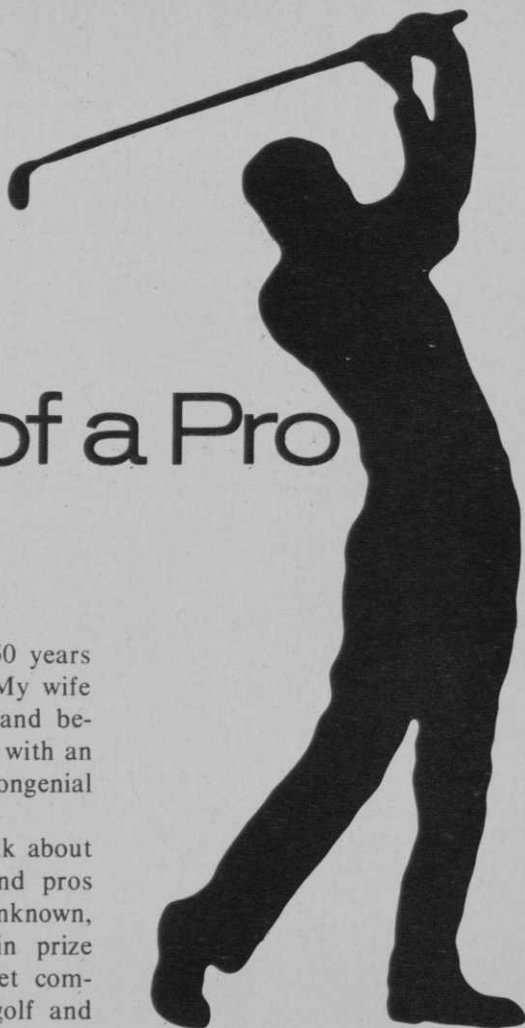
As a club professional, I always have tried to do more for my members and the club than I was paid for doing. Somehow I got the idea I owed that to golf. I am one of a family that has won national championships. I probably have inherited an obligation of service to the game. In these days of playing stars and managers exploiting golf and golfers to the limit, I am merely one of the Happy Golfers' Army.

It could be that even these days with the publicity accent on the "take" rather than on the "give" in golf business, genuine value to the golfer continues to be rated by what help the pro gives amateur golfers, and that encouragement and assistance will continue to be well re-

warded materially and respected by those the pro has served.

The success of the professional depends primarily on the kind of a job he gets. And what an accidental element that is, because so many pro jobs are over-sold. Young men usually go "blind" into pro jobs. Some of them are lads who think pro golf is an easy way of making a living. They may be hard-up and take any sort of a job. This applies to adept amateurs who come out of high school or college, can play fairly well, but not well enough to go on the tour. They haven't any idea what a pro job means, nor do the men who hire them.

These applicants fail to learn how the previous pro did on the job, whether he had been competent, diligent and pleasing, whether he had received patronage of the members, and what



The third article in the "Confessions" series takes a long, backward look at the pro business and asks the question, what is success? **ANONYMOUS**

chances are of improving the revenue. The fellow who is looking for the pro job also ought to have a good idea of what the expenses are. These days the expenses of pro department operation are greater than club officials and members realize and are increasing as members want more service and the pro's employees want more money, easy hours and privileges.

Officials and applicants for pro jobs are inclined to think of the job as paying more than it does. You may hear of a pro job yielding \$25,000 a year before personal income tax. When you stop to analyze the situation, there may be 250 active men and women members. That means the professional has to clear, before taxes, an average of \$100 a year per member. And that's for about a seven month season in midwestern and northern states. To do that, the pro would have to have a membership that averages in gross revenue well over \$200 a year per member.

Ask the club member, who thinks his pro gets \$25,000 a year out of the shop, if the member himself spends \$200 a year in the shop. Not many do.

When I first went to the club from which I retired, I was able to learn what the pro depart-

ment grossed the previous year. I knew something was wrong because the club had the type of membership that wanted the best of everything and was willing to pay for first-class merchandise, service and instruction.

I studied the membership, learned what they expected from a pro, gave it to them and tripled the business my first year there. The next year, I was offered a contract with everything I possibly could ask. That was the only written contract I had in 29 years at the club.

I'll admit I was lucky in working with and for men and women who were well qualified as officials and committee heads of first-class clubs. Some persons seem to be almost born that way. With discreet direction and diplomatic education by a professional whom they realize is a capable and conscientious specialist, they are invaluable both to their club and to its pro.



Being a pro and a club official have changed greatly. Paperwork now is an expensive part of pro business. Accounting for merchandising control, tax, insurance and employee management is a big item that has to be paid for out of the pro's revenue for merchandise and lessons, club cleaning and storage, his salary guarantee and what supervising golf car operations may yield.

The duties and expenses of a modern pro department operation have changed; so now the pro job at a first-class club generally is that of a golf director.

Toward the end of my active career, I didn't have time for as many lessons as I wanted to give or even to play at least nine holes with many of our members.

I'd started in pro golf making clubs and I've never stopped making sure that clubs I sell fit my customers. Learning what the player requires on the lesson tee and by playing with him or her, the experienced professional is able to supply the buyer with valuable, helpful clubs. That type of service from a competent pro is worth a lot of money and strokes to his members.

The member ought to be able

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## CONFESSIONS OF A PRO

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to depend on his pro to supply him with exactly what he needs. I never carried many brands in my shop and every two or three years would change my featured line to keep my members' interest lively and to please all tastes. I'd do some minor altering now and then or put in special orders to make sure the customer was fitted precisely.

I started on both my jobs as a pro-greenskeeper and saw the course management part of the work become a full-time specialist's job. My relation to the superintendents, as they later became known, was more as a partner than in the loosely defined supervisory capacity. I knew what the superintendent was up against and was able to be his voice in court and get players' sympathetic, patient understanding of how "acts of God" and man can damage a course. Maybe it's more important now; golfers expect everything to be perfect always.

My relations with managers, too, have been happy, mutually beneficial and figured into the pleasant and efficient operation of the club.

In fact, as I review my years as a professional and my relations with superintendents and managers, I am reminded that never, now or yesterday, could a pro who is doing the correct, progressive, profitable thing for himself and his club, be only a pro. He has to know something about the job of everybody on the team or he is not qualified to star in a very demanding business.

The pro job has been tough, demanding much during long hours, and it is getting more complex—but what of that? If the job weren't difficult and exacting, a caddie could handle it and earn enough to get by. □

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