

By Patrick D. Williams

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Sometimes I get very amused, but at the same time, very concerned about the general public's opinion of golf professionals. The typical reaction is that the golf professional has a soft job, makes a lot of money, wears sporty clothes and plays 18 holes of golf each day of the week. These people do not understand the golf profession, because to them it is an avocation. All of us in the golf business know that nothing is further from the truth.

Opinion as to why the public thinks this way is diverse. Years ago some golf professionals were flashy, devil-may-care types, who made all the appearances of riding the waves. People watch television and conclude that all golf professionals make \$50,000 a year or more. Few know that the average income of professionals is in the \$10,000 to \$12,000 income bracket. (According to GOLFDOM's figures, in 1970 57.5 per cent of professionals earned between \$10,000 and \$12,500 a year.) Because few people understand the golf professional's situation, his skills and talents are grossly underrated. The very term, professional, refers to an occupation which demands skill, training, education and experience.

Twenty-five to 30 years ago the role of the golf professional was fairly easy to describe. The demands on his abilities were nothing compared to what they are today. The reason for the drastic change is quite simple—growth. Growth in the numbers of players, golf courses and other related areas. Growth means large-dollar investments, and large investments demand many more skills from the people in charge.

Let me digress briefly to cover one point. In my opinion the golf professional is the key to a successful golf course operation. He can make it go or can set up blocks that create its downfall. I am not saying that technically he is more important than the club manager or the golf course superintendent. Their roles are just as vital. The general public, however, judges a golf operation by the quality of the golf professional. Unfortunately, many clubs and courses direct their growth in other areas. During my tenure with the Professional Golfers' Assn. I saw



Schooling the Profs

The former director of education for the PGA gives his candid views on the strengths and weaknesses of the present educational program

too many cases in which the golf professional literally kept an operation going solely through his own desire and initiative. As someone once said people join clubs to play golf and not swim in the pool. Conclusion: The man who services these people must be a first-class professional both in golf and in business.

Why do people become golf professionals? Simply, they are usually good players who think that by becoming a professional they can play all the time from now on out. Few realize the long road they face to become a qualified professional, and the attrition rate is high in the profession. A person does not decide to play golf for money and at the same time automatically become a professional. It doesn't work that way.

What does it take to become a golf professional in today's market? What will it take in the future? Candidly, the golf professional is off and running today in trying to get caught up with the growth. Years ago a man became a professional by working up through the caddie ranks. Today, the time is not available for this lengthy transition. When John Doe makes up his mind today to turn professional he is faced with a four-year apprenticeship, schools and training seminars and written examinations. He does not just turn "pro." If he fails at any step, he is halted in his progress for at least one year. So you can see that the process is not simple.

These requirements are fairly new. It was not until 1957 that the PGA started to get going in its training and educational programs for new professionals. It was not until the late sixties that it started to put together a complete educational package. Other professional groups started their programs in the late thirties and early forties. However, the PGA did build an educational program expenditure from a few thousand dollars a year to a quarter of a million dollars a year in a fairly short time.

Today the PGA's training program is quite stringent. Candidates must be high school graduates. College graduates are given additional credits. They must successfully complete two, week-long training seminars called PGA Business Schools. In addition, they must complete a five textbook home study pro-

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gram and pass a comprehensive written examination. Also, they are required to meet various other requirements outlined by their local sections. Entrance, obviously, is not based on how well a person strikes the little white ball.

However, in light of all these "new" requirements there is still a void which the PGA must fill. This void exists in the assistance it provides not only to new members but to the older members as well. There is always a tendency in any association to say it is hard to teach an old dog. On the contrary, I have found that the "old dog" is by far the most receptive to learning because he knows that he does not know it all. The PGA is making some inroads in this area with its new Executive Management Seminar, but much more needs to be done.

Sometimes there is a tendency in golf circles to become blinded by the glamorous aspects and forget the problems of the everyday rank-and-file golf professional. I agree that the tournaments and other affairs are a vital part of the PGA's activity; however, I think that its major thrust must be in helping the average guy in the membership ranks.

In my opinion the PGA must:

- Revamp its sectional educational programs so that they are serious pursuits in learning. Attendance would be mandatory and testing new as well as older members acceptable. The benefits of the area learning centers are boundless.

- Re-structure the PGA Business Schools in course curriculum. Presently, too much time is allocated to teaching how things are run at an affluent golf club. More emphasis needs to be placed on the public and semi-private operations. Further, teaching golf or how to teach needs to be separated entirely from the business aspects of being a golf pro.

- Expand its winter educational program and get it out to the masses, rather than the handful who can attend the sessions in Florida.

- Establish a "national academy" for golf professionals where perspective professionals can go for extensive training in business, playing and teaching.

- Develop a solid on-the-job training program in which a person's learning progresses regardless of

the type of club he is employed by.

- Put some teeth into the National Employment Service whereby they can help place qualified professionals as well as encourage new blood to join the ranks. If jobs cannot be found, training is useless.

- Develop a myriad of programs for its present membership regardless of the hurdles. The association must provide help to the guy in the hinterland. This can be accomplished by carrying programs to him run by national headquarters; by developing a top notch bi-monthly technical bulletin; by getting him involved and understanding his programs, and by making the Professional Golfer magazine a more informative and useful tool for him.

- Develop a first-class research bureau to actually analyze and to keep data on the profession. I do not refer to an equipment testing division, but rather a division which can accurately report facts and project market trends for the golf business.

- And I think the entire association would directly benefit from a program of establishing regional offices to distribute its services. The Florida location is too far removed both geographically and financially from the average member. He has a hard time mentally associating with an operation so removed.

I hope that no reader takes what I have said out of context. To me the PGA is a very progressive and dynamic organization. My three and one half years as its educational director provided me with an invaluable amount of experience as well as an opportunity to associate with numerous top-rate club and playing professionals.

What I have tried to say in a constructive fashion is that the PGA has done a lot and still has a lot to do. I sincerely feel that the rank-and-file professional would have a higher professional stature in the business community if the PGA will help him to acquire the necessary skills, and more important help him to maintain these skills.

A growth business, which golf is, does not allow complacency nor tolerate being covered up with tinsel. Long-range programs are the only solution to guaranteeing success in this type of environment. By active and effective programming, the PGA can remove the professional under-estimation of the modern golf professional. □

COMING EVENTS

Grassland '71, Fourth Annual Field Day, Municipal Airport, Eugene, Ore., June 23-27.

Sod Production Field Day, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., June 29.

National Golf Foundation Western Invitational Seminar for Teachers, Lake San Marcos Resort, San Marcos, Calif., July 12-16.

Landscape Architects' Field Day, Cole Nursery Company, Inc., Circleville, Ohio, August 11.

NGF Eastern Invitational Seminar for Teachers, Pine Needles Lodges & CC, Southern Pines, N.C., August 16-20.

Turfgrass Field Day, Crop Science Field Laboratory, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., September 9.

Alabama-Northwest Florida Annual Turfgrass Short Course, Auburn University, Auburn, Ala., September 19-22.

Florida Turfgrass Management Conference, Pier 66, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., September 19-22.

Midwest Regional Turf Foundation Field Day, Purdue University, Lafayette, Ind., September 27.

Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium, Sewerage Commission of the City of Milwaukee, Wis., November 4-5.

Northeastern Weed Science Society 26th Annual Meeting, Hotel Commodore, New York, N.Y., January 5-7, 1972.

Golf Course Superintendents Assn. of America Annual Conference, Netherland-Hilton Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio, February 13-18, 1972.