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HERB GRAFFIS



SWINGING AROUND GOLF

NEW INTERESTS IN THE GOLF MARKET

Golf business is a two-way, international highway of which American makers of golf playing equipment and golf course maintenance equipment were reminded by the presence of many studious Japanese at the Professional Golfers' Assn. Merchandise Show and the Golf Course Superintendents Assn. of America equipment and supply show in Boston.

At Boston, the Japanese visitors were busy photographing machinery from all angles. At Palm Beach Gardens, where PGA officials had banned picture taking, the Japanese were buying golf clubs and balls from leading makers, bags from a few and thoughtfully inspecting their other items. Golf cars received close attention and descriptive literature was collected. We did not learn of sales of golf cars to Japanese buyers. Japanese courses generally are too hilly for most cars. And the Japanese girl and women caddies are cheap, swift, vigilant, sturdy and satisfactory. The revenue they earn to some degree compensates for taking the golf course area out of the much needed agricultural and livestock productivity.

Naturally, American golf car makers wonder if the Japanese delegation wasn't interested in making golf cars to compete in the American market.

Japanese golf balls in the American market have been almost altogether cheaper, molded range balls. The Japanese haven't been able to capture the American "feel" into the clubs they make for domestic and export sales. For years the Bull's Eye putter has had a considerable annual sale in Japan. Patient efforts have been made by the Japanese to produce an exact copy of the Bull's Eye, but the genuine and imitation

are readily discernible to the professional or amateur golfer acquainted with top-grade clubs.

With American or British steel shafts, American or British composition grips and heads either imported or closely copied from imported heads, the Japanese clubs simply can't attain the fine balance and authoritative feel of the American jobs. Why? Who knows? Maybe the Americans can't make a parasol that feels just like the authentic Japanese production.

Duty and shipping account for a good quality United States club costing in Japan about twice the equivalent of its home price.

The Japanese took much of the baseball glove business away from the Americans. The threat of a Japanese drive for the American golf market is one that has American manufacturers alert.

Last year the Japanese put up the biggest purse of the tournament year. Trent Jones is designing more courses for Japan; so are architects associated with Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus. Art Hill and Bob von Hagge are on Japanese jobs. Japan's leading businessmen have bales of money and are intensely enthusiastic about golf. There even have been reports that Japanese capital is getting into American golf resorts.

Don Rossi, executive director of the National Golf Foundation, the highly effective bureau of golf as a game and a business, is continually worrying about the slow pace of golf. It's costing millions in needed facilities for those who haven't been discouraged by getting frozen behind slow players.

Rossi, an official of a metropolitan district club of prestige and pleasant members, was playing one day behind a buddy of his; also a club officer. The slowness was in-

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sufferable. After several holes Rossi called to his pal ahead, "Fore! Have you gone to sleep?"

When Rossi eventually caught up, his friend asked, "Why did you yell at me? I had \$25 going on that putt."

Rossie replied, "If you had \$25 ruing on the golf you play, golf's no game for you. Try a crap game."

That could be the right answer to a lot of slow play. Poor players playing for too much money. Maybe that's partially the reason for slow play on the tournament circuit. Bill Langford, noted veteran golf architect, used to say, "When the bet becomes more important than the golf, then the man isn't playing golf." Bill has been around a lot. He is the one fellow who played in inter-collegiate championships as a member of two teams: Yale and Princeton.

Maybe you shouldn't damn the slow player ahead of you. He may need the money badly.

Perhaps some scholarly collector of golf books can answer a question that has interested me for years.

But chances are remote. Golf

book collectors often are just that; not fellows who catalog and index their collections to be useful in research.

What I'd like to learn is the date of the first angry reference to bad greens. Really, even critical reference to unsatisfactory putting conditions was rare in golf magazine and book stories prior to the 1920s. Greens were accepted as they were. If you didn't like them, you stayed away. *Freddie McLeod* explained the prevailing attitude of experienced players years ago in the telling of a young pro who was complaining about the greens at a National Open championship.

"What did you get?" asked a listening bartender.

"79," the youth answered sourly.

"And what did you make?" the bartender asked a veteran contestant alongside the lad.

"I got 71," replied the old hand.

"Were you playing different courses?" the bartender queried. The kid got the message and quit bellyaching about the greens.

At the PGA Merchandise Show again this year I noted the conven-

tionability of golf bag designs.

Millions of rounds are played yearly with bags carried on golf cars, yet bag designs are virtually the same as when all bags were carried by caddies.

Now, how often it seems that whatever you want is on the side of the bag, inconvenient to reach when it's on a golf car. Sweater, rain jacket, glove, bandages, hats, bug spray, tees, balls, pencil, rulebook, green repair tool, ball marker, sunburn protection and all the other paraphernalia usually are on the other side of the bag.

When a caddie is carrying the bag, the answer is easy. All bags are made entirely for being carried by caddies.

I mentioned to the sales manager of a leading golf car maker the possibility of a genius some day producing a dual-service golf bag, convenient for caddie and car use.

He laughed and said, "I know what you mean. Whatever I want always is unhandy." Then he paused and remarked, "Maybe a swivel or a rotating carrier on the car would do the job." □

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