

Viewpoint

Golf must make the most of being an outdoor pastime

by Herb Graffis

This month marks the 50th International Turfgrass Conference and Show sponsored by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, and the staff of GOLF BUSINESS wanted to publish some kind of commentary in this issue that would look back over the past 50 years and concisely assess where the golf business has been, where it is now, and where it seems to be headed — to overlook the day-to-day, year-to-year changes in fertilizer prices, shortages of water, and unionization of labor and give us a view of the whole forest rather than just the trees.

There is one man uniquely qualified to write such a commentary, and we naturally turned to him: Herb Graffis.

Herb founded GOLFDOM, forerunner of GOLF BUSINESS, with his brother Joe some 52 years ago. While Joe ran the business side of the magazine, Herb worked as the editor until the mid-1960's, when he and Joe sold the magazine. Since then, Herb has successively been executive editor and consultant for the publication.

After reviewing more than a half century as a player, club member, businessman, reporter, and editor in golf, Herb now sees a serious slowdown in golf development. The reason: failure of course and clubhouse architects to modernize and coordinate their planning in adjusting golf to the modern world's "concrete and asphalt jungle" conditions which present golf with opportunities it ignores. He urges designers and builders of golf facilities to revive the "summer garden" setting that helped make golf so popular in this country.

The veteran observer notes that the lesson-practice tee, an American innovation that revolutionized golf, offers immense possibilities to architects and club and fee course executives. He says architects have neglected this area.

Herb adds that when the golf business takes advantage of using its out-of-doors qualities, the responsibility and status of the golf course superintendent will be considerably improved — as well as the business rating of golf facilities. — Ed.

The one who told me golf has lost the brains and grasp for beauty that made it America's greatest playing game was Johnny Inglis.

As time goes on I see his vision was so sound that many of the people I thought had been brilliantly foresighted and contemporaneously prominent in golf business have been succeeded by nice guys who haven't a faint idea of tomorrow.

They have missed sadly the plain idea that golf's great tomorrow for service and prosperity is how it got started out-of-doors.

The brutal, threatening truth today is that golf is being choked, maybe ruined, by those who don't realize the simple fact that golf is a pastoral pastime. They have looked at golf as something like a pool room hideaway; not for out-of-doors.

Inglis as a kid was pro at Fairview Country Club, Elmsford, New York. Johnny was for many years president of the Metropolitan New York PGA. In winters he was at Augusta, Ga., teaching Robert Todd Lincoln, son of the president who emancipated the parents of Georgia caddies, and at Fort Myers, Fla.

He operated a course for men who came in on their yachts in winter mainly to fish. When fishing weather was bad Inglis got them playing golf. He had Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone, and Henry Ford taking a few shots, but they said they took too much time and he went back to work for heirs who eventually sponsored tournaments that were so slow they almost drove golf out of business.

Inglis died a couple of years ago at Dunedin in Florida. He was 86 and made some aces on par-3 courses a year prior to passing along to the Green Pastures.

Inglis told me, "All the social and financial prestige of the Four Hundred days of the 90s interested the Best People in playing golf, but what made them believers was seeing how much fun they could have outside."

Sundays, member families used to come to Fairview with epicurean lunches. They would play golf, then on tables outside have dinners great in simple, beautiful outdoor service that was superior to the charm of the European sidewalk and garden cafes. The delightful earlier American beer gardens and the never-to-be-forgotten toylands like that of Victor Herbert and his orchestra were what made life living instead of merely signing a club bill.

When people who were unaccustomed to the new social and economic homestead of private clubs arrived, the amazed newcomers exclaimed "this is better than any place in New York or Paris." Although they had not roamed much past Pete's place in Peoria, the genuine sophisticated globe-trotting mortals with the sense that art is eternal were nostalgic about the beginnings of the dear old club's lovely garden in Eden.

So right they have been.

But now there are faint promises that golf and country clubs may be beginning to live outside again instead of being primarily a



restaurant, bar, and locker room somewhere fairly close to the urgently needed and delightful therapy of the outside.

Millions of Americans desperately need — but aren't getting — these values, although they are paying in their country club dues and bills for this delightful escape from dull worldly cares they desperately seek.

The new picture of the golf club outside is offering the best opportunity golf course architects, superintendents, and clubhouse architects ever have had.

The situation will make the smart ones rich and famous.

The time now demands that the course and clubhouse architects and the course superintendents with their genius, power, and money-making abilities must make far more use of the outside beauties than has been often exhibited.

Right now there are signs that the golf clubs or pay-as-you-play course to meet modern conditions must have design of the basic outdoor attractions and the clubhouse indoor attractions and facilities coordinated so the clubhouse area is virtually a golf garden with somewhat of the happy character of the summer gardens when golf was young in this country.

This will call for intelligent, imaginative, economically sound coordinating of the first tee, 18th green, practice green, and lesson tees with a clubhouse having terraces, veranda, and lawns attractively landscaped for the enjoyment of people who like to watch golf, practice golf, take golf lessons, eat, drink, and delight in living outdoors.

With psychiatrists reporting the stir-crazy conditions of modern living in the concrete and asphalt jungles being in a disaster area, and the golf facility correctly designed being the escape and therapy, it is puzzling that golf facility builders — especially the real estate developers and resort owners — should be so obtuse in attuning to the times. They are costing themselves millions and their customers immeasurable happiness.

The practice and lesson tee area has been unpardonably neglected by golf facility designers and businessmen who haven't done a thing to make wise, pleasant, and profitable use of potentially magnificent entertainment

areas in golf.

A golf lesson should be fun. The results of the instructors who are worth lesson money show that if what a pupil needs to know can't be discovered by a professional in a few minutes and the pupil told how to teach himself in the remainder of 5 minutes, the pro lesson is a waste of time and money.

Every experienced pro knows that and realizes supervised practice is his most valuable service.

In sad statistics of pro lesson economics, the PGA survey shows plainly the need of a drastic revolution in the attractiveness and use of the lesson tee before the pros' function becomes extinct.

The practice-lesson tee should be an attractive summer garden with tables, drink, food service, and a delightful club atmosphere

so alluring men would come to their clubs to meet their wives and children for golf's "happy hour" and stay for dinner at the club.

Considering the genius in some respects of men who I have believed are among the smartest in golf business, I have been appalled by such admirable guys as I could name designing golf courses so flagrantly deficient in the coordination of modern, attractive, and economically sensible facilities for golfers.

The situation is that we have a play business with more than a \$6 billion capital investment, and Big Guys in it are blowing away money on courses that are obsolete before the first ball is hit.

My current idol among pro golf businessmen and as a human in every way is Jack Nicklaus. He has a competent mechanic

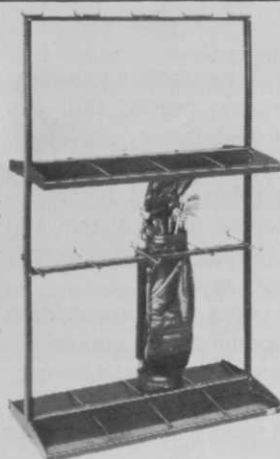
with him, Pete Dye, who designed a golf course that was just another course. The PGA Tour Sawgrass course is yet another of those that were simply circus golf courses that were made acceptable by writers and guests and not for the pleasure of members and adjacent property owners.

Will the new PGA course of tomorrow be a showing of the happily needed and profitable golf course that will bring millions into the free spending pleasures of tomorrow? Or will it be, like so many courses have been lately, merely another troublesome, dull, and expensive course that the Good Lord could have improved a million ways without half trying? It will determine the health of golf business tomorrow.

Frankly, the prospect for intelligent, imaginative development of golf as an outdoor sport and business of tomorrow doesn't look too bright.

I'm sorry to say, there aren't too many designers and businessmen in golf who seem to have vision and energy enough to see the business possibilities of golf as an outdoor game. The good business and pleasure view of golf tomorrow obviously is clearest among the college-trained superintendents whose education extends beyond the limits of grass-growing. But the design of golf facilities now is, in most cases, pathetically obsolete.

Look at the outdoor tables during the Masters and if you don't get an idea of what the possibilities are for golf facilities in the future, you just haven't got it.



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