

REMARKS OF A NEW PROFESSIONAL

GENE Littler, who won the Amateur Championship last fall and came within an 8-foot putt of tying for the Open Championship last spring, has now been a professional eight months and, under the regulations of the Professional Golfers' Association of America, has completed his apprenticeship as a tournament player.

He announced that he was turning professional last January after he had outscored many of the leading tournament players in the San Diego Open and as he was about to be released from active duty in the United States Navy.

Although Gene has been playing golf all his life, he is still acclimating himself to some of the surprising aspects of life as a professional tournament player:

What Professionals Learn

"The hardest thing to get used to," he said recently, "is the idea that you don't have to win all the time to be successful.

"It came as a surprise to me, as a matter of fact, that a professional doesn't have to shoot 66 or 67 in every round, although it is, of course, important to avoid a bad round.

"In amateur golf, you have practically nothing if you don't win. But in professional golf there is an incentive to keep working even when you see you can't win.

"The other important thing to learn is that you can't wait for professional opponents to make a mistake.

"Sometimes in amateur golf, you can win matches when you are playing badly. If a professional plays a bad round, there are so many capable players in the field that many of them will pass him.

"You can't wait for opponents to make mistakes. You have to outscore them with birdies."

These are the things, apparently, that a young professional learns—not new strokes. There was little wrong with Littler's stroking as an amateur, and he doesn't admit to having learned a single new stroke as a professional.



GENE LITTLER

"I practice because I believe it is the only way of improving myself. Ben Hogan is the great example of that. But I don't believe in practicing all day long. I don't think anyone's concentration is that good.

"It is tremendously important to practice wisely. It is not useful, in my opinion, to practice and not play. You get into the habit of hitting balls without thinking."

The application of these principles to his already sound game will, Gene hopes, make him a success as a tournament player. "I don't believe anyone can start out winning tournaments right away," he added.

Littler turned professional for the most simple and logical of reasons: it seemed to him to offer the most effective way of making a living.

"I have always loved golf.

"As a professional, I have a definite goal in golf to strive for, which I think is lacking in amateur golf.

"My advice to any amateur who is considering the same move would be first to examine himself carefully and decide definitely what he wants out of life. When he has determined that, the other decision will be easy."