

WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A PRO

BY

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"Turning pro" sounds easy. It is easy.

However, there's a vast difference between "turning pro" and becoming a qualified golf professional and a member of the Professional Golfers' Association of America.

The PGA of America and I personally receive many letters from young fellows who say they're interested in "turning pro."

Every time I receive one of those inquiries, I always ask the writer one question, "Why do you want to become a golf professional?"

Almost invariably the answer is, "Because I love to play golf."

When any good amateur golfer tells me that, I advise him to remain an amateur. The fact is that most golf professionals, the successful ones, at any rate, are too busy to play much golf.

The man who loves to play golf is better off if he remains an amateur and goes into some sort of work which permits him to play a lot of golf and in which the ability to play a good game is an asset.

Playing ability is important to a golf professional, but there are many things which are far more important.

It takes a long time to become a golf professional because the man who is learning to be one must master not one job but many of them.

The golf professional-to-be can learn the business on the job, in the traditional way, by working for a PGA member. Or, today, he can learn many phases of his work in schools, colleges and universities.

There is no one specific course in the golf profession, but the study of such subjects as business administration, salesmanship, turf management, public relations and others will be most helpful.

Such subjects can be taken in the regular course of schooling or in short courses. However, any way you go about

it, it takes as long to learn the golf profession as it does any other profession.

In the long run, the best "school" for the golf professional is the PGA of America. After he is elected to membership, all facilities of the association are open to him.

His "post-graduate course" is the Teaching Program and Educational Program and the other programs established and maintained by the Association for its membership.

To help the apprentices learn the business faster and better, the PGA also conducts the PGA Training School each winter.

Professionals Must Be Versatile

First of all, the golf professional must be a good professional instructor. He must know the fundamentals and mechanics of the golf swing and he must know how to teach them to his members.

Second, the golf professional must be a good merchandiser. He's in the business of selling, just like the merchants down town. He must learn that business well if he is to be successful.

A golf professional must be a good salesman, but not too good a salesman. He will be criticized if he is too good or if he is not good enough.

His system must be suggestive selling rather than pressure selling. Pressure selling simply doesn't work in the golf shop.

One vital part of the business of merchandising in the golf shop is display. Big department stores have their display experts, but the golf professional must learn to be his own display expert.

Third, the golf professional must be familiar with every phase of golf activity at his club. He must understand tournament operations, handicapping, the Rules of Golf and many, many other things.

Fourth, the golf professional must be, at least in some degree, a public relations man for his club. Quite often, he is

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the liaison man between his club and the press, the golf associations and so on.

In addition, he must know how to meet and solve problems in his own personal public relations. Public relations in the golf shop, on the practice tee and elsewhere can be the difference between success and failure.

Fifth, the golf professional must have a knowledge of the golf course and the many problems connected with it.

Many of our members of the PGA of America are superintendents as well as golf professionals. Those who aren't invariably work closely with the superintendents at their golf courses.

Sixth, the golf professional must understand the problems of the club manager, so that he can assist when necessary, in working out those problems.

Here again some of our golf professionals "double in brass." Some members of the PGA of America serve as club managers as well as golf professionals.

Last, but not near the top of the list in importance, the golf professional must be an executive, an organizer in his shop. The bigger the shop, the bigger this problem becomes.

His Duties are Various

The golf professional must plan his own work and the work of his teaching assistants, his shop assistants and all the other members of his staff.

That sounds like a full-time job, and it is. It's more than that for the golf professional, for that's only the start of his responsibilities.

In addition to the many phases of his work at his own club, the golf professional who wants to be successful must be prepared to devote much time to civic enterprises and various worthwhile causes.

The average PGA member puts in considerable time, even during his busy season, to the promotion of Junior golf, to golf clinics, and mass instruction programs, to the work of civic clubs and so on.

The golf professional occupies a unique position at his club. He must be friendly with his members without being a member himself and without acting like a member.

Although he must be friendly, he must always keep everything on a business basis. Needless to say, that isn't easy to

do. Sometimes it's unusually difficult, but nevertheless it must be done.

It is essential that the golf professional dress, conduct himself and maintain a manner of life which is in keeping with his position. As a professional man, he must dress and conduct himself like a professional man.

Must Maintain his Position

Golf professionals of the past have done a tremendous job in building the profession up to the high level that it enjoys today. We, the golf professionals of today, must continue that important work.

Naturally, there are drawbacks to the golf profession, just as there are to any job. I always make the point of explaining these to the amateur who is interested in "turning pro."

There are the long hard hours during the busy season. There is the fact that you must work hardest on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, when other people are out having fun.

One disadvantage is that, as a golf professional, you will probably never get to play as much golf as you'd like to play.

However, the biggest disadvantage is that it takes a long time to become a golf professional.

That can't be helped. There is no shortcut, no easy way to get there. There are so many things to learn that it's bound to take a long time to learn them all.

The only way to learn all the things which will make you a successful professional is through experience gained by working under a qualified golf professional.

One other disadvantage, which may be the biggest one of all, is that at most clubs there is no retirement plan for the golf professional.

Therefore, in addition to all of the other things he must do, the golf professional must work out and maintain his own retirement plan.

As I stated at the outset, "turning pro" is easy.

To do it, all an amateur has to do is declare his intention of "turning pro," or secure employment as an assistant, a "shop boy" or any one of several other jobs.

The amateur desirous of "turning pro" can do it by engaging in any one of several other acts which constitute professionalism under the amateur code laid

down in the Rules of Golf by the United States Golf Association.

The Necessary Qualifications

However, to be eligible for membership of the PGA of America, the would-be golf professional must have certain professional experience, together with certain other qualifications.

To be eligible for membership, the applicant must have completed five years as:

- (1) A head professional at a club,
- (2) An approved tournament player, under an agreement with the PGA, playing in a minimum of 25 tournaments a year, or
- (3) An assistant to a head professional.

An applicant can also qualify by having a total of five years of experience in any combination of these various phases.

Under certain circumstances, the Constitution and By-Laws of the PGA of America permits an assistant with less than five years of experience to become affiliated with the PGA as a Class H Apprentice.

The golf professional who has completed his five years of apprenticeship and who desires to become a member of the PGA of America must make formal application to the Association.

Every applicant must appear before the Officers or the Membership Committee of his local PGA Section, for oral examination.

After that, his application is investigated by the Association's National Board of Control and published for 30 days for the consideration of all members of the Association and their sections.

If he meets all the requirements and if his examination by the local PGA Section is satisfactory, he is then elected to membership in the PGA of America.

The approved tournament player classification is a relatively new one, dating back little more than 10 years to shortly after the end of World War II.

It opened a whole new avenue of experience to the man who wants to play golf as a career and to the man who wants to use his playing experience to help him become a club professional.

The PGA made regular membership available to approved tournament players of five years standing because there was the feeling that experience on the tour and association with golf professionals

Superintendents Meet

Some 1,000 golf-course superintendents met in Chicago for five days this winter to increase and share again their specialized knowledge concerning the factors that will make turfgrass grow even under the abuse of golf players. As an agronomist once said: "We would have no trouble maintaining golf courses if it weren't for the golfers!"

The occasion was the 30th National Turfgrass Conference and Show of the Golf Course Superintendents' Association of America. The health and maintenance of the golf course were discussed from every angle—economic, climatic, mechanical and chemical—by panels headed by green committee chairmen, agronomists, golf-course architects, professionals, club managers and publishers and editors. Among topics on the agenda were: "Warm and Cool Season Maintenance," "Are You a Good Boss?," "The Professional's Appreciation of the Superintendent," "Clubhouse Area Landscaping," "Speeding Up Play," "Planning the Service Building" and "Living With Golf Carts."

would help a man to learn the things he would need to know to become a good golf professional.

A man who becomes an approved tournament player merely because he loves to play golf soon learns that there is a tremendous amount of work involved in being a successful circuit player.

The steps to be followed in becoming an approved tournament player correspond somewhat to those to be followed in becoming a PGA member. It isn't easy to become either. It isn't supposed to be.

At the end of five years, of course, the approved tournament player must go through the regular channels in order to become a regular PGA member.

The road to recognition as a golf professional and a member of the PGA of America is a long and difficult one. However, take it from me and from the more than 4,000 PGA members, it's worth all the time and effort.

The golf profession is an old and honorable one. None of us would be interested in trading with anyone.