



# professionals

## WEST

In spite of uncertainties in the economy and changes in the golf business, professionals in the West are having a steady year, most of them far enough ahead of last year's business to feel they are staying even with inflation. By mid-year however, few held hopes for 1974 turning out to be a great year.

It appears to be a year that rewards those with enterprise and the willingness to experiment, those who will deviate from traditional practices if necessary and those who can sell the sizzle even when their steaks are no different than the competition's.

What pays off for professionals in one area might not work in another.

For example, one professional (Dale Mead, Del Rio CC, Modesto) has reacted to the pressure from discounters by limiting his club stock basically to two lines. Demonstration sets of three others are on display, and even more available on order, but he has concentrated his inventory on only two — Ping and Lynx.

A metropolitan area municipal course professional (John Fry, Harding Park, San Francisco) has tried to keep up with the proliferation of club brands, but admits it creates an "inventory crunch", and "cuts up the pie so many ways".

He has been instrumental in working with the Northern California Section of the PGA to establish a travel arrangement whereby professionals represent the travel agent in helping arrange golfing tours abroad for members. The agreement includes contribution of a percentage of the total business to the section, and the opportunity for the professionals to travel as tour directors.

He sees a round of price increases in golf equipment this Fall, and believes the business may be headed for another buyers' market, as opposed to the sellers' market that has been in effect for about a year and a half as demand outpaced supply.

"The biggest challenge we face is keeping golf business in the golf shop," said another private club professional (John Zontek, Contra Costa Country Club, Richmond). Downtown discounters have lured a significant amount of club business from him, so he has increased his emphasis on soft goods. "This is holding well so far," he said, "but we'll get close-out pressure there too." He expects a drop in total volume in his shop from 1973.

A remodeled and expanded golf shop is paying off for another private club professional (Bob Moore, Peninsula CC, San Mateo), who took the occasion to install an old barber chair in his shoe department as an interesting sales gimmick.

After two or three years of good volume in low-priced shoes (\$25 range) he is convinced that higher priced shoes are better for him and his members. Even though manufacturer's "make-goods" replace faulty cheap shoes, the buyer is upset by the inconvenience and delay, and the professional's time is occupied in replacement. Higher priced shoes tend to satisfy all parties.

He has noticed a strong preference among his members for forged-head irons, in spite of the recent popularity of investment-cast clubs. "We allow our members to try sets of clubs before buying, and they tell me they simply hit the ball better with forged clubs," he said, "so that's what we sell mostly, though the others are available."

Downtown discounters have made inroads in his club sales

volume, and he has turned to soft goods in defense. Now, however, he plans to reduce his soft goods inventory, "because the department stores can offer such a wide selection."

One private club professional (Mead) has developed a rotation system for clubs and soft goods that satisfies his members and maintains a healthy level of sales. He emphasizes a given item about every three years. For instance, his inventory of men's slacks is normally about 150, but he has 350 pair this year. Next year he'll return to normal, and the following year he'll double or triple his stock of women's soft wear. It gives his inventory a freshness, avoids saturation of his members and builds anticipation for the special years.

He has found the same system works well in clubs by specializing in one or two different manufacturers each year. In spite of this he too is feeling the effect of price-cutting in the club business, and plans to emphasize soft goods sales more. "After all," he said, "nobody asks for trade-ins in clothing."

## CENTRAL

As business in pro shops in the Chicago area goes, it is not the best of seasons; nor the worst. At clubs where volume for 1974 at the end of June exceeded that of 1973, the range was from 5 to 10 percent. At clubs where business was lagging, a decrease of from 5 to 10 percent was most frequently quoted.

A total of 15 clubs was recently surveyed by Golfdom, and pros at six of these said current volume is higher than it was last year. Five pros said it was down and four others reported that it was very close to what it was in 1973. Overall for the season, it

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Valley, in spite of a raise in dues on the first of the year to \$1,000 and an initiation fee of \$5,000 that resulted in a loss of 75 members, has already picked up 40 new members.

Tom Raber, club president and management spokesman at Cypress Lake CC in Ft. Myers, reports a minimum waiting list with membership virtually up to capacity. This season stock was raised but the 350 membership capacity has not been affected.

As Joe Makara indicates in the spread on the pros, more active members have replaced those less active at the Manchester CC in New Hampshire, too.

Dining room and bar revenues are 20% higher than last year at Cypress Lake, according to Raber, and Vanderpohl at Whitmarsh Valley reports, "I've had the best dining room and bar operation that the club has ever had."

At Whitmarsh Valley in particular it is felt a continuation of the gasoline shortage would probably have helped business. The club has many affluent members who go off on trips who might have stayed closer to home if the embargo had not been lifted. Conversely, the gasoline shortage affected banquet business for Dick Welch at Turf Valley. Several large functions were cancelled in February and March and splintered into smaller, local area gatherings. Regardless, Welch still maintains he'll do his best year in the seven he's seen at Turf Valley.

At Turf Valley an extensive pool renovation costing \$48,000 was undertaken this spring. The state's largest pool at 50 meters is 14 years old and seam separation due to settlement threatened its usage. Relining and crack repairs cost \$22,000, \$18,000 was spent for concrete and another \$8,000 for plumbing and electricity.

The mood is decidedly up among those we were able to talk with. The only "trend" apparent in mid-season might be the recruiting of active members to replace those less active. If the trend proves to be true and if it continues management may have every right to expect a near record year.

Active golfers usually make active customers. The trick will be to spot the trend and be prepared to handle the increased business.

looks very much like the area's golf shop proprietors are going to play to a standoff. Not bad, considering that as late as the first week of June everyone was wondering if the rain ever was going to stop and if anyone ever was going to get the chance to play golf again.

There were 22 days of rain in May. The weather continued perverse through the first ten days of June. Over this 40-day span, from five to eight playing days were completely lost, and as many as half of them kept all except the most determined golfers off the courses. Clubs in the northern section of the Chicago district suffered a little more than Westside and Southside clubs, losing two or three more full days on the average than the latter, and probably not enjoying as many days in which there was at least partial play.

The pattern of sales pluses and minuses in comparing 1974 with '73 is fairly definitely defined where the weather was poorest. Shops in the Waukegan, Arlington Heights, Barrington Hills sector apparently didn't fare as well as those in the Oak Park-Riverside and farther South section. Yet, a blanket statement can't be made that business wasn't as good at all clubs in the north as in the west and south due to the drainage situation at different clubs and also because of varying golf car policies. At several locations, restrictions on the use of golf cars when turf is suited for not much more than foot traffic, have been loosened in the last two or three years.

At clubs where volume was off, practically all of the loss was attributed to irretrievable glove and ball sales. To give an idea of how weather curtailed play, only 1,850 caddy rounds were recorded at Glen Oak through May 25th when normally 3,000 would be expected. And, Glen Oak probably wasn't as hard hit as clubs farther north. At Skokie, a Northside club, there were only five days in May suitable for lesson giving. Still, the distress flags weren't flying over more than one-third or one-fourth of the shops. The reason was that capital equipment — clubs,

bags, shoes, sportswear, etc. — was selling about as well as it ever did.

What saved the pros on the heavy goods was the enormous amount of traffic in the clubhouse during the spring, heavier this year than ever before. Due, of course, to the fact that so many club members aren't planning on travelling this summer as much as they did in the past. The windfall due to the cutback rebounded to the club restaurants and bars and to a lesser extent to the pro shops. A lot of people bought playing equipment in anticipation of the rain and cold weather eventually abating.

The situation from the standpoint of weather, and that is about all that preoccupied the pros until the early part of June, is well summed up by Bill Heald of the Riverside Club. "I'm about as confused by my business this year as I have ever been," he says. "On the basis of weather we should be having an awfully lean season. But since the latter part of April people have been milling around the club. Sooner or later they strayed into the shop and started buying. As a result, our business this year is as good or a little better than it was in 1973." Another thing that has made the current season profitable for Heald is that none of his big events has been rained out.

Paul Lemke of Oak Park estimates that his volume is close to 15 percent higher than it was last year. Possibly half of the increase is due to inflated prices. Sales at Oak Park were only fair until the end of May but they picked up noticeably at Memorial Day and continued strong through June. The ball and glove business he lost due to rained-out rounds was more than compensated for by other items. One thing that has helped the Oak Park pro is that his club's policy on golf cars is not as stringent as elsewhere. Club officials have decided that damage done to turf by the cars is easily repairable and there is no point in being over fastidious as to their use. Of course, it takes cooperation from members in making this policy valid. They have to use good judgment in deciding where they can drive on rainy or soggy days.

Possibly the only club that is outdoing Lemke in volume increase is Medinah. Business has never been better than it is at this location, which has a 'supermarket' pro shop.

The reason for the surge, estimated at nearly 20 percent over 1973, is that Medinah is going to play host to the U.S. Open in 1975 and people are clamoring to join the club. It now has a full membership, whereas a year ago it was down more than 10 percent. Around 1900 bags are stored at Medinah, which has three courses. If the range ball count can be accepted as a business barometer, volume has blown off the roof of the pro shop. The inventory this year is 9,000 versus 4,000 in 1973 and since just before Memorial Day the practice area has been teeming. Medinah's range is rather inconveniently located in relation to the clubhouse and pro shop complex, but as the pro, John Marschall, observes, when early season playing dates are wiped out and the desire to play becomes pent-up, golfers will go to the moon, if necessary, to get their games in shape. Since lesson business goes hand in hand with range exercise it is not surprising that Medinah's teaching pros were simultaneously eating and teaching all during June.

If you wonder what the top selling items are at a big club like Medinah, here is a rundown furnished by Gene Moore, the No. 1 assistant: Wilson and Lynx have been Nos. 1 and 2 among the clubs; Wilson LD and Titleist DT pushed by the TopFlite are the best selling balls; and the Izod brand is the sportswear leader. Contrary to experience at most clubs, there is fairly strong demand for the graphite shaft at Medinah. At other places, only the pros who are clubmakers are doing much with graphite. At most clubs, five or six graphite shafted drivers are made available to players for practice or testing and sales are contingent on reaction to the club. So far, it hasn't been enthusiastic, with only occasional sales being made. The consensus is that graphite either isn't helping the average player's game to any great extent or he is waiting until that \$125 price per club comes down.

At Olympia Fields, Medinah's big club counterpart on Chicago's Southside and always a criteria for measuring golf shop business in the area, genial John Spiropolous after prefatory allusions to all the rain he had seen this spring, conceded that he had no kicks. For him, it was the year for selling clubs and golf bags, which means there will be something of a famine in these items in 1975. It's that two-year cycle

phenomenon. But what John stored up on the heavy equipment side was tempered by lost ball and glove sales due, by his count, to 13 days in May when little or no golf was played. Soft goods sales to men at Olympia have been excellent this year, but only fair among the women patrons. Lesson business boomed after the weather gave way, keeping three men busy on the teaching tee all through June. The Wilson LD ball has edged TopFlite and Acushnet's two leading balls.

Some general impressions gleaned from Golfdom's spring survey of pro shop business: This is definitely not a year of change... There is nothing that is daringly innovative in the design of balls, clubs or sportswear... But in the estimation of most pros, what can be done?... Add dimples or subtract them?... The Hogan Director model club offered a weight toward the toe selling point, but it was hardly original... Still, pros who handle the Hogan line, are high on the Director.

In sportswear, there was a strong trend away from double-knits in favor of a lighter woven polyester-cotton combinations... Also cotton and rayon... Cotton has made a strong comeback this season... There is no in-between in slacks fashions... They're either wildly pastel or somber... Several pros beat inflation by stocking predominantly in \$23-30 slacks and cutting back on \$35-40 models... Cardigans seem to be going out, replaced by pullovers.

Women's wear still presents a dilemma... About one out of three shops find its sale are from fair to good, but the others are dragging... Most frequently mentioned brands are Mulligan, Voyager and Hadley... There is a lot of brand switching as pros search for the line that will catch women's fancy in the individual shop... Their conclusion is that designers become pretty patented in their approach, but most pros agree that probably everything imaginable has been tried in fashioning shirts, blouses, shorts, slacks, etc.

The Burton lightweight bag, which retails for \$32.50, caught on in a rather big way at three or four of the 15 shops surveyed... Men as well as women are buying them... They had an especially big sale at Glen Oak, where girl caddies were introduced for the first time... If you're curious about this, 65 girls

from 14 to 16 were signed up and at least 25 show up every day... One of the club's 14 caddies certified for the Western Open was a girl, but she didn't make it... In the opinion of the Glen Oak caddiemaster, the young ladies are doing a fine job... Quick to learn and paragons of courtesy.

Getting back to inflation... Increases in golf ball prices have been pretty minimal... One manufacturer raised his price per dozen only 25 cents and another suggested a \$16.95 per dozen retail price versus \$16.00 last year... Proving that in a highly competitive field, prices have to be held down even though there is a terrific squeeze due to higher wages and material costs... Increases in club prices seem to have bounced all over the lot in the 3 to 10 percent range, but pros agree that this is holding the line about as well as is being done in any industry... Generally, the fact that overall price increases in pro shops haven't been higher have left most players pleasantly surprised... Undoubtedly this is the reason why, in spite of prolonged poor spring weather, as many as two out of three pros are doing as well this year as they ever did.

## EAST

Optimism is the prevailing mood in East Coast pro shops in mid-1974. In spite of a slow May and June in the Northeast due to wet weather, the professionals fully expect to catch up before the end of this season. Their Southern cousins, ranging South from Maryland, are even more optimistic. There are already indications of percentage increases over last year. Inevitably, however, comparisons are being drawn against 1973's almost disastrous washout. Particularly in the Northeast. 1974 profit margins will have to show extremely healthy figures to offset 1973's deficits. Most professionals feel financial solvency will be a reality this year. Depending, of course, on the vagaries of the weather.

Ladies soft goods are generally slow up North. The gals were still in slacks through most of June. Graphite clubs are moving slower than anticipated and the consensus seems to be that their high cost was keeping purchases down. Customer desire to experiment with the new clubs is apparently not strong enough

to offset the high prices. Most pros feel some of their golfers will swing to graphite but only if there is a substantial price reduction, which they don't see happening this season.

Some gambles on ordering last fall have failed to pay off as the season gets into full swing, mostly in the elusive soft goods "guessing game" of what may or may not move in the Spring. Even so, spirits are not dampened.

The gasoline shortage, now fading into a grim, dim image, may have had a reverse effect on pro shop business. More golfers did less long range traveling and more spending at home courses than in prior years. Tony Evans at Highland CC, Fayetteville, No. Car., guesstimates a 10% increase over last year that he can trace to members staying at home.

Evans reports about 5 or 6 percent of his membership playing Shakespeare or Aldila graphite but says, "Graphite is doing fairly well. It hasn't overwhelmed us." He feels price is definitely the factor that needs to change and is confident it will. Evans is doing well in the shoe line in spite of the fact that he doesn't stock a great many styles. He said recently, "I don't stock a great number of shoes but about three styles and a pretty good run in sizes in men's and one style in ladies' and then I do most of my other shoe business by special order." Evans avoids buying "one shot" items like real heavy style changes and high fashion offerings, tending rather to stick to basics. "We are what you might call a conservative club. Conservative in dress too. More so than many other clubs," he offered as an explanation.

Joe Makara at the Manchester, New Hampshire CC reports heavy traffic following a sketchy beginning this year. Rain, felt throughout the Northeast, did not seriously affect play at this 51-year-old Donald Ross layout. "We used to be on the quiet side but we've picked up some new members to replace those who were never very active. Our membership isn't any bigger but it's more active," Makara said recently.

By and large Makara feels he has been successful in gauging his clients

needs. Misjudgement, at this time, would appear to be only in women's apparel. Makara said, "They're always changing styles. We used to go into certain dresses and then there is no call for them later on. Of course we haven't had the weather for the women, they've been wearing slacks up until a few weeks ago. And of course you can't get replacements, you have to order in October. Partial stuff comes in even though you've ordered in October. It seems silly but that's the way they operate." Makara adopts a philosophical attitude which he sums up this way, "It's a different business today and you've got to keep up with it."

Seven years ago the old Griswold Hotel in Groton, Conn., a famed watering place dating back to the turn of the century, was sold to the Pfizer Chemical Co. and its equally famed golf course, Shennecosett, became a municipal layout. A typical seaside links bordering on Long Island Sound, Shennecosett was designed by Donald Ross and opened in 1898.

Walt Chaney, Professional and Manager at Shennecosett, like his counterparts up and down the coast, is optimistic. "We hope to overcome May and June deficits by the end of the season and I think we will," he said recently. Chaney also reported a drop of 30% in soft goods, attributable to the bad weather in May and June.

Green fee traffic was heavy the last weekend in June, according to Chaney, which he felt might be the beginning of the good Summer he looks forward to. "We've had several outings and I hope to encourage more groups during midweek when we're not so busy," Chaney said. "We rely on a big tourist trade in this area and if our weather holds now we'll see one of our best seasons."

As far as the gasoline shortage goes, it apparently fizzled out at Shennecosett. The club switched to gas cars last season and has had no problems to date.

Sports Director and Host Professional Larry Wheeler is enjoying one of his biggest Springs ever at the Golden Horseshoe, Williamsburg, Va. "We're up about 20% over last year," he recently reported. Wheeler handles all sports activity including tennis and the pool at the famed tourist mecca. Business is booming

and he and his two assistants, Gary Smith and Ralph Johnston, are kept hustling.

Wheeler commented on his involvement with graphite. "The clubs are not moving too well but we have done a lot of shaft replacement. We do a big business in club repair and we're currently using the Skeptor shaft from California which at \$40 is half of last years Aldila price."

The direction at the Golden Horseshoe is forward. Wheeler fully expects a record year with a minimum of problems.

Frank Moxon, Professional and owner at the Pontoosuc Lake GC on the Northern outskirts of Pittsfield, Mass., is moving ahead with all his plans. This in spite of a slow start this season. "May was so darn wet that we're really behind but it's slowly coming into its own. Play has been pretty good. We didn't raise our prices this year, we managed to keep them down, so I'm still getting a good play," Moxon explained. Limited memberships are up to capacity too but transient play is a big factor in this prime vacation territory.

Recent innovations have included beefing up the car fleet by eight new vehicles and the continuance of a program started a few years ago to lift the old flat greens. This fall Moxon plans on regrassing his tees through seeding.

Before shutting down last season in November all the underground tanks were filled so going into Spring operations this year caused little concern about fuel shortages.

Frank and his brother Bruce, who runs the grounds end at Pontoosuc Lake, inherited the course from their father, Charles, who was a fifty-year member in the Eastern New York Golf Association of the PGA.

The mood is decidedly optimistic along the East Coast. Upward sales trends are predicted. Perhaps they may be slightly erratic at this mid-season juncture but by season's end the optimism may have paid off.

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