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SWINGING AROUND GOLF

Tough times: Gloomy comments on the condition of golf business during the current "inflationary depression" has old timers recalling that golf has had some far tougher times before. And those former crunches were very useful in separating the men from the boys.

Toro, Wilson and Acushnet got into golf business when conditions were not inviting. The shrewd management of Sam Clapper and Ken Goit, Lawrence B. Icely and the canny Acushnet team of Bommer and Young soon made the new arrivals powers in the progress of the industry.

The Acushnet pro-only policy was an achievement that stabilized and improved distribution of most golf manufacturers' quality products through retailers who could do the users the most good. It also helped give a sound producers' profit basis to a business the cut-price stores were ruining.

'. . . clubhouse suppliers began dealing strictly cash-on-delivery with some rather prominent clubs.'

Toro's part in developing a nationwide golf course equipment and supply connection of dealers had far-reaching effects on the distribution and service of grassed-area business of all sorts. The Worthington mower company also enlarged that marketing field and aided in creating a new and vast business during the depression. The Jacobsen brothers in their machine shop in Racine, Wis. got into the power greensmower business by making believers and buyers of greenskeepers in the Chicago and Milwaukee districts.

After the '29 market crash golf clubs that had built big clubhouses of the baronial hall-type could not make the payments. Some of them folded up. Others had semi-completed. clubhouses adjusted to survival conditions. Some managed to stay alive by making use of a federal aid that extended payments and reduced interest. Golf club residential site developments were abandoned in every metropolitan district. In the Chicago area alone 11 such projects folded. The property was acquired at desperation sales and eventually made many of the buyers rich.

The credit of private clubs was generally nothing to brag about in the four years following the market slump. The butcher, grocer and other clubhouse suppliers began dealing strictly cash-on-delivery with some rather prominent clubs. That meant many members were not paying pros and pro credit of course was sour. Now pros talk about the discount stores and other price-cutters who never spent a penny in developing the golf market. In the '20s, when the golf market was booming, stores advertised hickory-shafted irons for $1.25. The clubs were offered as imitations of pro-made irons that sold for $5. Stores were selling woods for $2. The pro shop price from bench-made woods of carefully selected persimmon heads and hickory shafts with expert fitting and workmanship was $7.50. You have to remember that the worth of the dollar was much different then, but pro shop business flourished despite the competition of cut-price stores.

The demand for improved course maintenance continued strong despite the depression, so the market for improved gang mowers, tractors and other machinery persisted although club payment was slow. The golf course equipment and supply dealers did marvelous jobs of financing and kept Toro, Worthington and other course equipment manufacturers going. □