

Feedback

GOLF BUSINESS is attempting to get a better idea about the problems of the industry. To do that, we need your help. Starting with this issue, we are beginning a FEEDBACK column. It will be a forum of ideas on topics you think we have or haven't touched. Readers interested in expressing their opinions can write to Nick Romano, Feedback, GOLF BUSINESS, 9800 Detroit Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44102.

Send club pros back to teaching

There is an identity crisis confronting today's club pro.

He is thrust into the role of being a haberdasher — a role for which he is neither trained, skilled nor attuned. Consequently, the role in which he should be most adept — that of a teacher — has suffered.

Selling clothes and making a golf shop beautiful — is that what a golf pro is? I'd say it is not. In essence, the club pro should say, "I'll teach you the game, I'll recommend the proper equipment, I'll assist in the regulation of the course, but, uh-uh, merchandising isn't my bag." But he has gotten away from that. Gradually . . .

I came into merchandising that way. I was as greedy as the next guy during my years as a head pro at Riviera Country Club. The profit was there and when I looked around I didn't see anyone else who seemed to want it. All I had to do was buy the merchandise, sell it, and watch the profit roll in. And, indeed, I made a tidy profit that way. Haberdashery was big then, but inevitably as the opportunistic observed what could be done, they came into the business. The buying and selling competition escalated. You could no longer anticipate the easy revenue from it. Yet, there was still the large investment in a sales force, inventory and the time and effort necessary to maintaining the operation.

Thus, the club pro was left with the problem of operating a business when the business was gone.

This whole picture, then, should be given a realistic look. Many clubs are poorly managed today. Added to that mismanagement, there are higher taxes, higher operational costs, higher water rates, higher upkeep, higher food prices, etc., etc. Management may offer to take over the golf shop, but the pro stubbornly and unwisely resists. "No," he says, "you can't have it. I built it." Instead, he should be saying, "You can have it. Give me a salary and I'll go back to teaching people how to play the game."

If he fights and the golf shop continues to fail, perhaps he loses his job and the man who moves in to succeed him runs the golf shop even more poorly. The golf shop, then, becomes just one more straw to the camel's load, threatening the existence of an already burdened club.

To reason how the club pro got beached in a bunker of 30 percent reduction sales on

women's footwear and stymied behind an over-inventory of men's alpaca sweaters, one need only trace the evolution of the sport in America.

It was originally a game for the affluent, who wanted to look affluent playing it. It was the mecca for all sportsmen. Presidents played it. So did movie stars. When Pancho Gonzales, Johnny Unitas and Sandy Koufax were on top they played it, too. The club pro astute in merchandising took advantage of it and to the people with the essentials of leisure time for golf became the source for the equipment and the attire. Overnight, the club pro became wealthy, expanded his business and spread his tentacles into anything connected with golf.

As he became successful, others saw the potential in it. No one, after all, was going to play golf at a course where the pro wasn't stocked with everything that was needed.

That, then, became the profession. It was only natural that the pro would leave the teaching aspects behind. Let the hired help do that. The club pro was much too busy with the movement of an inventory that may have grossed from \$150,000 to a half million a year. No one could have a business like that without overseeing all the administrative aspects of it.

At the height of the Arnold Palmer era it reached a saturation point. They were wealthy times in which the economy grew and flourished. But then the economy suddenly spiraled. The not-quite-so-affluent society wanted something more in line prices-wise with what was available at the major stores.

Then, the trend was noticed. The pros were slower to build their inventories and the big concerns — Bonwit Tellers, Saks, Robinsons, etc. — recognized the value of having top equipment lines to fill the consumer's needs. They had the resources — money, merchandising knowhow, etc. — to procure the necessities in volume.

Once content to leave the golf shop business to the golf pro, they were now saying, "Now . . . get us a golf shop in here." Suddenly, an evolution. . .

Face it, the cream has gone off the top. Oh, not in the remote areas — the Dakotas, perhaps, or some parts of the middle west — the pro still needs the concessions and the merchandising to make a living. But in Chicago, Florida, California and elsewhere it is fast becoming obsolete and unrealistic thinking. Even the pros themselves have come to this realization and many have broken out of the pro shop and gone into discounting.

However, the answer for most pros is to let someone else who is an expert in haberdashery reap the profit from it and let the pro ease the pressure from himself. Sure, take his best shot at merchandising, but first and foremost he should be a pro and apply his concentration to teaching how to play the game.

It has become a lost art mainly because the artist has failed to seek himself out.

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golfbusiness

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