

# GOLFDOM

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# GOLF BUSINESS

BY HERB GRAFFIS

**Close-outs poison pros and manufacturers, too:** Many, many summers I have heard pros cry with pain, "Closeout sales are murdering us."

After all the years, I continue to be puzzled at the PGA being declared a law-breaker for protecting the top quality of the golf club market with "pro only," then slapping together cheap clubs as close-outs and that being legal.

Close-outs were supposed to be the result of a manufacturer's bad guess or misfortune in having production uncomfortably ahead of sales. Excess production had to be turned into cash, hence close-outs at prices lower than normal for the presumed quality of the merchandise. The close-outs weren't supposed to come onto the market until mid-August, shortly before the next year's models were shown.

Word got around a few manufacturers were deliberately making close-outs to sell to big store buyers for retail sale in June.

Pros screamed, but never were able to do much about getting the short end of the close-outs except when a few solidly financed pros at public courses began specializing in close-outs and butchered the normal golf club profits of stores and pro shops. Then these pros who collected the close-outs got bags, shoes and some balls as well as clubs. Some stores quit carrying golf goods in areas where close-outs were featured. Sales were so reduced at pro shops where first class equipment was sold, credit ratings of those pros suffered.

The preceding review of a merchandising headache in the golf equipment business is old stuff to veteran pros and salesmen and to the few manufacturing executives who have stayed on their jobs through the extensive changes in ownership and management of golf

manufacturers. Newcomers probably won't have any happy answer to the close-out damage to golf market price stability.

Maybe price-slashing isn't the worst possible thing. With the cadie replacements diminishing in golf and slow play shutting out active young people, the price of almost \$500 for clubs, a bag and golf shoes isn't going to be a charming factor in winning the youth market.

Maybe pro shops with close-out slashing prices are an answer. In a pro shop recently, I saw two young men examining two "specials" on clubs. One was of four woods and nine irons... "Was \$440... now \$289." and another "Special" of four woods and eight irons "Was \$555... now \$300."

One young man said to his friend, "I don't see that much difference and they feel about the same. How can they explain that much difference in the price?"

This seemed to me like a warning. When the pro shops start closing out, manufacturers are going to be hurt badly. The store business won't help the clubmakers a bit.

With many club-fitting experts in pro ranks wondering about the cast and forged-head iron club situation and remembering the aluminum shaft collapse, the pro shop rather than the store as the outlet for the close-outs may be due for deep study.

Further pressing for the point probe of manufacturers and home pros in solving the close-out problem is this year's report that some club companies did big volume, but lost their fannies, net. And "The Bottom Line" is what counts with those on High.

**Grass root news:** Conrad Scheetz, GCSAA Executive Director and the association publicity man Douglas

Fender deserve cheers for their monthly Fore Front newsletter.

It is for the information of GCSAA chapter publication editors. There are over 50 of these regional publications in the U.S. and one in Canada. Most of them are monthlies. They are the close-up sources of regional problem discussion, activities and opinions. They are remarkably well edited and useful to superintendents and their employers. The editors' talents, energies and time are freely contributed to the business of golf courses and the nation's beauty.

**Public course owners should be new force in industry:** Formation of a national organization of daily fee golf course owners in Chicago recently brought into being a body destined to be a tremendous power for good in golf business.

The course owners' action was an outcome of meetings of fee course executives, the National Golf Foundation engineered last year in Cleveland and Burlingame, Calif. At those gatherings, it became apparent that owners of this country's 4,107

fee courses urgently needed to pool resources for protection and promotion.

Fee courses are about evenly divided in size with 2,085 of them being 18-holes or larger.

The fee course group is too close to being murdered by the tax-wasters to think of surviving much longer without a powerful lobby. Golf business has become accustomed to taxation without representation as no reward at all for what golf has done for communities.

Outside of some limited, but valuable lobbying done in Washington by the National Club Association, which practically was formed by a firm of Washington lawyers specializing in industrial lobbying and several state golf groups assembled to protect golf clubs against discriminatory heavy taxes, golf hasn't been able to protect itself against bureaucratic burglars.

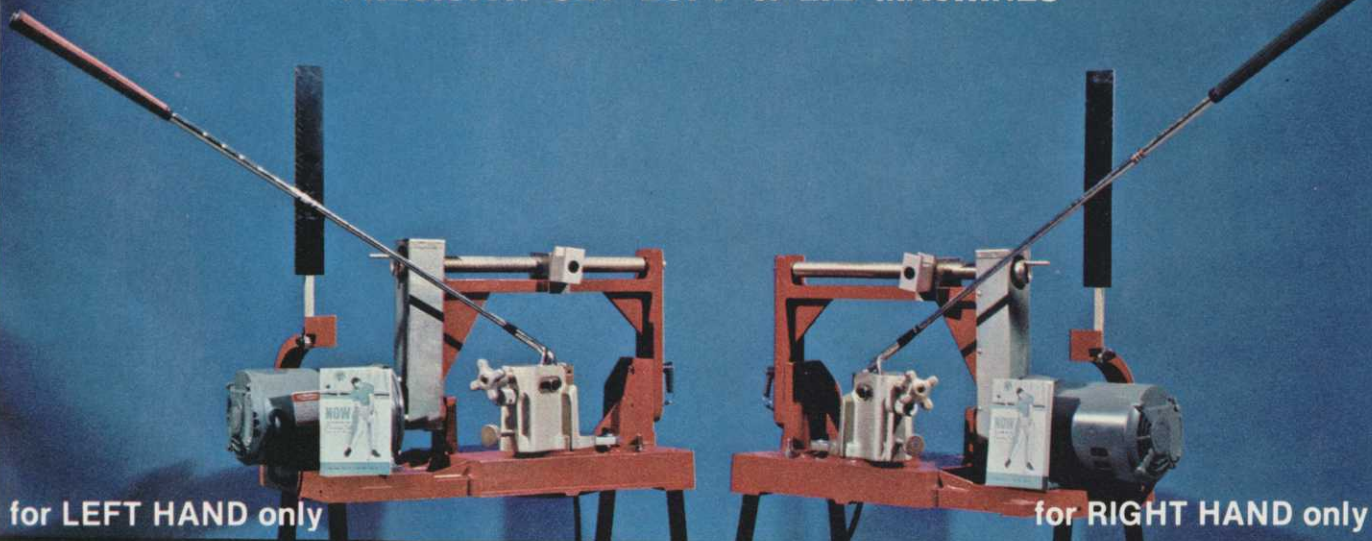
In the constructive area, fee courses have immense opportunities for creating more golfers

and enlarging the course owners' market. High prices of private club memberships are keeping many of the most desirable young families out of golf. A lot of fee courses are providing facilities superior to those of private clubs but the social atmosphere, programming and standing need development. The USGA Associate Membership plan could fit into this picture with a better day for golf and golfers. The USGA made a pathetic start on its Associate membership venture. President Ford teed off the ball and Arnie Palmer was cheerleader, but there was absolutely no game plan and nobody knew what was to be done.

There's a great deal of need for a revival of the vigorous sort of golf promotion earlier fee courses did in bringing many thousands into the game.

Free golf lessons with loaned or rental clubs and balls are overdue as promotion. With modern and effective ideas in teaching golf, the newly organized fee course owners can hasten the next golf boom. □

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