



Mac Hunter: Pro On Both Sides Of The Counter

There are mounting signs that the walls of the pro shop are closing in on the golf professional as he feels the economic pinch as never before.

He is caught somewhere between the press of big business — the luxury department stores and discount chains — the encroachment of clubs in search of additional revenue to support their unwieldy operations, high prices, tight money, slow moving inventories and a smaller, if not inadequate, sales staff.

It is not a pretty picture and Mac Hunter, who has seen it from both sides, thinks the day is upon the professional where he finds himself squeezed to the point where he will have to make a choice between turning his back on being a store operator/merchandiser of sorts or go back to being a true golf professional giving advice and being paid for his skills.

Hunter, for 23 years the head professional at Los Angeles' fabled Riviera Country Club and now owner of his own golf equipment company in which he designs, manufactures and merchandises an advanced line of clubs, expressed his views to GOLFDOM'S Senior Edi-

tor Herb Graffis. Hunter came to these conclusions:

1. Club management is to a great degree archaic and lacks in-depth leadership.
2. The need for a change in club operational methods is accelerating and the call for improvements will get even louder.
3. Present management systems are unwieldy, costly and generally unnecessary. The fat and waste must be trimmed.
4. The people who might provide a cure are either too busy buried beneath the system or unwilling to become involved until bottom is hit.

"I say the business of being a club professional is in serious trouble," said Hunter. "The forces of the golf business opposing the pro are formidable, although they might not be insurmountable if contested correctly — now!

"Unfortunately, though, pros have not been astute enough as a general body to look ahead and take precautionary measures to preserve their well-being. But neither has club management to a similar degree. Both are adrift in the same sea, fighting for what still appears to be a

worthwhile existence. What they need is a workable alliance based on the times and capable of improving both lots," Hunter emphasized.

Hunter is a viable authority on golf merchandising. Riviera, under his direction, grossed more than \$300,000 annually in pro shop sales before he took off for greener fields and an end run at club-making.

Golf virtually runs in the veins of the Hunter clan. Mac is the son of a British Amateur champion, who until his death was one of the strongest influences on pro golf in California and the United States. There are in fact, more than 150 years of golf behind Hunter, beginning with his great grandfather, a clubmaker in Scotland, his grandfather who founded the British PGA and his godfather Tommy Armour.

In a series of questions and answers, Hunter offered several recommendations to the pro shop crisis:

GOLFDOM — What is the most needed improvement in pro shop sales methods?

Hunter — First and foremost, fledgling professionals as well as those in the business for many years should polish up on the economics

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of day-to-day business — selling methods — buying methods — and maintaining a good payment record — to better reckon with the nagging burdens of the current dollar squeeze. Secondly, the pro should specialize and promote only those goods (whether soft or hard) that are of quality and give top performance, and that offer a fair margin of profit as well as provide a good measure of exclusivity.

GOLFDOM — What control, if any, do pros have over the quality of clubs and balls?

Hunter — Collectively, they are not adequately informed to alter the circumstances of equipment manufacture, and if they were, I doubt if they would react collectively, although there are and always have been individual exceptions. Worse still, the PGA has failed to recognize their problems with any apparent success, and because of this has done little to alleviate them.

GOLFDOM — What, in general, can be said about the business methods of pros?

Hunter — Professionals don't earn a living today; they struggle to survive. Lack of fundamental economic preparation is the pro's biggest handicap. At best, he is an unprepared businessman who takes it on the chin because of his failings. Speaking from a manufacturer's side, the golf professional spreads himself too thin trying to cover too many bases both in things to do and products he tries to merchandise. He would do better to cut back — specialize — and bring his credit under control.

GOLFDOM — Would installment payments alleviate some of the problems?

Hunter — Yes, I believe that could be a solution. I would like to see the PGA investigate American Express, BankAmericard or MasterCharge as a viable credit plan. It could provide a giant credit balance to the whole industry if a plan could be worked out. Such majors in the field of finance have evolved sound systems of credit and collection — all the pro would have to do is hook into one.

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GOLFDOM — What advantages do the department stores have over the pro shops, and why can't the pro compete more favorably?

Hunter — Department stores can and do offer professional equipment, the same as offered in pro shops, and at the lowest prices. In some cases they even offer superior lines and certainly carry larger inventories than pro shops. They have the cash flow and expertise for expansion. In addition, many country club professionals are unable to advertise or solicit outside traffic for their shops. The club pro's time is tied into many club-oriented services which he never gets paid for and are time consuming, while stores owners give 100 percent of their time to promote their store.

GOLFDOM — Most golfers expect pros to be the best informed and most helpful authorities on clubs. Haven't manufacturers done an adequate job in educating pros and assistants in design changes and new materials in clubheads and shafts?

Hunter — No. Manufacturers advertise, but what they say and what they produce are two different animals. There is a decided lack of plain golf savvy or just what fundamentally makes a better golf club on the part of many manufacturers. How can a manufacturer educate a pro when he himself is lacking, and does little to nothing to advance, the technical know how he so flagrantly advertises?

GOLFDOM — What about the graphite shaft? Isn't it doing something for the pro shop service and sales?

Hunter — Graphite is good; it plays well and represents a significant advancement in club design. I would recommend that a pro look into the potential profits offered in the shafting of woods with graphite. Therein lies dollars to be made at a highly profitable margin. Unfortunately, the fast-buck artists have cut into this pie and have left a lot of unhappy and disbelieving customers. Still, I feel graphite has an excellent future, even though the price remains too high to encourage much inventorying in times that now face us. If the graphite shaft producers could afford extend club manufacturers like myself better

dating and terms, I think a lot more clubs would be shafted with graphite.

GOLFDOM — Can golfers with high handicaps use the iron head design and materials favored by expert players?

Hunter — Yes and no. Clubs are built for money, not total satisfaction. Most manufacturers are producing two sets of irons — one for top players (serious golfers), and one for the duffer.

GOLFDOM — Would you recommend forged heads in lower-priced irons for lower weight distribution and a wider flange to get the ball up for the inexperienced player?

Hunter — No. Any weight distribution that can be accomplished through forging can be done even better by investment casting. Forging offers relatively little except a lower price. In my opinion, it is a positive step BACKWARD in club manufacture, but one which will happen because of the serious economic crunch that now faces manufacturers.

GOLFDOM — Which golf pro-

fessionals in the past became club manufacturers?

Hunter — I don't consider Walter Hagen a manufacturer any more than I would Bobby Jones, Tommy Armour, or Jack Nicklaus. These are great names in golf used by major manufacturers to headline clubs or even companies, whereas Ben Hogan has from the start been totally involved with his company, as is Toney Penna, Jerry Barber, and myself.

GOLFDOM — What can be done to improve the golf business outlook?

Hunter — Streamline management, method of operation and course maintenance to cut out unnecessary frills. Employees should be offered incentive programs. Creative management should be subjected upon all departments to invigorate a healthy club atmosphere, rather than whipping a dead horse. What can be said in general about the club professional is that he's working a whole lot harder now and enjoying it a lot less. □



Hunter discusses shop arrangement with pro Kevin Fleming at the Lomas Club in Sante Fe, Calif.