

Spalding marks its 100th year

Back when Albert Goodwill Spalding was a young pitcher for the Boston Red Stockings, few people in America were playing golf and for certain, 1876 was not a big year in the pro shop, since there were few or none.

What Mr. Spalding did start, 100 years ago was a sporting goods company, which grew into the golf business and continues to influence pro shop sales around the nation.

This year, the Spalding division of the parent Questor Corporation celebrates its centennial year and from the New England industrial city of Chicopee, Mass., directs a golf equipment and soft goods line reaching into thousands of pro shops around the country.

Spalding's rise in the golf business wasn't accomplished overnight, though. In fact, it didn't even start in Massachusetts. Albert Goodwill and his brother J. Walter opened the business in Chicago with an enormous capital asset of \$800. Golf and Spalding didn't join hands until 1894, when the brothers introduced the first balls and clubs into this country.

The company acquired other firms and expanded into other areas

besides sporting goods down through the years. In 1967, though, Questor began to buy shares in Spalding and finally absorbed the outstanding holdings and made it a wholly-owned subsidiary.

In spite of all the complicated financial history, the effect on the golf business at Spalding has been minimal on the surface. Four management people take up the main responsibilities with golf division manager Ralph Carlson; Mike Orr, in charge of ball marketing; Mead Sommers, in charge of the golf club line and Mike Seymour working with the latest venture, soft goods.

All have less than four years with the Spalding organization and have backgrounds dealing in marketing consumer products.

From a marketing standpoint, Spalding has attempted to cultivate the pro in the shop to sell product. They have done very little testimonial searching on the pro tour and feel the best way to aid club pros is through their "Home Professional Golf Consultants", whom Spalding utilizes as its untapped source for product information and merchandising ideas.

Account knowledge has been an asset to the company in its market position. Accepting the needs and requirements of club pros is something Carlson and his colleagues admit to. "We attempt to show our product line as superior to the competition," Carlson commented with no restraint.

Unlike others in the ball market, Spalding has attempted to zero in on special interest groups within golfing consumers. For example, Orr pointed to the fact that this was the reasoning behind the emergence of both the Molitor and Flying Lady ball lines. "We were looking to get into a very select area with these products," Orr told GOLFDOM, "There was a high potential need for a ball for both the golfer who wants something different and can afford it (Molitor) and the woman who wants a ball designed for her play."

Looking at the soft goods area, Seymour thinks the pro is a good merchandiser and must become more oriented toward the profit found in clothing. "The key for the pro selling soft goods today is to sell with the multiple purchase in mind. Sell both tops and bottoms that match. Pros can get enough flexibility in coordinate possibilities to excite their customers and stimulate buying," Seymour told GOLFDOM.

Since he is from a different school of thought than his company colleagues in the ball and club business, Seymour points to the fact pros will have to look to soft goods to continue their volumes in the shops. "You look around pro shops today and see a slowing in the hard goods lines.

"One think that really surprises me is how a pro can sell clothing with a rack of slacks on one side of the shop and the shirts in poly bags shelved in another area. Someone has to put these together and show coordinate sale possibilities," Seymour noted.

Many innovations are planned for presentation to the market from Chicopee this year. Although they won't give many details Sommers and Carlson admit that Spalding will be coming out with a new club line this fall. □



Applying winding by hand is just one of several hand production methods done on each Spalding wood. Shown above is work being done in the custom order department. Between 50,000 and 60,000 pieces passed through this department last year. Most employees in the section have at least 25 years with the firm.