

GOLFDOM

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BY HERB GRAFFIS

GOLF BUSINESS

Bicentennial bust: At last January's PGA Merchandise Show there was only one item I saw that had any connection with the nation's bicentennial.

I was surprised that the many bright minds among golf manufacturers and pro shop merchants had skipped timely chances to celebrate with red, white and blue on a ball or a club, but the only thing I saw was a golf bag with stars and stripes.

The bag was far more of a sensation than you'd expect. Smart pros saw glorious promise of selling tickets on the bag for tournaments on July 4 and other of our bicentennial holy days.

What a swell promotion there is in a bicentennial year bag prize every weekend with chances for a few bucks. And red, white and blue markings on bicentennial year club grips hit my imagination after seeing those stars and stripes bags as something that might jolt loose money from guys who have plenty, but don't expect to buy new clubs until our nation is 300 years old.

Market data far and few between: As a sports reporter I learned the first thing to do was to get the score correctly.

In covering golf business, I found learning the score is the toughest part of the reporting job.

For years it has amazed me that the multi-million dollar business golf does a year is conducted with such limited knowledge of marketing figures.

Lately I have noticed an increasing number of cases in which statements indicate golf businessmen are reaching for market guidance that isn't there.

For instance, superintendent Bob Williams in his blasts against the general manager concept had said that between 40 and 50 percent of all private golf clubs have gener-

al managers. I have learned a lot from Bob over the years and have lost some arguments of the searching souls to him.

It could be that a general manager selling his case might say 75 percent of private golf clubs have general managers. On what basis could I call the fellow right or wrong? In view of the lack of helpful, factual information about golf business maybe nobody has much of a springboard for constructive discussion.

Dean Casell of Acushnet, a sound business scholar, recruited and schooled by the Boomer-Young team to conduct Acushnet's golf business, has said pros should have 75 percent of all golf business. That got me wondering how much pros have now. Where would I learn that? Not from the PGA as a golf marketing authority, because Mark Cox hasn't been able to make that progress yet in developing the PGA from a fraternal organization to a business authority.

The matter of turf schools possibly turning out so many graduates, they might be weakening the job security of experienced superintendents is an issue that has been intensely discussed but no one seems to know how many young people are graduating. So who really knows just what we all are talking about?

For years, I have heard (and sometimes observed) that private golf clubs are badly run businesses. Maybe so, but where would officials go for figures that would provide operating guidance in the operations of clubs that differ so widely in conditions and character? The CMAA was the first organization that did some statistical work in determining the business score. Possibly even that tiny help of facts may have helped the CMAA put over the general manager idea. □