

Pros Who "Sell" Themselves —and Merchandise

By HERB GRAFFIS

A MAN who was an acknowledged merchandising authority long before he came into the golf field was telling me the other day his observations of the pro situation and he concluded his remarks with the statement that the pro who hasn't done a good job of selling himself to his club had better get busy pronto or get reconciled to an unhappy and unprofitable future.

This able business analyst had spent the last six or seven weeks following the tournaments on the west coast and in the south. He commented on the fact that the greater part of the money of the numerous open tournaments is split between a dozen or so pros, with the other boys getting nothing but experience and air. For the pro who is not of the stellar performing class, the tournament pilgrimages are an extravagance—all right if he can afford them, but not so good if he hasn't a club lined up for the coming season. "If some one could dope out a \$10,000 Pro Merchandising Tournament he'd be doing the greatest thing that could be done for the pros," commented my friend.

Department store competition, the bug-bear for many pros, may not be the unmitigated evil it seems when it gets tough enough to make a pro realize that he has to become a merchant himself to buck the department store successfully. If the pro is a quitter you can see the plain symptoms when you hear him bellyaching about department store inroads on his business and not using his noodle and some energy to fight for his own.

Get Your Club Wised Up

You have to hand the devil his due. The department stores have put enough emphasis on their golf departments during the last two years to identify golf as the national game. They will continue this year to put the loud pedal on their golf departments stronger than ever before. If that scares you, you'd better look for a good job in another field, but if the threat simply makes you plan and merchandise better, you're the kind of a fellow who is worth a lot to any golf club.

In the February issue of *GOLFDOM*, reference was made to the inflated idea of the professionals' profits that most club members entertain. There's no wisdom in talking "poor mouth" to your members, or getting in any begging attitude, but it's plenty dangerous for you to let this perilous and false notion of your income to go undenied until members think you have so much money you don't need shop business.

If you're making any "New Year" resolutions about operations at your club this season, let the first one be to talk and act business. Don't forget you're a business man and a teacher. If you are the "boy-wonder" as a tournament performer, you may not have to worry much about the business-angle of your employment. And even if you happen to be a star sharpshooter, you can't get away from the fact that the steady good money in professional golf is made by the fellow who balances his operations so his shop gets some push behind it. We know, for we've seen several of the famous tournament players trying their level damndest this winter to get lined up with clubs where the shop gives a good chance for profit, instead of trusting to the fickle fortune of the tournaments.

Pro Boss of the Business

Right now the pro is in control of the golf merchandise situation. The player buys on the recommendation of the pro, or follows the buying lead of some friend who has relayed to the buyer the advice or endorsement of the professional. The department store hasn't this selling force, so the pro golfers had better make the most of it. The department store policy is cut-price all the way through and that, of course, is a policy that is bound to grab a good part of the cheap business. But, since there isn't much profit for the pro in his cheap business, why worry about who gets it. Keep your clutches on the quality market—the price difference in golf merchandise is not great enough to beat you out of business if you are any kind of a merchant at all.

There always exists a chorus of complaint from pros about the way some manufacturers at times apparently favor the sharp-buying department stores at the expense of their steady professional trade. At the risk of drawing down the divine wrath of some prospective advertisers, I'll say that I believe there are times when some manufacturers throw a curve into the pros who have built up the golf business.

Cut Out the Whining

But why howl about it? It's something that brings about its own punishment. If you know anything about other lines of merchandising you can see what a ruinous effect the price-slashing stores have had on a lot of makers of standard merchandise. The drug trade is one conspicuous example. It is devoutly to be hoped that the substantial makers of golf goods won't let their price-structure be demoralized by giving the stores, at the expense of the pros, the inch that soon is made a mile.

The pros, before they set up their wail, should realize that, in a lot of these cases, the manufacturers have had something slipped over on them by the store-buyers, preceding the cut-price orgies. But, at any rate, the pro has to concede the manufacturer the right of self-preservation just as much as the manufacturer must grant it to the pro.

They Mind Their Business

It isn't a bad idea for any pro to meditate and take an inventory of himself. He must merchandise his personal stock to his club members just as much as he must merchandise his shop stock, and he might well consider which of his qualities are marketable most profitably to his members, and which traits had better be eliminated and kept out of sight.

I've just been talking to a golf enthusiast who has done considerable traveling around the country and has belonged to a number of clubs. I told him that I was batting out something that I hoped would help pros make more money. I said to him, "Everyone thinks the pro is filthy with jack and the result is he doesn't get regularly the deal he ought to get from his members and his club officials, if he is a competent and conscientious fellow."

There was no profound commiseration in his reply. "I haven't a hell of a lot of sympathy for a lot of pros," he said, "but take fellows like Howard Davis (Ridgemoor C. C.) and Alex Gourley (Glen Oak G. C.) and I'll give them a hand. They are

two opposite types, but both of them good business men by any standards. Young Davis is naturally effervescent; it's not put-on "bull" with him. He is enthusiastically and genuinely interested in his members and has a pleasant word for all of them. Alex has a more reserved temperament, but he is so interested in his job and obviously so earnest about doing everything he can for his club and its members that they all think mighty highly of him. Pros of this order are priceless to a club. It wouldn't take long for any club to see the difference in value between fellows like these and the half-baked birds who jumped from caddie to pro jobs simply because they were willing to take a pro job for next to nothing.

"The lesson, as I see it, is for the pro to keep himself on dress parade all the time before his members. If he has lost \$50 in a crap game the night before, it doesn't help his chances of recovering the dough to give any evidence to his members of his load of woe.

"Some of these birds hold a penny so close to their eyes that they can't see the \$150,000 clubhouse ten feet away, and that's fatal to any kind of salesmanship. I was in a pro shop last year when a member came in with a little job of winding a string around a grip. The pro couldn't resist the temptation to get 15 cents for the job. What a lost chance! Any smart merchandiser would have done that trivial job of a minute or so for nothing, given the member a friendly little bit of patter about being glad to do it, for the pro shop is always at the member's service. He'd have had the member feeling that the pro shop was a pleasant place to buy; there was no chance of being stung."

That is the comment of an average member. Draw your own conclusions.

The Level Is High

Citation of horrible examples in GOLFDOM must never lead to the inference that such horrible examples are typical. We are convinced that the professional golfer as a class has not had the opportunity to study merchandising methods, yet, even so is far superior to even the better class of smaller retail merchants in other lines. They're improving rapidly, for the representative pro is a fellow who realizes that he will have to do his utmost to make a living that will not penalize his family and him because of his real love of the game. The pros' advancement as merchants and as more prof-

itable factors in the club scheme of things depends a whole lot on the sort of interested co-operation they get from club officials.

They Put Over Their Stories

Ted Woolley, the pro at Maple Hills Golf club, Kalamazoo, Mich., is one of the fellows I call to mind as being on the job as a merchandiser. Before me is a booklet, *The Gateway to Golf*, written by Woolley in boosting his winter golf school. Kalamazoo's slogan is "The Gateway to Opportunity," so Woolley's title is well chosen. On the cover is a picture of the Maple Hills clubhouse. The foreword of the booklet is an invitation to visit Ted's indoor school and get the fundamentals of golf. I think the stuff is the best ballyhoo of an indoor school I ever read, so it accompanies this article. Note the significant paragraph referring to members of his own club. What golf club official or director who wants his club to be run on a business-like basis would seriously consider

the matter of firing a fellow who thinks of his members in this fashion, and replacing him with some incompetent kid, just because the price would be lower than that of worth-while professional services?

The book has five pages of concise high-spots of golf instruction calculated to lure the reader into Ted's school. It has two pages of "Short Putts," devoted to gossip about the Maple Hills activities and members. Woolley says he got out this little booklet because he felt his letters were being thrown away. He's had excellent reader interest and results from the book, and

I dare say it didn't set him back much money. Again the moral shines out, "Use your bean."

Dave Livie, at Cleveland, is another of the boys who advertises successfully. Dave used a half-page in the December issue of the *Cleveland Golfer* to advertise his golf

shop. It was well displayed and had good copy in suggesting Christmas gifts for golfers. The advertising copy was so intimately and alluringly real golfer's stuff that it couldn't help but pull business. Note this line from the advertisement:

"Men trained in the golf profession will aid you in making your selection; a service which is not duplicated in Cleveland." Yet some of the boys still worry about store competition. Dave, I note, can take the family to his place in Florida for part of the winter and take things easy.

Today I blotted a flock of letters with a blotter sent me by Larry Striley, pro at the Penobscot Valley Country club, Bangor, Me. The blotter is illustrated with a nifty-looking girl

swinging a club. Larry briefly lists his instruction services and shop stock on the blotter which also carries the display line "When in Maine Be Sure to Play Penobscot Valley." Simple, but it gets plenty of circulation and makes the golfers remember to play at Larry's course and buy at his shop.

When I think of fellows like those named above, I am inclined to repeat to a bunch of the boys who want to sob out their miseries on my bosom, "The fault, dear Brutus, lies not in our stars, but in ourselves."

Dear Golfer:

YOU, your family and your friends are invited to visit my indoor Golf School at 128 E. Water St.

The indoor golf instruction idea has been demonstrated to be basically sound; it certainly is the most practical and convenient manner in which the average golfer can improve his or her game. Practice and instruction are the best ways to keep fit. In the summer you know how hard it is to practice when the desire to get out and play is so keen.

My two nets and interesting putting course will give you a lot of pleasure and add considerably to your golfing ability. Why not accept my invitation to make use of them this winter?

To members of Maple Hills Golf Club I am offering special rates, as it is my ambition to improve the playing average of my Club. I want you to come up and have a work-out anyway. There will also be educational and slow-motion pictures of some of the leading golfers of the day. This will be free to my patrons.

Yours for a long drive,

TED WOOLLEY.
