

PRO MERCHANDISING STUDENTS SAY Pro Shop "Atmosphere" IS GREATEST, DISTINCTIVE SALES AID

By Herb Graffis

SOME of the bright business men in the pro ranks are wondering if the tendency to follow too much in the footsteps of the ritzy retailers isn't a mistake for the pro who is dressing his shop with an idea of increased sales. Not that these doubters question for a second the favorable selling influence of neatness and attractive display, but they suspect that the pros may be inclined too much toward sacrificing the distinctive charm of the pro shop and replacing it with an imitation of a part of Fifth avenue or Michigan avenue establishment.

There's a lot to that criticism when you get right down to thinking about it. One of the pros I know is a fellow who is seldom heard of to any extent out of his own district where he is an old-timer and has a lot of friends in the profession. This man does a grand business at his shop and his members all regard him as a "character" and a fixture. They are loyal customers of his. This pro has been away from the land of the heather these many, many years, but you'd never know it to hear the rich burr of his talks with his members. When you're with him alone or with his family and he's away from the club there's rarely a suggestion of Caledonian in his speech. That man is a smart stage manager of sales. He knows what members expect and "click to" and let's them have it with both barrels.

"Local Color" Aids Sales

Among the paragraphs in Willie Ogg's comments in November GOLFDOM was a brief suggestion that the pros might be going wrong in straying away from the golf shop atmosphere. I have been thinking about that line ever since Bill wrote it, trying to dope out just what was in it for the good of the cause.

Now comes a letter from Dave Towns at Lake Wales, Fla., that causes further thought on the subject. Dave writes:

"Some of the material in shop displays in GOLFDOM does not tally with my own experience. I find that I sell more golf

clubs in my shop by not going to such obvious effort to dress the shop up "pretty." I have my bench where my members can watch me closely making my own irons. A couple of the finished clubs are around on the bench where a member can grab them easily. Real men like nothing better than to "sit in" with the pro in his shop when he has his working clothes on, where the smell of the wood and even the glue and the sight of the shavings and the business-like looking bench make a strong play on the constructive instinct.

"The players see what kind of stuff they are getting and know why I can guarantee every shaft and club in my shop."

That listens like fixing up the selling picture in an impressive way, for regardless of what percentage of stock in a shop is bench-made, the sight of competent work being done on the bench is going to give the member some convincing evidence that the pro knows his stuff on clubs and will pick, or make, only what he knows will be a credit to the pro's reputation and judgment. Just how far this sort of stuff will go in boosting business with women GOLFDOM hesitates to guess. That angle has to be considered, for the women are getting to be a bigger part of the pros' market every day. Somewhere between the two extremes of the pro shop that is heavy on the formal side and the old shop that was cluttered up with nothing much but atmosphere and clubs in various stages of completion, there is a happy medium. The pro is in an ideal position to locate it and dress his shop so you'd know, if you came into it after being blindfolded, that it was the business headquarters of an able professional instead of a corner of some department store.

Such a fitting and distinctive shop atmosphere means capitalizing the pro's individuality and specialization. That is what makes people willing to spend more money. The pros have learned plenty in picking up the essentials of selling dis-

plays from other retailing fields and now it looks like the next move is to exercise their ingenuity in profitably blending the principles of the stores' successful displays with a strictly pro shop atmosphere. It's bound to come and probably some of the foresighted boys already are planning it to a marked degree for their next seasons.

Chip Shots Around the Pro Circuit

Well, now, one great international crisis is avoided for the newspapers now carry the story that Walter Hagen didn't send the Prince of Wales a bill for \$325 for a set of matched woods and irons that were sent to the bonny monarch after he had played with Sir Walter. The affair carried two stories: one that the bill was sent and another that it wasn't. Perhaps the fine Italian hand of impresario Roberto Harlow got this two-time feature into print. Why not send the bill to the Prince? He isn't married so what has he got to spend money for?

Not Too Many Pro Shops

You hear merchandising experts say that one reason for the advent and hectic growth of the chain stores is the surplus of small retailing outfits that have no economic license for existence. It is interesting to note the pros' immunity from this criticism. There is just one pro shop per club and not an over-development of retailing outlets in the pro field.

Protest Florida Shakedown

Some timely comment on the pro entry fee required in open tournaments conducted for resort publicity is made in the *Bristolite*. The La Gorce demand for a \$25 entry fee came in for a strong and entirely justified slug. It is reasonable to suppose that \$15,000 prize money wouldn't have been offered if the establishment hadn't seen more than that amount of publicity in sight as the result of professional participation.

The claim that the \$25 fee was needed to keep off the course coyotes was not in order. Presentation of a P. G. A. card for the current year would have been assurance enough that the entrants meant business.

But, anyway, the Bristol paper sets forth:

"Unless certain differences are ironed out there may be a scarcity of tournament professional golfers in Florida next winter. The competitive awards were nothing to speak of anyway, but the blow-off came when the date drew near for the one event in which they had a chance to play for real money. That was when the boys were soaked a \$25 entrance fee for the La Gorce tournament.

"But even prior to that they suddenly found themselves accorded the same treatment which any ordinary duffer might expect to receive. In other words, upon their arrival in Florida they were made to pay green fees. The profession simply wasn't recognized at all. When the pros, including the top sawyers, appeared at any of the courses they would be asked to register and then plunk down their green fees, generally about \$4 in that part of this fair land. And they would continue to be treated in that manner until tournament time rolled around.

"On top of that to be asked to dig down and lay a fee on the line was not so pleasant, especially for those who failed to finish in the money. At La Gorce, for instance, in addition to the \$25 fee the professional had his hotel and other expenses to reckon with, which meant that it cost between \$100 and \$200 for his several days' stay to compete in the tournament. And when he didn't get up in the money it was just that much red ink on his bank roll.

"The leading professionals have seldom paid an entry fee in tournaments. A majority of the clubs have figured it as good advertising or publicity to have the stars of the game play over their courses in tournaments. But all that seems to have been changed in Florida, where they charged \$3 per day or \$5 for the tournament for the gallery to walk around the course watching the high lights perform. And they made the pros who furnished the show pay for their own performance.

"At La Gorce half of the field had to pay \$25 for 36 holes of play, as only about that proportion of the field could make the grade for the final 36 holes. And that, of course, meant they had no chance to get a slice of the purse.

"There are those among the professionals who claim that if they didn't enter the tournaments down that way the meetings there would be complete flops. There is, to be sure, a deal of truth in that. In fact, what would the national open be if not a single one of the recognized stars were to enter."