

# Plenty of Holes in New Shop Sales Experiment

By HERB GRAFFIS

ONE of the clubs in a great metropolitan district of the mid-west is inaugurating an experiment in merchandising for the 1929 season. The innovation is purely an experiment, and for that reason is on a basis that allows cancellation of the arrangement by mutual consent on comparatively brief notice.

This plan calls for the operation of the pro shop by a men's store of considerable size, which has long gone aggressively after golf business. The store is to pay the club 10% of the gross business as a rental and furnish its own employees at the pro shop. The store will bill the members direct for pro shop business. With the exception of a modest sized sign the store will have no display advertising of its own in the pro shop, but of course will substantially benefit from the opening of new charge accounts among the club members whose buying on the charge basis is expected to extend far beyond golf goods.

Regardless of the merits of the plan it is something that calls for study by professionals, for in one respect it is a revelation that an investigation of the pro shop merchandising situation made by this club's officials brought out the fact that taking away concessions from the pro and handling them directly as a part of the club's operations had not been successful enough to warrant installation of the system. In this respect the step was something that will bring joy to the hearts of good pro merchandisers.

I can't see now where the proposition agreed upon between the club and the store is going to make history to the degree that it will be copied to any great extent. In the first place I don't see how the store will get enough profit out of the enterprise (with the exception of the profit from newly opened charge accounts) to justify the operation. Take the average metropolitan district club and the gross profit at the pro shop is a bit over 30%. The shop income is generally split into three major divisions, with clubs and other merchandise running not much over a

third, ball sales next, and the club-cleaning income third, but with all three divisions being closer together than is generally appreciated. Under the arrangement above mentioned, the store will not have the club-cleaning income, and unless the shop's volume is greatly increased by the sale of wearing apparel, the store will be trying to make a net profit on around 20% of  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the present gross. Figure the costs of shop help for selling, book-keeping and billing costs, insurance, etc., and if you can dope out a net profit you are more of an optimist than I am, I doubt that cut prices on merchandise would stir up much business at a high-class golf club such as this is. This type of membership wants quality merchandise and is suspicious of golf goods that is not standard priced.

Where the hope for volume lies, in my opinion, is in drumming up trade for knickers, sweaters, hosiery, shoes, and the like, by advertising literature mailed out with the monthly bills, by more extensive display in the shop, and by quick supply of out-of-stock numbers from the store's headquarters. But even this is a toss-up and calls for a lucky break as well as costly and energetic merchandising.

## The Personal Element

One point that the store management will be up against is that of establishing the same confidence in the clubs they sell that the member has in clubs from a stock that is *personally* selected by the pro for his own individual trade. Regardless of the value of a first class brand name, the educated and first class player trade is in the logical habit of placing the greatest trust in merchandise that is carefully selected by *units* by an expert and authoritative pro-buyer. This factor may not count for much with the cheaper golf trade that finds it necessary to take the last red cent of price cut, resulting from huge quantity buying and purchasing power that can cash in on emergency and volume requirements of manufacturers. But personally selected, expertly endorsed merchandise certainly has the call with the

bulk of the golf trade, and constitutes a tremendously important element in the pro's future.

Members of a good private club are "fussy" people. They may make some allowances for the pro, but from operation under the management of one of the most successful merchandising establishments in the world they will expect perfection. Woe betide the enterprise if they haven't stars working for them in the shop selling.

### Where the Pro Stands

The committee-man who is steering this new arrangement in its development stage is a highly successful business man.

While we were discussing the new arrangement I asked him if he didn't think it was rather a raw deal for the club's old pro who left when the new line-up was announced. The pro is a good man, obviously, for he had no trouble in getting another club in the same district a few days after he was in a position to look for another job. The club official's reply was to the effect that golf clubs these days are being compelled to operate in every detail on the basis that they consider would be most business-like in satisfactorily serving the membership. "In golf, as in any other enterprise," he continued, "there arise new conditions that may necessitate severing relations that have been mutually pleasant. Pros, as business men, must realize this and adjust themselves accordingly. Our club is in fine financial condition and we intend to strengthen its position in this respect. When the professionals can sell us on the idea that they do a resourceful and thorough job of strengthening the club's operating status, on the basis of satisfactory and highly valuable service to the members, then they are in invulnerable position with us, or any other club.

"It is my belief that the pro's big job in bettering his professional standing begins with making his members know he's a busy man, and a very important one, but doing it without showing an opera star's temperament. Members who are business men want to do business with other business men. If a pro seems to be taking things too easy on the job or have lots of time on his hands, the members notice it unfavorably. Even if a pro has time open he wants to conceal it. For instance, if there is a threesome starting off the first tee, he might ask them if they'd mind his playing with them. That gives him a chance to get "in" with them and

benefit from the sale of merchandise and lessons. At the end of the ninth he could excuse himself, saying he has an appointment. That would get over the idea that he is prompt with his appointment and that he has plenty of them. To a busy business man there is nothing more unpardonable than a pro being late for keeping an appointment for a lesson.

"Another place where the pro has to watch his step is against playing 'favorites' in the club. He has to study personalities in this matter and use lots of judgment for there's a lot of injustice done to pros on this account that they don't realize until it's too late.

"I think the pros have a wonderful chance for making more money than they ever dreamed of if they will devote more time and thought to selling lessons. In every club I ever heard of the market for lessons is sadly under-developed. If he can run a shop in keeping with the present day demands of members and get his lesson business built on the right basis I can see no reason why a pro can't net between \$6,000 to \$8,000 a season at even the *ordinary* metropolitan district club. That may not mean much money to a pro, but it seems to me that for seven months' work for a lad, it's a beautiful income."

**E**NCOURAGE the sons and daughters of members to play golf. Make junior memberships so inexpensive that their parents will not hesitate to sign up for them each year. Hold a junior championship. Thus you will be building up good golfers to represent the club in future tournaments and at the same time assuring a source of experienced players for future memberships as older members drop out.

**A**SOIL must contain 80 per cent sand to be classed as a sandy soil, but it need contain only 30 per cent clay to be called a clay. Hence, it is easy to change the texture of a sand by adding very little clay and silt; but it requires tremendous quantities of sand to change a clay into a clay loam.

**T**HE first three or four holes of a golf course should be relatively easier than the average for the course. This expedites getting the players away during rush periods, since they will have time to loosen up and thus be better able to play difficult shots than if met on the initial holes.