

Stores Find Plenty Grief Operating Pro-Shops

By HERB GRAFFIS

INDICATIONS point to the collapse of the threat against the pro shop business that has been present in the activities of department or sporting goods stores bidding for pro shop concessions. Stores have found that the pro's merchandising work at his club calls for a selection of stock of uniformly higher grade than that of the stores, and for a selling and service policy putting the individual temperament of the member paramount, instead of establishing a general store policy and hoping that it's right for the majority of the membership.

The idea had its origin in the belief of the stores that they could cash in on the red figures that were shown by golf clubs. The stores had the same notion as everybody else who is not acquainted with the facts—the mistaken belief that the pros are making fortunes in their shops. So, there came into being the bright idea that the stores could take away the shops from the pros, hire some boy for \$100 a month and the lesson income, and then make several thousand dollars clear, giving the golf clubs just enough of the profit to keep them happy. There is no use of the pros kidding themselves; the fact that some of the boys were not on the job or were not competent merchandisers had about as much to do with leaving the door open as the club being in the red and desperate to add to its income.

To date, the results of the switch have been anything but happy for all concerned. The club that expected its financial difficulties to be solved by turning over its shop gets a comparatively small contribution to its financial aid and has lessened the desirability of its membership by being burdened with the atmosphere of operation as just another department of a commercial establishment instead of as a private club with each of its members being able to boast of it as such instead of making apologies. The young fellow who is operating the shop for the store is between the devil and the deep blue for the members say to him, "who are you running the shop

for; the club or for 'Gus, the Square Two Pants Suit Store Man'?" Then the store, when the profits are lagging, rides the kid, asking, "who are you working for, us who pay you, or the club?"

When the pro runs the shop, it is being run for the service of the members primarily, and the pro makes what he can out of it on that basis. When a store runs the pro shop, it is primarily for the purpose of exploiting the club members. Now, if a club wants to lay their members open to this exploitation in return for a few hundred dollars a year, it strikes us that it is very questionable policy.

Price Boost Likely.

One case of the store operation comes to mind. The club received around \$900 as its 10 per cent of the year's gross. This is a bigger volume of business than most 18-hole club shops will do, even with the club-cleaning. The answer is that there was a good volume of business in sweaters, hosiery and knickers. Going into this phase of the business further and comparing the prices asked for the merchandise at the pro shop operated by the store and the same merchandise at the store's headquarters, you see a difference that plainly reveals why the store can pay the club \$900 and laugh.

Inability to get a good pro at the price paid under the store arrangement means that the members wander over to some neighboring club for instruction, and that's dangerous in these days of competition for memberships in metropolitan districts. The straying member is liable to see such a distinctive improvement in the atmosphere of the truly private club shop that his allegiance to his old club wavers. In one of the recent cases of the pro shop being farmed out, the club had to protect itself against this loss of really interested and well paid pro service by engaging a well-known playing pro. It will cost considerably more per year than if the pro were allowed to operate the shop on the right basis for the club, but in the long run it will be a good thing for the pro cause to

have the club find out what's what after paying out its members' money in the experiment.

Small Clubs Won't Pay Out.

In smaller clubs, the shop operation by stores is such a hopeless stunt that the stores are withdrawing and carrying with them a keen realization that it takes a clever pro business man to get by at a profit. A young fellow who has been pro under the store-shop plan at a Wisconsin club dropped into GOLFDOM'S office the other day on his way to a new job. He showed figures of two year's operation, each year resulting in a loss to the store of more than \$1,000. He said he stuck to it, trying his best to keep everybody happy, for two reasons: good pro jobs were hard to get, and he wanted to give the plan a good test and see if there was any chance of working it out as a good thing for the pros, the members, and the stores.

"It's not in the books," the boy remarked. "The store is out to sell and the pro is out to serve. When you try to please the store people by putting on the pressure for volume you get the members sore, and when you handle the selling in the diplomatic, studied way a good private club membership calls for, the store complains. The club is fed up on it and so is the store, but the contract has another year to run.

"With the store trying to make up almost a \$3,000 loss in one season, the members are going to get a pretty trimming. If it were in a big town the members would do just what they do in Chicago, for instance, go to some other pro or store to buy. There's no reason but low price for them to buy at their own club. But this is in a small town where there's no other club to go to. I pity the fellow who has my old job. He is bound to catch hell from all sides and hell is what I mean."

One of the early scare cases of this store operation ended last year when the store that was making a strenuous bid to get into the pro shops went bankrupt. These sadder but wiser men now know that it takes some smart hard work to run a pro shop at a profit, and if there's any pro who still thinks he can just let his shop run itself, let him take good warning.

Thus the noble experiment of the stores chiseling in for the pros' business at the clubs is speedily folding up. To hasten its entire departure from the golf field the improvement in pro merchandising and members' service must continue.

Sports Goods Makers Plan Trade Practices Revision

GOLF, baseball and general athletic goods manufacturers are to meet at Greenbrier Hotel, White Sulphur Springs, W. Va., May 7, with Garland S. Ferguson Jr., chairman of the Federal Trade commission, presiding.

In the Federal Trade commission's bulletin the purpose of the meeting is set forth as:

"To give all concerned an opportunity to participate in deliberations which are expected to result in efficiently eliminating from the industries mentioned all practices which may be considered unfair, wasteful or otherwise bad for the industry and the public.

Name Practices to Be Probed.

"Among the practices thus far proposed for discussion are: Giving of athletic equipment to persons engaged in athletics or sports on condition they use only equipment of concern giving such goods, or that they recommend its equipment; secretly paying athletes, or others, to use only equipment of a particular concern, or recommend its use; advertising that winners of competitions, or others, used goods or equipment of a particular concern, without disclosing obligation to use such equipment, if so obligated; giving athletic equipment, etc., to those employed in positions of trust, as instructor or advisor in a particular line of sports, upon condition that its goods be recommended or used by such person; use of names of prominent athletes on goods used in a particular branch of athletics engaged in by said athletes, on goods or equipment not used or designed by such athletes; advertising, or otherwise representing, that an athlete prominent in a particular line of sports or athletics designed certain equipment or sporting goods, where such is not the fact; exclusive dealing contracts, including rebates, gift goods or other allowances conditioned upon agreement to use or deal in only a particular concern's equipment.

"The proposal to discuss the foregoing subjects does not preclude the discussion of other or different matters. As experts in their line, men actively engaged in these industries are asked to define for the Commission such practices as they consider unfair and to assist in the formation of rules of business conduct intended to eliminate simultaneously on a given date the practices specified.