

Price Gyps Are Punch-drunk; Now for Pro-Maker K.O.

By HERB GRAFFIS

OUT OF the stormy first half of the 1931 golf season, featured by the most violent price disturbance the business has known, many indications point to the pro being certain of a happy harbor as the master pilots of golf goods merchandising. Now it is up to the pros to use their heads, steer steadily and chip the barnacles off their craft.

Signs of the hurricane were observed unmistakably as early as the middle of last season. GOLFDOM continuously counseled the pros to take greater cognizance of the price phase of their operations, to display

price tags, and to use every personalized effort to acquaint their members with the reliability and honest value represented in pro shop merchandise and service. To this journal's observers and to others who have viewed the entire golf merchandising field in the cold attitude of fellows who really wanted to guess the winner, it was plainly apparent that general business conditions and the uncertain reception of the new ball were brewing up a ruckus.

Warning Given Early

The danger signals were seen by the experienced manufacturers. Julian Curtiss, at the sporting goods dealers' convention held early this year at Chicago, warned the manufacturers to beware the price-cutting in golf and tennis goods. In these two lines the manufacturers retained a good profit because they had not established a habit of being stampeded by every yokel who asked for a price cut. With the handwriting on the wall large enough to use the full height of the Empire State building some of the manufacturers gazed at the warning and, even then acted like "no spikka da Inglis" by letting the price-cutters romp on them. That the game's business could slide through this crisis without being permanently injured as a substantial, fair profit field is basically a most significant manifestation of the pros' sound position.

Name any one of the leading, prosperous factors in the golf business in whose success the pros have not prominently figured. It can't be done. The same status will prevail in the future, according to present evidence.

Ouch! Cry Price-Cutters

The cut-price stores already are crying for help. The wolf-howl of lower prices has gone to the point where it no longer permits any of the price-cutters to enjoy an exclusive advantage. In the meanwhile the pros' volume may be temporarily cut, but he is not suffering torments of the manufacturers' thought that the bear market raiders, unless stopped, will perma-

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nently reduce his profits to the point where he is trading nickles. That's what may happen to the ball and club market at the "down town" stores, just as it happened to the golf bag business, unless positive and quick methods of pro price protection are employed.

Court Shows Solution

It must be granted that the manufacturers have been put strictly up against it in this matter of price maintenance by lack of information as to what methods could be legally employed. Recent action by the Circuit Court of Appeals for the Sixth District on a Federal Trade commission case involving a fishing tackle manufacturer, promises the solution of the problem, according to a bulletin of the P. G. A. Merchandising committee. The court opinion states that the manufacturer "may refuse to sell to customers who demoralize the market and may announce as its general policy an intention so to do." But the rub comes in when the court further states that complaints should be registered by the customers who are preserving a sound market condition, rather than be solicited by the manufacturers.

Right there is where the pros have their golden chance to help themselves and their manufacturing sources by submitting definite evidence of offenses in price demoralization. The time-honored practice of several pros getting together and belly-aching in close harmony for their limited entertainment, won't do. The fellows have to submit a statement of the case, in writing, to the manufacturers whose price structure is being demoralized. Then the manufacturer is permitted to take corrective action, legally, if the circumstances warrant.

Write or Don't Wait

Writing isn't the most convenient thing in the world for the pros, but if the present situation doesn't result in a lively increase in the correspondence school method of making a business stable, then the pros have no license to complain about lack of co-operation in curbing the price-slashing evil.

The position is not all roses and moonlight for the price cutters now. Comparison of the pro business in eight representative golf districts, with those of upstart and of established golf goods departments in the same territories, show pro profits are in better shape than those of the stores, despite the heat wave and rainy week ends. Further evidence of a not altogether happy condition with the stores comes to GOLFDOM in the statements of four fairly well known club manufacturers whose business up to this time has been with the stores almost altogether. There's no dough in this trade for the



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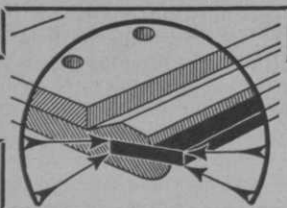
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manufacturers any more. Each manufacturer has been put on the spot by undercutting competition. Consequently all store suppliers become parties to hammering down the store retail prices. These manufacturers have told us that they are beginning to work on pro lines for 1932 and contemplate radical changes of policy to make the pros their preferred dealers.

A Better Break for Players

Prettiest part of the picture is player protection when the manufacturers and the pros get together in bracing the golf goods price structure against the wrecking activities of today's transient mob of price pine-appplers. Now the customer is having his money taken under false pretenses. Today cut-price balls vary in weight from 1.40 to 1.73 and we have had the pleasure, several times, of easily breaking the shafts of cut price clubs, just to make quality believers at spiritual seances. The buyers of the "bargains" are getting the trimming of their innocent lives. Really reputable merchandise also sold by the cut price gyms is benefiting none by association with the junk the chiseling stores also handle. The ephemeral profits are not worth a tiny fraction of the risk to the good manufacturer.

Every phase of the situation makes it obvious that the profit future of the golf playing equipment business requires an immediate and whole-hearted co-operation of

manufacturers and pros in checking the present unrestrained operations of price demoralizers.

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