

# Pros Guard Market Against Avalanche of Junk Sticks

By HERB GRAFFIS

IF the pros live up to their opportunity 1931 will see them established stronger than ever before as the controlling element in golf merchandising.

Signs point to an onrushing flood of junk golf merchandise put out by makers who came into the field when the miniature golf craze was at its apex. These people did a rushing putter business—if you could call some of those clubs “putters”—and due to the established manufacturers’ unwillingness to neglect interests of their steady customers, the newcomers didn’t get a real taste of what competition can be in the golf business. Along toward the end of the capsule-course hysteria, the tyros in club manufacturing got a sniff of famine, but they didn’t analyze the scent right. They believed that if they had a full line of golf clubs everything would be sweet, speedy and salubrious again.

In current issues of the sporting goods dealer papers you will find advertisements of some weird stuff to mark the first season of these newcomers with a full line. The acolytes figure there are between five and ten million golfers in the country and the picking is sure to be pretty; old-timers in the business know that GOLFDOM’S 1930 survey figures of a golfing market of approximately two million is right. Quite a gap in the figures!

It takes no seventh son of a gypsy seeress to forecast a headache of virulent character when these infant industrialists of golf come out of the daze and see red figures parked on the premises.

Even the kid pro having his first season at a nine-hole sand-green course at Palooka Siding, Okla., is bright enough business analyst to see that these newcomers will throw the stuff overboard at any price and, unless foresighted control methods are employed by the substantial factors in golf goods manufacture and production, there will be the saddest wreck of golf club prices the world has witnessed. The simple truth that most of these machetes that may be tossed onto the market at

distress prices will be jokes as clubs won’t mean much to the bumper crop of suckers who buy from the stores. The store buyers will get the clubs cheap and advertise them in a big way as leaders, using the whole procedure to beat down the prices of the established manufacturers.

## Wince at Storm Signals

The smart manufacturers of background in the golf business know this. Note Clarence Rickey, vice president of one of the older firms, quoting in *Sporting Goods Dealer*, one of that field’s buyers:

“\* \* \* \* with every one starting in [*manufacturing cheap golf goods*], there soon will cease to be any meaning to price or brands, and yet he [*the sporting goods dealer*] needed the profit on his golf department. This same type of business [*cut-price*] takes his mark-up off so many items in his store which are now being offset by his profitable golf business, that if he loses golf profits too he may as well close the doors.”

Rickey earlier in his article told what happened to the golf bag business generally when the store buyers worked on the manufacturers so the competition developed into a murderous price warfare. It’s taken many of the bag makers a long time to see how much better off they’d have been if they had made the pro shops their major outlets. Today they would be making a nice profit and probably selling more bags by having a margin of profit that would permit educating the pro in bag market development.

The warning is obvious. The good manufacturer’s salvation is in the pros’ merchandising betterment. The pro doesn’t care how much the manufacturer makes, so long as the pro is given the right sort of a deal on competitive prices with other outlets, some protection against savage bargain sales, and can sell his shop merchandise at a price the players can afford to pay for good merchandise. You don’t hear of the pros going wild on cutting prices so the manufacturer eventually suf-

fers. The pro and Henry Ford are about the last of the vanishing American price maintainers, and the manufacturer who has been through the mill in the golf business does not need to be reminded that the preservation of this pro virtue is vital to manufacturing profits.

### The Customer's Part

So far we have considered only the manufacturers' menace in this prospect of the disillusioned newcomers getting panicky. But the golfer, after all, is the big shot. The pros' importance in protecting players against the temptation of trading good dough for bad clubs never has been conspicuous as it will be this season. Judging from early indications of the 1931 lines of golf clubs the player who buys a new brand in June or later will stand about a 1-to-4 chance of getting his money's worth even if he pays as little as \$2 a club. There are some of the new manufacturers who are going about this business in a careful way. They are getting the benefit of pro advice in design and construction and are expecting a tedious grind before they cut into their share of the large, growing golf market. But three-quarters of the new folks in the field haven't the slightest idea of what it's all about and it will be all over for them before they learn.

Thus the teeing order for the 1931 season presents the pro with the greatest chance of his life if he is a studious, smart and active merchant. The alleged pro who thinks he can sit back on his bunzoon and let the jack casually drift into his mitt, had better sign off in his pro job and try his luck at an apple stand. If he doesn't, he is an absolute danger to the rest of the profession at this time when both the players and the good manufacturers expect the able pros to take command of the situation.

It's no inviolate secret of the order that more pros have ruined jobs for the entire profession than have been ruined by all other factors combined, so the impending situation calls for the boys to be their weak brothers' keepers during the crucial period. It may make some of the touchy boys sore to have others of the tribe make suggestions as to better merchandising at ailing spots, but it has to be done, and should be taken in good spirit.

Frequently it has been demonstrated that heaven must be on the pros' side as opportunity keeps rapping at the pro door until its knuckles get calloused. Again

this year opportunity raps to awaken the pros to cashing in. They can answer by steering golf marketing away from a crisis that can be made abortive if the able pros and substantial manufacturers work together in a foresighted, thoughtful manner.

### Green Section Seeks Out-of-Print "Bulletins"

**C**ERTAIN back numbers of the Green Section *Bulletin* have long been out of print and these missing copies are badly needed to complete the files at State Experiment Station libraries and other institutions where they may be used for reference.

Golf clubs are urged to return to the Green Section any of the below listed issues of the *Bulletin* they may no longer need:

1922—All numbers.

1923—January, February, March, April, May, June, November, December.

1924—January, February, March, May, June.

1925—June, July, August, December.

1926—January, March.

1927—February, April, May, June, November.

Co-operating clubs should send copies of these missing numbers to P. O. Box 315, Pennsylvania Ave. Station, Washington, D. C.

### Bezek Again Heads Mid-West Greenkeepers Body

**M**ATT BEZEK, Beverly C. C., Chicago, was re-elected president of the Mid-west Greenkeepers' association at the organization's annual meeting and dinner, Jan. 7. Other officers elected: First v. p., Alfred Buller, Chickaming C. C.; Second v. p., Ralph Johnson, Medinah C. C.; Sec., A. L. Brandon, St. Charles C. C.; Treas., Fred Kruger, Olympia Fields C. C. Directors elected: Fred Ingwerson, John MacGregor, Gus Graham and Alex Binnie.

Mid-West reported a thriving year with a busy schedule of practical indoor and outdoor meetings contributing to the technical advance of the association's members and the betterment of their course operations.

The feature of the annual meeting was the outline of the successful MacGregor method of greenkeeping at Chicago G. C., in the address of the club's green-chairman, I. R. Allen.