

Pros Present Their Platform for Working with Manufacturers

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THESE ARE days when every business man must submit himself and his business to a searching analysis. In the golf business we are far more fortunate than in almost any other business that can be called to mind, for despite a general depression in other business our sales, for the most part, are good. This doesn't mean that we haven't problems in abundance. I think that it means that we are working harder and more intelligently than we ever have worked before. However, as we really are at the beginning of what appears to be a wonderful period of pro business advance, the work and the thinking that we now are doing may be trivial compared with that which will be demanded of us in the near future.

Conditions of the last few years have thrown the substantial professionals and makers of golf equipment into closer and more understanding relations than they have previously enjoyed. We must realize now that as the pros' position and qualifications are strengthened so is the profit position of the well-qualified manufacturer made firmer. The threat of price reductions under the cost of manufacture, and of a sacrifice in manufacturing standards, now brought before us by the current cut-price epidemic, is a very serious warning. Either the good pros and the good manufacturers must work together or the financial future of both of them is certain to be imperiled.

The pro today is in a unique position in merchandising. I can call to your attention no other extensive business in which the chain store threat to the independent retailer is less of a menace than it is in the better quality sector of the golf market. It is the history of American business that an industry builds itself up through the courage and effort of independent retailers. Then when the market gets established and the pioneering work

is done, the chain stores come in with their standardized practices and brute force. I do not mean that the standardized practice of the chain store merchandising frequently isn't better than the methods of the independents, but I do assert that the lack of vitally interested localized operating brains handicaps the chains. We can study that development in appraising the present and future of golf goods merchandising and keep our individual practices ahead of normal business development so when the golf market does look like it is reaching a saturation point, we will be prepared to outsmart the competitors who then will be contending with us.

Educate Pro Market

Right now the matter of market development is one of the biggest problems before the pro. We have a small number of golfers in the country despite golf being unmistakably the national game. We need more players. Not only that, we need to educate those who think they are golfers now. When we get them educated we will have less competition for the professionals.

It is costly to a manufacturer when his buyers' first question is "how much?" Look at the present plight of the golf bag business where there are only a few manufacturers making money and even those fortunate ones not making anyway near what they should be making. The bag manufacturers looked to the stores as their best outlets. The pros were not the bargaining Shylocks the stores were so the pros paid more money for bags than the stores frequently sold these bags for at retail. Consequently the pro rather considered the bag business a hopeless deal. That is the basic reason why today the bag market is at least 50% undersold. Half of the bags in your racks should be taken out of service, and they would be when a real bag-selling tie-up between makers and pros is effected. There have been signs of such a development but unless the makers con-

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tinue to extend their efforts in this direction I believe that the golf bag business is in for a continuance of its generally unsatisfactory condition.

Cheap Goods Trade Recedes

From all sides I hear that the cheap golf club tide that marked the beginning of this year is receding. This certainly must be good news for the manufacturers of worthwhile equipment. In protecting the players against the almost complete waste of time, money and pleasurable opportunities involved in the use of this junk equipment the pros deserve the heartfelt thanks of established manufacturers as well as of the players. I say positively that the pros have done more to stem the tide of the cheap junk than all other factors combined. As a matter of fact even some of the solid manufacturers gave every evidence of being scared to death by the threat of the cheap stuff and temporarily attempted to meet the murderous price cuts. Fortunately, progress of the stampede was stopped by another fear. The manufacturers suddenly realized that deliberately reducing the value of brand-names that had been built up by the push of the professionals might be followed by reprisals on the part of the pro. The pro wants to work with every good manufacturer because their interests are mutual, but the pro is not going to be pushed around simply because the shrewd and expert buyers for the big stores employ sand-bagging tactics. I need only to point to the present status of many manufacturers in other fields who started by yielding inches to the big store buyers and ended by being compelled to give away miles that meant deficits. Now I ask, is it better for a foresighted manufacturer to work with the pros who are doing more than half of the dollars and cents annual volume of the golf business, or to build up the deadly Frankenstein of the store buyers? Pros have their defects, but even considering their shortcomings, the betterment in pro merchandising during the past five years I believe stands out as the most remarkable and speedy retailing advance in all of American business. Pros have gone ahead while general business has been in the miseries. Compare the representative personnel of pro golf today with that of five years ago, solely on the basis of business ability and performance, and you have an impressive view of how the pros are coming along.

Many have tried to fathom the apparently deep mystery of pro control of the golf market. They have cited the pro's free rent as giving him an unbeatable "in," but they have neglected to consider the pro's other expenses. It is impossible to get an average of the pro cost of doing business, but I should imagine that it would run something under 20%. Compare that with the store cost of 20% to 35% and you can see that the pro is in a position to compete with stores on a price basis but only at the expense of the manufacturers of good golf equipment. However, the pro believes in the policy of "live and let live" and that makes the future of the good manufacturer more secure than it is in the professionals' hands. Basically the pro market is founded on the pros' cardinal point of service to members. Every pro wants to see his members playing better than they do at any other club. He wants to see each of his members enjoying to the fullest extent the pleasant profits of golf. Pro business is built on service and sportsmanship rather than on price alone. That is why the pro has the confidence and command of the golf market. That is why the buyers of the cheap clubs eventually come to the pros to get properly equipped.

Now, about this cheap club business: I have taken some pains to check up on the division of club sales and believe that the following figures are substantially correct:

Higher priced clubs.....	40%
Medium priced clubs.....	30%
Cheap clubs	30%

Cheap Clubs Are Experiments

When you consider that the golf market is growing from 20% to 25% annually and that most of the new golfers' business is in cheap clubs, you see that the cheap club business represents mainly only the experimental purchases of people who haven't established their golf goods buying habits. When these newcomers learn something about the game they learn that the place to buy from is the pro shop. We are improving our educational work so we are getting first chances at many of these new people in the game. Our group classes for women and children are proving to be big market builders. Our publicity and advertising and sales methods are getting better. We are beginning to know pretty well what all this business of business is about. I'd make bold to say that we are making membership in our clubs more valuable because we are serving our members better than we ever have done before. At the

public and daily fee courses where we are represented, professionals are doing much to advance the game and bring to the communities the many benefits of this national game that isn't played by proxy.

The professionals realize that the manufacturers have problems too. Sometimes I think that we are penalized for being so considerate of the manufacturers' interests, but we are willing to give, as well as take, and to depend on our own abilities and economic laws to work out our destiny.

Act on Ball Business

Both the pros and the manufacturers have one of their most serious problems today in the ball business. It is no news to any student of golf goods merchandising to learn that balls sold at cut prices by golf goods retailing racketeers vary all the way from 1.40 to 1.70 in weight and the sizes make one marvel that such extensive tolerances would be possible in golf ball moulds. There is bound to be a continuance of the controversy concerning the new ball and a disturbance of the ball business. Consequently the pros, as well as the substantial manufacturers, must take some immediate, concerted action to keep the public from being led astray in purchasing. We must either act together immediately or suffer serious consequences of delay by having the manufacture and distribution of golf balls become painfully demoralized.

It seems to me that a warning sign prominently displayed in the pro shops would have some salutary effect in keeping the good ball business in proper channels. Something to the following effect might be worked out between the P. G. A. and the Ball Manufacturers' association, and shown at each pro shop:

WARNING

Golfers are being victimized by cut-price sales of balls that are either recovered and repainted and sold as new or by cut-price new balls made by manufacturers lacking proper design and construction facilities. Wide variations in weight and size of these cut-price balls are seriously penalizing their buyers.

Pro shop ball stocks are guaranteed to be of standard weights and measurements, and of recent, properly conditioned and resilient manufacture.

Such a notice appearing over the name of the P. G. A. and the Ball Manufacturers' association would deftly jerk the foundation from beneath this cheap ball competi-

tion and put the legitimate, qualified ball manufacturers in a better position.

Invites Makers' Cooperation

Speaking for the P. G. A., I will say that we will be very glad to sponsor such a notice as a protection for our customers. Co-operation from the Golf Ball Manufacturers' association is hereby invited. I am confident that this will be a decided help to the good manufacturers. We are willing to do our part and we ask in return only that the ball manufacturers give us the consideration to which we are entitled even when it may mean the temporary sacrifice of a few dollars that will return many fold from the steady pro volume. No one can intelligently ask us to exercise our intimacy and customer confidence in building up brand names that are used against our interests by price concessions at other retail outlets. That is an aspect some of the manufacturers will have to consider very seriously. Let them figure out the net profit of the store special price deals and the net profit of the pro business, and they'll see that the present picture plainly points to the wisdom of making the pros the preferred dealers. As for the future developments threatened by these cut-price deals with stores, we need only refer to the harvest of woe and loss now being reaped by short-sighted manufacturers in other fields.

The pros want to work with the manufacturers on the only platform that is sound for both of us and that is in making the interests of the players first and foremost. That policy has been the salvation of the pros and is strengthening the position each day.

Now, to each manufacturer who shares with us this sincerity of purpose and our knowledge of what the golf market needs and should have, we can offer a bright present and a future free from the nightmare of grasping and selfish exploitation and inevitable deficits.

A GOOD publicity stunt for boosting daily fee or small town playing volume is to announce that on a certain day a "dub tournament" will be held, the object being to get as many beginners as possible to play a medal round of golf and keep track strictly and honestly of every stroke taken. The only requirement should be that the entrants in the tournament have not played a full round of golf before in their golfing career.