

Young Pro Shows Sales Value of Personally Fitted Clubs

By HERB GRAFFIS

YOU can talk all you want to about the advantages the pro should capitalize in his effort to extend his domination of golf club

retailing but you can't beat that prime factor of the pro being qualified to fit the right club to the individual player's game. That makes the pro a ranking consultant in golf club design, and a factor that the leading manufacturers have not neglected using. Golf club manufacturing has undergone two distinct changes since the game began to get going in the United States; first, the bench-made club, which now constitutes only about one in 20 of the better grade of clubs sold in this country, and, second, the production of carefully studied designs on a precision manufacturing basis by expertly manned and fully equipped plants. This second stage has played a leading part in the progress golf has made in this country.

Now there are plenty of indications that we are seeing a third phase of change in the business of club manufacturer. The 1931 lines of the leading manufacturers all show an influence of pro design that is not based so much on exactly what the leading players use themselves but on what the leading players and instructors recommend for the average golfer. For several years past this influence has been apparent in the lines most closely allied with the pro field. The manufacturers have been awake to the fact that the usual metropolitan district handicap records show only about 10% of the players shooting 90 or less and their designing and manufacturing forces and pro advisors have taken cognizance of this governing factor in the lines.

This club manufacturing business is no downy bed and to keep the design and quality up and the price down is something

Ken Smith, of Kansas City, has found his allotted niche in golf's scheme of things supplying specially fitted sets of clubs to particular golfers who don't mind paying the price. Here's the story of how he got into the business and how he operates. . . .

that is wrinkling the brows of many a keen intellect these days. However, all of its vicissitudes were not sufficient to discourage a

young pro shop graduate named Kenneth Smith launching himself into it three years ago. Smith confesses that he doesn't think his business will ever get big enough to worry any of the big boys for it's a family affair of bench production. He is content to handle his minor fraction of the business so the pros, the leading manufacturers and the players will say "Ken Smith makes fine clubs" and the Smith family will demonstrate to the world that a pro-run business is a prospering enterprise.

Starting as a caddie at Mission Hills in Kansas City, Mo., in 1916, young Smith made his debut as a club-maker repairing clubs for other caddies. A year later he was given a job as an apprentice club-maker by the late J. W. Watson and began then to study and absorb the American and Scotch contributions to the club-making art. Then Watson retired and placed the kid with Ernie Ford at Meadow Lake. When Ernie moved to Detroit, Smith went with him and divided his time between Ford's shop and the University of Michigan where he specialized in business administration. He already had the bug for making clubs and saw that he needed business education. During his time at Kansas City he was working 48 hours a week at the club and still managed to graduate from high-school. After finishing Michigan in 1924 he went as assistant to Dick Clarkson at Northland C. C., Duluth.

A Family Matter

In his visits home from Duluth he was laying the foundation for his present en-

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terprise. His father is a talented mechanic and has worked out the factory methods. Smith, Sr., also makes the wood heads to exclusive designs. There are only eight in the plant. Five men and the two Smiths in the shop and Mrs. Kenneth Smith handling the office end. Kenneth says he spends an hour of his own time on every set of wood clubs that are turned out, so the production necessarily is limited. Clubs are made to special specifications and registered.

Smith is doing a goodly percentage of women's club business and from his observation forecasts a tremendous field for distinctively and correctly designed clubs for the fair sex. In commenting on design for the players shooting in the 80s and 90s, Kenneth expresses the opinion that these players with weak wrists and slow swings are liable to find the wood clubs of the stars unwieldy. In making the woods lighter he mentions that the weight in his design is not taken out of the head, but comes out of the shafts. The purpose, of course, being to get adequate driving power by having a full weight head and a shaft as light and whippy as is conducive to proper control when the club is in the hands of the 90 shooter.

It is that sort of design factor that Smith emphasizes should be studied by each pro in his sale of clubs to members.

In making the statement Smith doesn't burst forth in any boastful statement that he is the only one in the world making clubs of adaptable design. On the contrary, he pays high tribute to the standard of design and construction of clubs made in the leading factories, as judged by keen bench-expert standards. What he does say, though, not to refrain from playing a few notes on his own bazaar, is that where he cuts in is to make sure that his clubs are suited for the player who uses them. So if the elect don't find what they want out of the vast array offered, and they will pay the price, the Smith outfit will apply itself personally to the production.

Smith is quite reconciled to having a good small business that keeps steady and which is built solely on a limited and special job platform. He defines his position in the field by stating that he rates as a locksmith, not a keymaker, to those hanging around the door to a good score.

WHEN a green is fairly flat and not too severely trapped, a diameter of 60 feet is sufficient. The present-day trend, however, is toward greens closer to 75.