

Dealers' Meeting Shows Pros' Merit as Golf Merchant

By HERB GRAFFIS

"NOW, gentlemen, let us have the same true sportmanship in our business relations as we have in games to which we supply equipment."

That noble sentiment and guide echoed persistently in the addresses at the Chicago convention of the National Sporting Goods Distributors' Association. Some static prevented the clear reception of the message as the sassy staccato of the chisel chipping off extra discounts was heard plenty through the doors of hotel rooms in which buyers and manufacturers were furtively giggling at the idea of "open covenants, openly arrived at." Further difficulty in hearing the inspiring principle was provided by the grunts, groans, lurid language and hiccoughs of four sterling sportsmen kicking the hell out of one 130 pound golf club salesman. The little man was the victim in a case of mistaken identity, according to the later whines of the fearless defenders of all that is good, true and beautiful.

The meeting was a great object lesson all around to the pros. One who has covered pro meetings of all sorts for some years was impressed with the casual conclusion that professionals are serious-minded rank amateurs going through the rye, despite some folks notion our boys are passionately addicted to getting their hides moist and then turning blanket Indians. The really important development of this sporting goods distributors convention was, so far as pros are concerned, a clear and complete revelation that the pros are sitting very, very pretty.

Julian Curtiss, perennially peppy pilot of the Spalding organization, delivered the heavy-weight address of the meeting. Curtiss has a gift of saying critical things that mean battle, but doing it in a polished, literate way that could be taken down, without blushes, in the notebook of a spinster pillar of the First M. E. church.

The dean of the manufacturers told the

sporting goods men that he had been through six major business crises, and during each one of them the sporting goods business had flourished. He further indicated that, during these times in particular, the business of play should prosper, due to the growing popularity of the five-day week. He related that the five-day week has been in operation at Spalding plants without any increase in production costs.

Discounts Punish Sport Trade

Curtiss made one remark that should bring home to the pros evidence of what an enviable spot they occupy in sporting goods retailing. He said: "The most emphatic message that I have to bring you is: for heavens sake preserve the profits on those two great sports—golf and tennis. In every case you are dealing with an individual and the individual has no right to receive a discount."

In that remark he made an effort to cut out the sore spot that was given some lingual treatment by almost all of the expert diagnosticians and surgeons who attended the clinic—the trick discount. It was very plain that sporting goods dealers are in misery up to their ear-drums on this discount racket. Colleges, schools, clubs and other organizations play one dealer against the other and frequently lure manufacturers into a competition to see which can give away the most.

The Spalding chief tipped off what discount trouble, cut prices and tough competition was costing the manufacturers when he said: "A very erroneous opinion has for many years been prevalent in regard to the huge profits that are made in the manufacturing of athletic goods.

"The steel industry of the United States is considered to be one of the great basic industries, and yet the percentage of profit of the United States Steel Company has always been far greater than that of the concern with which I have been associated for so many years."

Some of the blunt talkers on the program referred to the hopeless factor in the situation, this factor being the dealers who were former prominent athletes trying to capitalize their reputations. When you heard the manufacturers and substantial dealers talk about these bewildered and incompetent ex-performer dealers, long on sinew and short on skull, you really could start to brag high, wide and loud about the pros. You got the conviction that the sporting goods dealer roster assays such a large percentage of punks that the less said about comparisons with the pros, the more tranquil it will be for the dealers.

Pro Is Head Man

Good dealers and good pros have a lot in common in eliminating the handicaps to golf goods business development and it was freely admitted by leading dealers, manufacturers and the sporting goods dealer, tradepaper men that the pro today was the head man in the golf trade. In chats with men at the convention it was made plainly apparent that the pro has a leadership in golf goods distribution that he must protect and extend by the most vigorous and intelligent effort. "The pro doesn't appreciate usually what a great inside track he has," was the tenor of the green-eyed comments made by leading dealers to GOLFDOM'S editor.

Informal tribute to the pros' business advance and status was freely made, but references to the pro were conspicuously absent on the formal program. Alex Pirie, president emeritus of the P. G. A., looking over the show, and was nailed by one of the officials and dragged up to the rostrum for recognition. Alex cooed a few well-received words of brotherly love and affection at the assembled multitude and let it go at that. The boys had some troubles to cry about and far be it from patriarchal brother Pirie to prevent any comforting that can be accomplished with irate resolutions and floods of tears as big as 90-watt mazdas.

Condemn Gun-Maker's Policy

The dealer jumped with righteous indignation on the direct-selling policy of the Browning Arms Co. employed to sell their guns through jobbers and dealers at the usual discounts. Now they have adopted a direct selling policy and give the dealer only 10 per cent discount for selling and servicing the guns. The convention adopted a resolution against han-

dling Browning guns until the 10 per cent direct-selling policy was abandoned. The Browning action seems especially idiotic to this writer, a resident of Chicago where Browning's best gun customers can't write and could not be expected to send in orders by mail.

But this reflection on how so many other fellows can be so dumb and so rich while I am so smart and so poor, is no novelty to your correspondent. It was again brought painfully to mind as the manufacturers and distributors at Chicago made initial efforts to organize "an united trade association for the entire sporting goods business."

In all the considerations of this proposal concerning the union of sporting goods making and distributing factor there is no mention of the pro golfer. It was a sorry oversight in view of the fact that the pro is doing about 20 per cent of the entire sporting goods retailing of the country. Some of these gentlemen in the sporting goods business apparently are unaware of the pros' business status. They seem to place the pro in that unfortunate position, described in the pansy's plaintive lament as "Just a Gigolo."

We'll work, wait and see what the pros can do to rectify this lack of appreciation. There's just one way they can do it, and that is by being the outstanding stars of merchandising. With their chances in this direction during 1931, the pros have a banner opportunity to make themselves the acknowledged masters of mutually profitable sporting goods distribution.

YARDAGE MARKERS IN SETS NOW ON MARKET

Chicago, Ill.—Arcus Ticket Co., 348 N. Ashland Ave., printers of restaurant checks and tickets of all description, have branched out in the golf field and are now marketing a new yardage marker consisting of a pressed-steel plate finished in two colors of baked enamel on a 21-in. channel-steel stake.



The markers, known as "Yard Marks," are sold in sets of 50, with properly assorted signs so that every 50 yards from 150 to 300 yards can be marked

on every hole of the course.

Arcus claims these markers are positively weather-proof and long-lived, requiring the minimum of service. Priced at \$47.50 per set, f. o. b. Chicago.