

# Season of Trials Forerunner of Pros' Biggest Sales Triumph

By HERB GRAFFIS

**P**RO BUSINESS during the season now closing provided the most severe test of ability, resourcefulness and energy the field has faced since it became the giant of sport industry. Although the operations were spotty there is ample reason to believe that the pro dollars and cents volume of 1931 business will not drop as much as 15% under last year. This is no cause for bringing out the pipes and playing agonized piobaireachds, since last year's income total was well above the increase that might have been expected by the most optimistic forecaster. Under prevailing business conditions the pros hadn't much license to hope for the substantial boom they experienced in 1930. Accordingly, the 1931 business represented a healthy gain over what might be considered the average annual increase for pro volume over a three year period.

The year again demonstrated that destiny has picked the pros as its pets. The season started with a rush and up to the middle of June golf business was registering its greatest half-season sprint in history. Some of the pros were pretty blue during this period as the stores were unloading standard make 1.62-1.62 balls at prices 40 fathoms below sea-level. Stocks of the wood-shed club manufacturers were being liquidated through the stores. These hit-and-run makers were getting out of the racket. They learned that the stores constituting their only outlets would play one maker against the other on price alone until there was a decided net loss in selling the stores.

This hammering buying practices of the stores also took from the established makers plenty of pounds of flesh and these makers were giving down blood along with the flesh without having the hunch to call a halt on being shylocked. That situation resulted in many of the manufacturers recently announcing, for 1932 pro encouragement and protection, policies that plainly show the pro is America's sweetheart so far as the smart manufacturer is concerned. The manufacturer who isn't

planning to make the pro the keystone of his 1932 merchandising is going to sob on New Year's eve, 1932, that he has not been doing as good as trading nickels.

## Make Good on Golden Chance

Art Boggs, sage pro at Kirtland (Cleveland district), called the turn on the year when he termed it "the testing season." The pro who got comfortably through this season and considers that his work was better done and his advancement in merchandising ability and attitude was considerable, is the fellow who has won the manufacturers over to making the pros the fair-haired boys of selling. They also are the pros who will retain this dearly won and valuable victory. As a matter of fact, they will be the pros who will have no difficulty in getting or keeping good jobs in 1932. The year revealed, even to notoriously indifferent officials, the definite value a good pro has in his club's operations.

The pros' "live-and-let-live" policy toward the manufacturers permitted a profit that far more than offset the demerits of pro credit. The credit situation has been improving among the pros although the hopes for the great clean-up P. G. A. officials planned for this year were blasted by general business conditions. Some clubs that previously had guaranteed member payment to the pro, did away with the guarantee. Plenty of the boys are worrying today about how to get money due them from their members without the members getting sore at being diplomatically dunned and then taking out their saffron ire by scheming the pro out of his job.

## Weather Is Worst Blow

But it wasn't general business conditions as much as the insufferably hot weather from the middle of June on that was responsible for the slump in sales. As a tip-off on what it meant to business: George Bowden, canny Caledonian at Maketewah (Cincinnati district) sat in the

grill of that club's magnificent new home, talking over the performance in Cincy with Emil Schmitt, the club's veteran manager, Harry O'Hagen, manager at Losantiville, and others. Said George:

"In July and August our play was off 2,000 rounds from last year. I figure I should average a dollar profit at least every four rounds played or I begin digging in to see what's wrong with my work. Well, I was off just \$500 in profit against 1930's July and August."

GOLFDOM coyly takes a bow for calling the turn on two features of the 1931 season. One was in prophesying the price carnage the wood shed manufacturers would introduce into the club market and the other was in saying the smart pros would offset this evil by marking their goods with bold price tags and moving, at cut prices, any merchandise that was freezing in the shops. It cost us this year around \$5,000 in turning down proffered advertising contracts of the hit-and-run manufacturers, to protect unwary pros against being stuck with this junk stuff that looked tempting at the start of the season. And we'll never again have a chance to put our paws on some of that sweet dough because some of those gyps are out of the picture now. But it did us more than five grands' worth of good to see how the pros handled themselves in their merchandising emergency brought on by the prolonged hot spell. Take another Cincinnati case, just because it's handy in the notebook that records the latest prowl through the provinces. Harry Boyer, pro at Losantiville, has a chairman who's the answer to the pros' prayer. Harry and his chairman talked over business conditions. Harry put the works on the women's club business and on cleaning down his inventory with cut price tags and signs. Elmer Biggs, our comrade at the Peoria (Ill.) C. C., did the same thing. If they hadn't, they would have taken it on the chin plenty when they closed their shops for the season.

This price-cutting hasn't meant that the boys have acquired the habit of hacking at the prices until price and not the inherent worth of the merchandise plus some selling effort, is considered the way to operate. They simply found, in many cases, that they were overloaded with deluxe stuff instead of having an inventory that was strongest in the medium price ranges, as it should be in these times. Maybe in a year or two it will be O. K.

for the boys to go back to making the big play and the big stock the expensive clubs, but the signs don't point to it as a healthy practice for 1932's start.

One of the amazing features of the season now closing was the way lesson volume kept up. Again it was the women who comprised about three-quarters of the names on the lesson calendar. The boys got a lot smarter about using this lesson business as a feeder for shop sales this year.

### Season's-End Inventories Low

Undoubtedly one of the main factors in making the pro the principal object of the wise manufacturers' affections for 1932 is that the pro inventories at the close of this season probably will be the lowest for many years past. The boys have ordered cautiously and worked much smarter than ever before in turning their stocks, as of August 15, into cash. On the other hand, when the hot weather began to give signs of running clear through until Christmas some of the manufacturers with heavy stocks unloaded on the stores at prices the stores couldn't hardly resist. The stores thought the price would drag in the customers by droves, but the bona-fide enthusiasts were the only golfers who played when the bulb was shooting mercury through the top like a geyser, and it's this class of trade that's wed to the pro shop until death do we part. Consequently, the stores and jobbers have more than a healthy amount of golf clubs frozen in inventory and certainly are not sappy enough to add to their burdens by extensive further ordering until they have been able to move the goods they acquired at sacrifice prices.

The announcement of the 1932 change in the golf ball meant that the pros would have clean shelves as a take-off in getting a jump on that business, while the jobbers and stores were still carrying plenty of ball inventory. The brief time the jobbers, dealers and manufacturers have been allowed for unloading the ball that nobody loved is actually brutal but the prices and volume that smart pro merchandising probably will be able to turn into the manufacturers on the 1932 standard ball, may provide some financial balm.

It appears, therefore, that the 1931 season, while not a record season of profits for the pros, has been a season to demonstrate the pro's logically major position in golf goods merchandising.