

# Stores' Selling Woes Emphasize Pros' Merchandising Mastery

By JOE GRAFFIS

**T**HOSE FORLORN laddies who persist in sobbing that they, as pros, are Miss Fortune's bar sinister offspring and who still harbor an inferiority complex are referred to current issues of the sporting goods journals, the estimable *Dealer* and the lively *Journal*, for solace and cure.

Pros troubles, compared with those related by and of the sporting goods dealers, are minor. Your correspondent has been batted around because of espousing the cause of the pros as champions of all that is good, true and beautiful in golf goods retailing. He has been guilty of price maintenance defense from the pros viewpoint to the extent of nuisance and has maintained the position in the face of price cuts by the pros. That these pro price cuts were necessary to preserve the pros' livelihood may be beside the point, but strict maintenance of retail price has been something that the pros have asked for and, because it was right under normal conditions, GOLFDOM has batted up for the whole price and nothing but the price.

Now let us tell you something about the troubles of price maintenance—or even of reasonable price reductions—as they appear to the sporting goods retailers.

In the first place, let us refer to the credit statements as issued by the club and ball manufacturers quarterly. Let's pass over that briefly although the showing of pros as delinquent in payment of bills for 6 months or more is greatly improved. But there is one important factor missing in the manufacturers' reports and that factor may make the pros show brightly by comparison. No report is made of the accounts that the jobbers have on the cuff and according to revelations of some of the manufacturers the jobbers, poor devils, are on the cuff to the shoulder blades.

In the dealers' papers they complain the banks are not giving a hand to those men who are stocked up heavily in a seasonal business and absolutely at the mercy of weather conditions. Well, even a golf writer and a pro knows that the quality of mercy with a banker is so strained it

would pass through a 10,000 mesh screen, notwithstanding Portia's declaration.

The pro can buy from hand to mouth and while he may be holding the bag for some slow pay members or be punished by adverse business or weather conditions, he is not at the mercy of the banks for the continuance of his business. Banking policy today seems to be to liquidate America and that is going to wipe out some of the established sporting goods dealers and jobbers.

## Pros Can Survive.

While the pros may not be able to make any appreciable showing of profit in these disturbed times, he at least can get by and weather the storm so he will be able to cash in at the date of the inevitable comeback.

Pros have been making some careful studies of their overhead costs during the past couple of years. Although the difficulty of arriving at precise figures has been related in these columns by Geo. Sargent, Dan Goss, Willie Ogg and others, still it has been made fairly plain that the pro can operate under the 25 per cent overhead figure of the sporting goods store. True the pro will be doing a little better than trading nickles and getting only a reasonable living income and no profit on his investment by figuring on an overhead cost of less than 25 per cent at most metropolitan district clubs, but he will have a job. The sporting goods dealer, on the other hand, is fairly liable to bankruptcy.

## The "Rackets" Ruinous.

Pro complaint has been plenty about the "discount card" and "buy it wholesale" rackets but the howl has been nothing to that registered by the dealers. Ames Castle, editor of *Sporting Goods Dealer*, writes of the plight the dealers are in because of this trick discount business. He tells of a golf club in the Los Angeles district that recently advertised, as an attraction for new members, playing equipment at cost. Maybe, some day that club will awaken to the cost of running a pro shop

and when it gazes at the red be not only willing but anxious to have some pro under the risk. A few days ago one of the Chicago sporting goods establishments that has been doing business for years on the discount card racket, applied for a friendly receiver, which is equivalent to sending out word to six good friends to rent white gloves for the last sad rites. The discount racket is a two-faced fooler—it fools the buyers, and it fools the sellers for the sufficient reason that old man overhead just keeps rolling along.

Business men are awakening to the folly of doing business at a price that does not allow a profit. Castle, in his *Dealer* article, quoted the president of the United States Steel Corp. as saying: "There can be no prosperity when steel rails are sold for less than their cost of production." Atwater Kent, prominent maker of radio equipment, simply closed his factory doors when he found that the market was so demoralized that he couldn't do business at a profit. There are a couple of smart men tipping off pros that there is no reason for selling unless you make some money.

The golf goods makers are seeing a lot of light in the operations of the pro business men who keep active selling at a profit instead of dropping retail prices until they are hopelessly in the red. The manufacturers are beginning to consider these pros as representatives of the pro field rather than rate the entire pro personnel by the boys who sit back and cry for some one else to solve their problems. The makers have to get some money from their production and selling effort and with stores insisting on lower prices so the frantic retail price cutting can continue, the golf goods makers already are at the point where hope of profit on sales to the stores has almost vanished.

Pros and players generally don't realize that the golf goods makers have one of the toughest of problems in their attempts to control production. Make up a bunch of clubs during the winter or early spring to take care of expected business and you have a small fortune frozen. Everyone wants shipments in a hurry. If you have not the stock ready to ship you have lost the business for the season. Right there is one of the unavoidable costs that must be absorbed in the retail price of a club.

When the end of the season approaches all any manufacturer can do is to have clearance sales and raise some cash so he can survive to suffer the same risk on the

models he has to make up for the following year. Bankers won't loan on frozen stocks of golf goods these days. If the pros can figure out the answer to that dilemma of the manufacturers, their solutions will be hailed with rejoicing.

### Department Stores Disappoint.

A while back some of the people in the golf goods business were talking about the department store golf departments being the big, profitable future outlet for playing merchandise. You hear practically none of that talk now among informed men because the department store must do business mainly on low price. With prices generally at the bottom, this corner on price which big-store buying power formerly made possible, has disappeared. Overhead in department store golf section, so we are told by experienced store men, runs from 28 to 35 per cent. Their golf departments, consequently, often are allowed to operate at a net loss because of the departments' interest for men, and during the last year, for women, too.

Where the department store usually is beaten dizzy by the pro is in the character of the retail selling. The department store salesman usually has no special interest in the sale of golf goods other than the preservation of a job that is none too opulent. The pro is an authority on golf merchandise and its proper fitting to the buyer and he has to sell or else. . . . With that set-up it is no wonder that pro shop selling, despite unfavorable comment of some critics, has it over store selling like ice cream has it over turnips.

Confirmation of this general superiority of pro shop salesmanship may be found in the public and fee course field. One would think, because of the absence of experienced pros at many of the fee and public courses, that the stores would run away with this business. But look at the courses whose players depend on the stores for equipment. You see bags of 1 wood and three irons and signs forbidding more than 1 player to play out of the same bag. Then note the equipment of the players at those pay-play courses where first-class pros are on the job. Despite the lower purchasing power of the average pay-play player you will note that the average equipment compares favorably with that of the private course players. There's the testimony on how average pro selling stacks up with average store selling.

Appraisal of the golf goods merchandising situation from any angle shows to doubters

that the pros' position is that of greatest present strength and brightest future. What the pros can do to make their favorable position more evident and take fullest advantage of their strategic location in the golf goods merchandising plan, depends entirely on the pros themselves. They can't depend on much outside salvation during this period. Other people have too many troubles to take time out for worrying about the pros.

## Central Texas Golf League Is Popular with Players

**A** TIME HONORED and always successful method of boosting golf interest in a given area is to organize an inter-club golf league with team matches between the various members of the group.

GOLFDOM is in receipt of a letter from Z. L. Howell, Jr. of Ennis, Texas, describing how the very successful Central Texas Golf League operates. Mr. Howell says:

"Last year the Central Texas Golf League consisted of six towns—Ennis, Corsicana, Mexia, Hillsboro, Cleburne and Waxahachie. Each team which consists of not more than 20 nor less than 10 players plays every other team two matches, one at home and one at the rival links. Since the number of visiting players may vary from 10 to 20, it is up to the captain of each team to notify the opposing captain just the number of men he intends to bring. The captains of the six teams compose the rule committee and it is up to them to settle any arguments that may come up.

"The schedule is every other Sunday, leaving one Sunday between matches for meets postponed because of rain and so that team members can play in their own club tournaments.

"The Central Texas Golf league manifested so much interest last year that two new towns applied for membership in the league this spring and were admitted. The two towns, Tyler and Palestine, made us an eight club league and incidentally brought about quite a problem to be solved, since for each team to play two matches against every other team would make the season last too long and also because certain towns are a considerable distance from certain other clubs. Accordingly, this year the league has been divided into two divisions with Corsicana, Tyler, Mexia and Palestine in the East Texas league and

Ennis, Cleburne, Hillsboro and Waxahachie in the Central Texas league. It is really still one league, but by dividing up in this way we can arrive at the winning teams of each section in a season of reasonable length and then bring the two winners together at the close of the season to play for the championship over a neutral golf course. The winning club will hold late this season a league invitation golf tournament where a Calcutta pool will be organized and nice prizes provided for the winners.

"We find that this league has done more for golf in a social and business way than anything else. Closer relations and better fellowship between the towns has been very noticeable and we feel the league is a lasting and permanent organization."

## Combination Lessons Build Business for Al Collins

**A** NEW STUNT in selling lessons is the combination lesson idea employed successfully by Al Collins, pro at Indian Hills C. C. (Kansas City district). The idea has the merit of getting a two-time urge to take lessons and introduces something of a competitive element into lesson taking.

Collins gives details of this plan in his interesting and lively monthly pro department publication, the *Al-O-Gram*. He writes:

*You know I favor class instructions for beginners at golf. Now I have a modification of class instructions that makes lessons cheaper, more effective and much more interesting regardless of how far you have progressed in golf.*

*Combination Lessons, I call them, and here's the idea: Two people arrange for a half hour instruction at the same time. I spend an hour back and forth as needed and allow one to practice the stroke while I instruct the other. Thus you get instruction and practice on the stroke all in one session. It's working out fine and is much more effective as well as more interesting because there are two in the class. You quite naturally discuss the instructions and a contest develops—each trying to beat the other in perfecting his stroke. I like it—others like it—you'll like it and get a lot out of it. Get together with a good friend and start early in the season so the benefits will show up in your game. It's economical—\$2.50 covers the total cost for the hour for both of you and includes the boy to chase the balls. Men and women alike will find this plan greatly increases the benefit derived from instruction.*