

Pro Competition Calls for Smart Sales Management

By FINLEY TYNES

JUST HOW CAN the pro successfully meet competition? If I wished to toy with words I think I could build a reasonably sound argument on the premise that they *haven't* any competition that isn't self-made or self-imagined. They have certain advantages that every downtown golf dealer envies. They are the golf doctors at their respective clubs and should, by gaining the full confidence of the membership, be in a position to prescribe for every player's needs as dexterously as an M. D. writes prescriptions for pills. Broadly speaking the pro should no more worry about competition than should doctors or dentists toss away sleepless nights because patent medicines and other quackeries are being offered for sale.

Pro Can't Price-Cut

What is pro competition? All our lives we have been taught to call it the "life of trade." Today it brings to mind a vicious selling circle which is called the "death of profits." When two people start trying to cut an equal slice of the same cake we have competition in perhaps its simplest economic form. When one cake-cutter uses a sharper knife than the other we have unbalanced competition. If he uses two knives—one to cut cake with and another to cut holes in the other cake-carver, competition may be eliminated partially or wholly, and a monopoly formed. If a whole swarm of big and little cake-cutters stage a rush at the cake from all sides, the icing or "profit" flies in all directions. Then no one gets enough to eat and cake-cutting ceases to be an art or a business and becomes a "racket." There's too much knife wielding and consequently too much racketeering in the golf business. The pros, by the very nature of their affiliations, can ill afford to rush or crowd too much at the cake table, and they have consequently gotten hungry quicker and stayed empty longer than those bad mannered souls who have racketeered their respective ways.

When is pro competition? It is at work nearly 24 hours a day. Store windows tell logical customers day in and night out

that golf bargains await within. Competitors pursue sales prospects zealously while they read the newspapers, again when they read the magazines, at Christmas time when the pro is in Florida or California.

Golf Equipment Sold Everywhere

Where is pro competition? A question like that would need a long time to answer this year. Not long ago one could have said—the better sporting goods stores and department stores. But today we would be exaggerating very little if we answered, almost everywhere. For this year golf clubs, bags, balls and other equipment are being sold not only by the stores which always sold them but by gasoline filling stations, chain stores, house-to-house canvassers, wholesalers direct, mail order houses, school athletic departments and finally—even by corner grocery stores and bakery shops.

Let us not dwell longer on *Where* is pro competition. Pause a moment and ask "*Who* is this competition?" We have already answered it partially—the proprietors of the "*Where* is competition" are, of course, the "*Who*." But they are not all. Add also the names of those manufacturers who have spent the past two years in a tour of the highways and byways of big and little businesses in an effort to force golf distribution on the playing and about-to-play public in almost every corner of the land. Such manufacturers are just as surely pro competitors as the downtown stores which are selling the goods you would like to be selling.

But *Why* is competition? Surely all pros have not been playing Nero, fiddling away while a few manufacturers and a myriad dealers burned down their market playhouse, put their club concessions on the spot and took the pro's profits for a ride from which the walking back has been hard going. No, not all, but enough, frankly to lead some manufacturers to believe that the game was growing too fast for the pro, that adequate volume was not to be reached through the pro as a sales

outlet. These manufacturers were both right and wrong.

Go back to our cake slicing story for a moment. Those engaged in the slicing a few years ago found to their joy and surprise that no matter how many slices they cut, the cake seemed ever to grow larger. And then one day, wonder of wonders, there were two big cakes instead of one and then finally five or six. One was the "high hat" angel food cake which we'll call the "Country Club Market." Another tempting looking chocolate cake, which had been overlooked for a long time, we'll call "Public Fee and Municipal Market." A nice caramel layer cake came out of the oven which was tagged "College Golf Course Market." Then a tremendous, fluffy-looking mixture assumed huge proportions. It was a queer tasting cake which despite its rather puffed up size was called "Miniature Golf Market" cake. Alongside this hybrid concoction were various other cookies such as "Driving Range Market," "Indoor Golf Market," and finally a delicious looking spice cake called "New Ball."

One would naturally suppose that manufacturers held a funfest all their own, what with so many cakes going the rounds and each one seemingly getting larger and larger. But the manufacturers, too, have their competition—some 10, some 50, and some 100. In the cake-slicing orgy that followed the discovery of the tempting dishes just mentioned, it was a case of too many cooks spoiling the baking. Some wanted to do the slicing before the icing cooled. Some wanted to *sell*, others *give*, and still others *throw* the cake away.

Few manufacturers, if any, bore any ill will toward the golf professional. Competition came headlong as the direct result of the singularly rapid growth of the game of golf itself. There are ten times as many golfers in the U. S. today as were here ten years ago. There are likewise ten times as many manufacturers and ten times as many channels of distribution.

"All even, so far," says the pro, "but I still don't know the *why* of my own competition." "Why," he asks, "is my competition greater today than two years ago when you have just said there are ten times as many of us in golf all the way down the line?"

Panic Touched Pros, Too

The answer to that one lies in the 1929, '30, '31 stock panic. The weak-kneed all climbed aboard a cheap price, poor quality

band-wagon on which the pro could only sit in deepest dejection if he chose to ride at all. The pros looked as nonchalant as possible, smoked whole packs of Murads, played golf with the same gang of sharpshooters day in and day out. And many pros waked up with their market shot steward and a hang-over even more serious than a compound fracture of the 18th amendment.

Competition! We know *what* it is, *when* it is, *where* it is, *who* it is and *why* it is. What then, can be done to overcome it? There may not be a royal road out, but I say in absolute sincerity that opportunities were never better to make real money in golf merchandising.

Most manufacturers whose high grade products are sold by pros would not only rather have the pros as customers in preference to other outlets but would gladly continue to go even farther than at present to protect them and their market from price-cut peddling by stores. They would also be willing to go much farther than at present in protecting the pros, if in turn the pros would cooperate more willingly along the two main lines which are vitally important if the pro is to handle the volume of merchandise to which his position entitles him. I refer to salesmanship and credits.

A pro can be a good sportsman and yet use real honest-to-goodness business salesmanship methods in soliciting his members. He can develop tact, be unobtrusively helpful and sell his members without offending them no matter how ritzy his club, if he will just make the effort. Try it and see how it works.

Secondly, a pro must pay his bills to merit protection from manufacturers. I know that credit is a touchy topic of discussion but it is vital. The pro's credit was never so good as today. It has improved tremendously, but there is still an occasional back-spin on checks. There are still too many past-due accounts. Take discounts on time, and save money; saving it these days is earning it. On the manufacturer's side, unless he can collect he can't manufacture. Credit is a courtesy and should not be abused. I am a great booster for pros as the *big business golfers* of the future. If they play business as fairly as they play golf they can achieve wonders.

Here's Where Pro Has Edge

The pro, despite all of the dark clouds on the sales horizon, is in a peculiarly ad-

vantageous position to pitch in and win back the merchandising market which downtown competition has been "selling short." The pro can do it because he can offer what the dealer cannot. I'll mention a few ways:

1—*Know your members.* Spend more time with the dubs. If they have "stage fright" when you are around, get friendly and overcome it. Make a friend of the stranger and a customer of the friend. Don't play too often with the same clique. Play the membership list as often as you can. The better you know the players at your course the harder it will be for them to buy elsewhere.

2—*Shop service.* Furnish a type of shop service that is so good your members can't help but notice and comment on it. Never let them forget that it is their club and that you are *their* pro. Appeal to their loyalty. Loyalty is an old-fashioned virtue but it is still in vogue.

3—*Lessen competition* by absolutely refusing to stock the clubs of any manufacturer whose clubs are being constantly sold elsewhere at slaughtered prices. Don't be afraid to write a manufacturer if you think you are getting a raw deal. That will do you lots more good than airing ill will and all your troubles weeks or months later at a district tournament.

4—*Sell through the eye.* Keep a neat looking shop and put up plenty of signs. Use home-made signs for "Specials," keep your racks in attractive shape, label prices plainly and post a placard to the effect that you stand back of what you sell and that service just begins when the sale of goods ends. These things will make selling easier, will stimulate a desire to own, will win confidence in your favor.

5—*Do not be misled any longer by the cry for price buying.* Have nerve to stock quality merchandise and you can sell it. The in-born desire for quality goods is coming to the front again with a vengeance. Be ahead of the others in your community to sense that desire. The American consumer is still basically a distinctly sterling article. He likes to buy where the standards are highest. Men and women like to have you over estimate their incomes and spending capacities—if you do it tactfully. They will try to live up to what you take them to be.

6—*Be the golf "doctor" at your club, but be sure to feel your members' pulses, not*

your own. Stock and sell what you feel sure will suit *their* needs. Too many pros are loading up with equipment which fit their game but which do not fit their customers. Don't be afraid to have honest opinions and express them about the type of equipment a member needs. Without being a kibitzer you, because you have the knowledge your competitors haven't, can have your say and give your reasons. The take-it-or-leave-it attitude has sent many a prospective customer in to call on some frizzled headed clerk who never saw a golf green but who will tell him that "Woozit" clubs are just like the ones Bobby Jones uses. And the clerk makes a sale that you should have had.

7—*Develop the women's and youngster's markets every day.* They will both be big money makers. Also it might be well to give more attention to occasional group lessons for men, women and children. Perhaps one out of five of these lessons could be given free. You are the exponents of the only sport that is enjoyed by both sexes from age six to the 90's. Why not make a few suggestions to parents that their children learn golf.

8—*Keep close in touch with new developments in equipment.* These are constantly being brought to the attention of the golfing public. Your club membership has the right to expect you to investigate new products, try them out, recommend them if they are good and reject them if they fail to make the grade.

"BUY IT WHOLESALE" is misery to all American retailers. So the pros have no reason to think they are the worst sufferers. A. E. Ward, Kansas pro, tells how far this wholesale buying evil reaches, in reciting the case of a salesman asking him what sporting goods store in town was run by Mr. X. Ward replied that X was not in the sporting goods business, being in a line just about as far removed as one could imagine.

X had written in for quantity prices, intended to buy for himself and a few friends, alleging he was a dealer. Ward suggests that the manufacturers make closer investigation of these inquiries from unknown parties and thus give the pros and other retailers the protection due them and which is necessary for the maintenance of manufacturers' legitimate distribution channels.