

Pros Plan to Avoid Costly Penalty of Dead Stocks

By HERB GRAFFIS

ACTION OF the Illinois PGA in effecting transfer of slow-moving shop merchandise between its members in August was significant to manufacturers who already are beginning to wonder if 1933 will be the sharp and deep pain in a tender spot that 1932 proved to be.

The Illinois enterprise followed along the lines of the work pros in the Kansas City section have done and which was described in earlier issues of GOLFDOM. In brief, the move means minimizing pro-shop inventories and getting the shelves and bills cleaned out for a fresh start next season. Department stores and other golf goods retailing outlets, exclusive of the pro-shops, have had a disappointing time of it trying to get rid of the excess inventories of manufacturers that were picked up at bargain prices. Apparently people suspect the cheapness of "down town" stuff, for many reports indicate that sets at \$60 were highly popular even in the store sales.

On the other hand, pro-shop sales conducted in association with Spalding, Wilson, U. S. Rubber, Hagen and Kroydon pepped up the unit number of sales made through the pros in what might otherwise have been a sad season. This simply means that the pros, by taking full advantage of the remainder of the active playing season and early holiday shopping, can be all set to anchor themselves stronger in the driver's seat of the golf market during 1933 while the competitive stores retain in stock some of the distress merchandise of 1932.

Pros and Makers Joined

What this continued sluggishness in the store buying of the manufacturers' output is going to mean to the pros is easy to surmise. It will mean that the smart manufacturers and the smart pros will be working together stronger than ever before. On the pros' part there will be an extension of the lively selling effort that has grown sharply during the last three years and a strengthening of the pro busi-

ness men's effort to reduce manufacturers' credit losses and high selling expenses in the pro field.

The manufacturers may be expected to show a continuance of their ambitions to control retailing so the pros' legitimate profit and the pros' due share of the market will not be subjected to unwarranted peril. Difficulty of production control on golf goods and factory facilities geared to the ravenous demand of the 1930 market have given manufacturers plenty of headaches and monthly nightmares of red spots dancing in front of their eyes. What the manufacturers looked to the stores for in retailing was unloading frozen and obsolete stuff to the fee and municipal course players. Especially in the smaller towns have manufacturers considered stores rather than pro-shops as outlets during the past.

Fee Courses Offer Outlet

Examination of the personnel records of fee and municipal courses during 1930 and 1931 revealed plenty of reason for this policy. Going over such records with a number of experienced pros who were acquainted with local situations one would arrive at the conclusion that at least half of the pay-play courses had no pros and in too many of the cases where so-called pros were located these men, or boys, were pitifully lacking in qualifications.

GOLFDOM'S investigation of the pay-play course field made earlier this year indicated that although such courses were only approximately 27% of all the country's courses they would have about half the total volume of play for 1931 and 1932.

Obviously then, this would be the field for the manufacturer trying to turn his surplus into cash at reduced prices. But, as a general thing, the stores have flopped in getting this trade and the pros have awakened in time to command it. In seeking an explanation, two answers seem logical. One is that the fee or municipal course job formerly considered beneath the station of a man accustomed to a private

club connection now is recognized as a highly desirable spot for a smart pro merchant who will work and who gets the opportunity to do so under any reasonable sort of an arrangement that profits both him and his employer. The other answer is that store retail selling of golf goods usually can't stack up within three brassie shots of pro-shop selling where the average competent and alert man is on the job. At the store is a clerk who gets his clerk's pay so long as some business is coming in. At the pro-shop is a fellow who knows that if he doesn't sell the right thing, at the right price and time, to the right person, the wife and kids and he are going to have to do without something. It makes all the difference in the planetary system.

Pros at private clubs have reached out and gathered in a fair amount of pay-play course business this year. Easing up on trade tournament and greens-privilege restrictions at the private clubs have brought new trade to the private club pro-shop. Free lessons given with purchase of clubs, club sweepstakes in addition to the ball sweepstake events, punch-boards when permitted, and all other sorts of trade inducements have been used by the alert pros to keep their 1932 business much nearer normal levels than has been the case with the nation's business in general or the sporting goods business in particular.

Sales to Women Helped

Women's continued growing interest in golf got more sales and service attention than ever before from the pros. A few of the brainy experimenters sold expensive matched sets to women by getting them to buy the mid-iron, mashie, mashie-niblic and niblic early in the season and then selling them the rest of the set month by month after the shock of the first outlay of money was forgotten.

More interest in instruction naturally went along with this necessity of fighting off the sheriff by keeping up shop sales. The pros were impressed with the close connection between competent instruction and business-like shop operation in 1932 more than during any other season. Club officials and members who saw any indications of sluggishness in either one of these essentials of pro department operation were not at all backward with comment about the availability of talent to replace the indifferent ones. This, of course, put a wholesome amount of pepper into places where it did good.

There remains a good month for clean-outs by most of the pros in the northern and central states. With the boys quite aware of how they have struggled right side up through the worst business season in American commercial history, it is to be expected that they will complete the job of getting an early start for 1933. The indifferent brother who expects to coast through a hard winter or the weak one who thinks he is whipped now had better snap out of it during the few weeks of the dying season, or else . . .

In the meanwhile the bright laddies will be getting set so they can plan for 1933 without the handicap of hangover from errors of omission or commission during this departing season.

Golf Ball Liquidation Gives Bright 1933 Promise

REPORTS FROM golf ball makers indicate that liquidation of surplus stocks of golf balls has been rather satisfactorily accomplished despite generally sluggish action in sporting goods market.

Stocks of the old "larger and lighter" ball with which the makers were stuck plenty by the official mandate making that ball practically obsolete have been cleared out at prices as low as \$1.20 a dozen retail. Although the pros felt the effect of these clearances, they were able to buy balls at prices which enabled them to meet this competition and bring ball business back to the pro shop. Most serious sufferers from the clearance sales were the department stores that had been cutting into the pro ball business by knocking off a nickel or a dime from the pro shop standard prices of well known balls. Prices got so low these stores lost their exclusive command of the cut price ball market.

There have been some outspoken statements to the effect that the ball manufacturers won't get caught again by a combination of legislation and enthusiasm. Early forecasts of manufacturing schedules show a conservatism that may make a shortage or delay in shipment of leading brands of balls not altogether improbable in 1933. A lot worse things could happen to both the manufacturers and pros.

Another detail of the situation that promises the ball market won't repeat on its 1932 misery soon is the fact that smaller manufacturers of balls got caught over the barrel this year and were paddled to death. That such a fate was possible