

SALES LED BY PROS

LOOKING at the scoreboard, it appears the pros have turned in by far the best performance of golf retailing during the depression. Now that the depression looks to be ended and the golf business is on the climb, thoughtful pros are beginning to discuss among themselves and with manufacturers the future of golf merchandising.

Perhaps the beating administered to the golf goods manufacturing and selling interests has been sufficient to impress deeply several essential lessons, among which might be mentioned:

(a) that pros are the most logical, profitable outlet for golf merchandise of dependable quality,

(b) that, for the preceding reason, pro business should be strengthened,

(c) that the golf business has been heir to several ridiculous and extravagant merchandising practices that can, and should be, eliminated.

We can start with the definite statement that store selling is mainly price selling. Comparatively little promotion of golf play ever has been done by stores. Pros know that on comparable quality they can meet store prices. Therefore, whatever price concession is made on golf goods doesn't mean a genuine bargain for the public. However, price cuts made by stores do usually come out of the manufacturers' incomes. But on this count you have to figure in the PGA ball deal which has put the PGA in enviable financial shape and proved to be a highly successful expedient in bringing the pro organization safely through the depression. As the ball deal now stands, a pro who is at a club where he can sell any appreciable quantity of golf balls can pay his association dues, insurance and other benefits, and have an additional profit from this PGA ball arrangement.

Balls Last Longer Today

The ball business is in peculiar status. Golf balls, which used to represent about half the income for pros, now are being used almost twice as long as they were in 1928. Tougher covers that keep white despite hard play account for the reduction in ball sales per rounds played. While working harder to keep up their volume of ball business, the pros have been forced by the

ball situation to give more attention to sales of clubs, lessons and bags to maintain their incomes. How the future is going to be effected by the recent improvements in golf balls no pro is prepared to say, although some hazard the guess that the golf ball business will turn out to be like the tire business. Fifteen years ago a set of tires that would run 10,000 miles was considered great. Now, a set is expected to last almost the life of the car.

Several pros have told GOLFDOM they educate members from playing with golf balls until lost by making ring tests of balls that have been used a round or more. If a ball has been injured in play so it is slightly out of round as shown by the ring test but not apparent to the player's eyes, that player is a willing buyer of new balls and content with a fair round's service from a ball.

Volume Up in Bag Sales

Application of pro pressure on bag sales has been an interesting success for two reasons. One is that the boys have sold good bags because the store ads on cheap bags this season have been light. The stores so nearly ruined the bag business that there wasn't much chance for store fireworks in bag sales this year. The other reason is that the pros have set their improved merchandising methods to work in the bag sales push this year.

However, it is in the sale of golf clubs that the pros have taken command of the golf goods merchandising this year and given the manufacturers plenty to think about.

Manufacturers generally have been in the habit of thinking that golf club selling is over by the middle of July. Pro performance this year has definitely demonstrated that idea is the bunk. Logically there could be no foundation for the idea that golf clubs couldn't be sold after that

time, inasmuch as over 40% of the year's rounds of golf are played after August 1. People don't buy new models of golf clubs every year and they don't hold off after July because they are afraid radical new models will come out next year. Even at good clubs the average life of clubs in bag storage is above four years.

But the practice in the club manufacturing business generally has been to stop all consumer advertising selling effort after July first. If the pros had followed that lead the golf business would be in a hell of a fix trying to stage a good comeback. Pros did not follow the example of the majority of manufacturers because pros have to live during the winter on what they can make during every possible day of the entire golf-playing season. The reason pros are able to live is because they can, and do, sell.

During August and September this year the pros will again demonstrate what they are doing to command the golf business and the earnest commendation of first class manufacturers. Pro business up to mid-season caught most manufacturers unawares. Production schedules are closer to sales than they used to be. Consequently many deliveries were late and shipments of clubs dropped in on pros after the first rush was over and manufacturers' help on consumer advertising had eased off. The pros are going the rest of the route on their own and during this month and next you are going to see the finest pro jobs of selling service to both player and manufacturer you have seen since golf has been a business.

Season's Start No Time for Clearances

By disposing of these late shipments the pros are giving notice that one of the most unique and idiotic practices in golf goods merchandising has about run its course. That practice is the time-dishonored and deadly one of starting off the season with "clearance" sales of discontinued models through stores. The manufacturers have stated, and not without plenty of foundation in truth during times past, that returns of pro shipments late in the fall have stocked them with this merchandise for next spring disposal through stores.

Lately, though, manufacturers have been commenting favorably on pros growing up as businessmen to the extent that an order means an order for which payment must be made. Rarely now does a first class pro businessman show ignorance of

common business practice to the extent of shipping back merchandise he ordered but couldn't sell. That improvement on the part of the pros, and the closer co-ordination of manufacturing operations and sales in the clubmaking plants (in evidence from delay in shipping unexpectedly large orders) pretty well disposes of the excuses for clearance sales in the spring.

To be a business, like any good business, golf must have whatever clearance sales are necessary late in the season. The smart pros are operating on this basis already on slow moving stock and doing well by it. It's a lesson that the manufacturers and stores can learn to the advantage of all concerned.

Pros have been strenuously engaged in market development for golf and in this direction their work is increasing rather than diminishing after the first flush of enthusiasm. The pro idea of promotion is to make sales on a growing, permanent basis rather than be content with temporary interest. The pro effort in this direction not only warrants, but demands the fullest co-operation and protection of manufacturers. Fortunately, the leading manufacturers are aware of the value to them of this pro promotion service. No trick discount store cards passed around to school kids, who the pros have taught golf for nothing, are going to be allowed and any store circulating such cards will be unable to act as dealer for any of the first class golf lines, so representative manufacturing officials pledge.

Outstanding result of the depression has been that the pros, by their performance, have earned the right to be rated as leading businessmen in golf retailing. It is a position won by hard, brainy work and one that requires even more work to maintain, now that good times are coming back and the hit-and-run competition is getting active again.

Wheeling Tourney Dates Switched—Acting on suggestions of pros, Jack Grimes, sec. of the \$1,000 tourney to be played at Wheeling, W. Va., as part of the Wheeling Centennial celebration, has switched dates to Friday, Aug. 21 and Saturday, Aug. 22. Tournament is 36 holes on Friday and 18 on Saturday. Entry fee is waived on invited pros. Prize distribution is as suggested by PGA tournament committee. A select field is in prospect. Pros desiring invitations should write Grimes at the Wheeling Steel Corp.