

# PROS BUILD COMMAND OF MARKET

By HERB GRAFFIS

**I**N TWO sessions your correspondent recently had with sales managers for manufacturers there was sunshine for pros. These two fellows formerly had been doing business with store and other retail outlets. Now they have switched the big play to pros. They are fellows quite well known in golf merchandising, so the news of their conversion came to pros as a surprise. Pros have asked: "Do you think the guys really are sold on the pro market for keeps?"

The answer that I'm convinced is right is that these men and their companies now have the pros firmly in the Number One spot in their plans, for the sufficient reason that through pro retail outlets the volume and profits in golf goods distribution of the future will be much stronger than ever before.

Substantially, both interviews were the same. Both fellows started out by saying that manufacturers' profits keep getting smaller and smaller on non-pro outlets because store buyers don't go much for the better grade stuff in which there is some manufacturing profit of consequence, and that store buyers are merciless traders who work one manufacturer against the other until, in intense competition profits are eroded away.

What awakened both men to the command pros now have in the golf market was the increasing activity of good pro merchants in municipal and daily fee course jobs. Private club members' business is well in the pros' hands, but until a couple of years ago the stores were getting the bulk of business from the golfing public that was not attached to private clubs.

The way the market is divided now, about the only spot where the pros aren't in the driver's seat is in smaller towns where there are no pros.

"When you mention store outlets," said one of these sales managers, "you are too general. The outlets besides the pro are department stores, sporting goods stores, men's stores, automobile supply stores, radio stores, drug stores, premium outfits, catalog houses and even news stands and filling stations so far as golf balls are concerned. Cut that half of the golf business

up into 9 or 10 parts and in each of the parts you have a volume so small and so bitterly competed for that the pro business with its disadvantages still looks great."

## From Indifference to Going Business

This sales manager continued: "You GOLFDOM fellows can be given credit for an assist in the pros' build-up to command of this business. I can remember not so long ago when the pro was pretty generally considered a fellow who sang the blues at everything, was completely indifferent to his credit and sold only when some one came in and insisted on buying."

"I remember reading in GOLFDOM with a shock that the pro credit rating was good for small retailers and that pros whose credit was A1 were doing their best to educate and discipline their comrades who, for one reason or another, didn't have good credit or good merchandising methods. It seems to me that there has been a pro pride in business standing aroused. This is one of the very important factors in making pros masters of the situation.

## Don't Blame Woes on Makers

"Pros can beef and complain all they want to with real or fanciful complaints about the deals they get from manufacturers, but the truth is that no manufacturer ever gave the pros the short end of the deal like the pros have given themselves. The pros really got smart when they began to pay more attention to running their business, instead of trying to run the manufacturing business. Some very smart and experienced men have been losing money in the manufacturing business during the past four years, so it isn't the spot for pros who don't know what the score is in big manufacturing and distribution enterprises to mess in and try to run things."

An interesting development in these two chats was that both sales managers re-

marked that pro volume is beginning to look like it will be by a good margin the largest unit volume of clubs and balls as well as the largest dollar and cents volume. The pros have had the edge in dollars and cents volume for the majority of the last 10 years because of pro sale of quality merchandise, but the flood of cheap stuff in some years has given non-pro outlets the lead in units of sales.

One of the sales managers commented: "Take the situation in Chicago, for instance. Jerry Glynn and Tommy Armour have big clubs. Both of them sell considerably more good quality clubs and balls than does Marshall Field's, which is the leading high-class non-pro outlet. And Field's is doing a good store business in golf!

"The same condition exists in Cleveland, where four of the district's pros sell more good quality stuff than all store outlets combined.

"Any store that would be able to sell the same proportion of its prospective customers that the average hustling pro sells would have a tremendous volume of golf business. The stores just can't do it because the average pros are better merchants of golf goods and are in an infinitely better spot to sell."

Both men brought out the point that the usual salesman in a store golf department hasn't the training or the temperament to sell quality golf merchandise. He has been trained to take orders from people who are brought into the store by a cut-price ad. When it comes to selling something that the customer can buy with lasting satisfaction and on which the dealer and the manufacturer both can make a fair, undisturbed profit, the store salesman just isn't qualified.

That reference to the large percentage of the possible market sold by pros, as against store sales compared to the store's possible market was a new angle to us. We asked one of the fellows what he considered a pro's possible market for a year.

"I'd say that par on a pro's annual club sales," he replied, "was the number of active players divided by the number of years that the average set of clubs could be expected to rate as first-class modern equipment. For example; if a pro had 200 active players at his club he could figure on a good possible chance of selling each member a new set of clubs every four years. I say four years because the improvements in head design and construc-

tion and in shafts are so steady and pronounced that clubs four years old are costing the average player plenty of strokes and pleasure. The pro doesn't need to think he is pushing the buyer too strong to sell him a new set every four years. He's doing the buyer a favor. As a matter of fact, the way clubs have been improved in the last two or three years, a set every three years wouldn't be out of line. Well, on the four year basis that makes an annual sales par of 50 sets for the pro at the 200 player club. It may look too high for you, but think it over and you will be able to name plenty of pros who are doing about that well or better."

#### Holding the Lead

All of this listened so good to GOLFDOM that we began asking where the sour places were or if the pros were set in the lead for keeps, in the judgment of these sales managers.

The answers gave the pros something to think about. What the commentators had to say was virtually this: "The leaders always have more responsibilities than the followers, and the pros are going to be no exceptions. They will have to continue minding their own business to protect and extend their lead.

"We see that some of the sections of the PGA are having meetings where the manufacturers can attend and display merchandise to the pros. That is a good thing because the cost of getting to pros and selling them is heavier than that of reaching the downtown stores whose buyers are in the habit of coming around and inspecting the manufacturers samples. Sectional PGA educational work and supervising work on pro credit will have to be continued and some help given pros in collecting their own bills from members.

"There is no doubt of the pro making the market and making a brand so desirable that the stores want it. No store has been able to do the same thing in golf. Therefore it does look shortsighted for pros to try to work up local private brands for competition in the price market when the pros already have available nationally known merchandise in the lower prices which can be sold without confusing their members with a flock of brands, thus leaving the stores a better opening for pushing some private brand stuff.

"The quality market is well in the pros' hands because it exists mainly at the better clubs where the best pro business men are."