

# PROS SEE **BIG** YEARS AHEAD

By HERB GRAFFIS

*. . . and they think 1936  
has treated them pretty well*

**T**HIS year showed one of the biggest single year's increase in sales volume that many pros recall. Though greatly cheered by the improvement, pros are not inclined to coast and by a much larger amount of fall ordering than has been done for many years past, have revealed expectations of a continued improvement in 1937.

Studied foresight and planning brought returns to pros in 1936. The old idea that club selling is practically at end after the middle of June was not in evidence at many of the shops and it can be said that considerable of the pro net increase in club sales this year came from the volume sold in July, August and later. The pro performance in this respect has been enlightening to thoughtful manufacturers and, it is hoped, may have some effect in restricting the questionable practice of starting the golf selling season with strongly advertised cut-price sales.

There is a definite change in attitude of pros toward competition. Previously it was generally the case that the pros held all store sales in suspicion. Now, according to reports from competent pro observers in all parts of the country, it is not the legitimate stores that furnish whatever competition is to be feared, but the employees' co-op stores, the untruthful

advertisers, and the trick discount outlets. In every section except the New York metropolitan district, pros report that the old major warfare with cut-price stores has ended, with the pros as victors. There wasn't enough money in golf for the stores to continue fighting a losing battle. The pro command of the better grade club business, even in the New York sector, is admitted. Circus-style advertising, of doubtful honesty, has the New York situation disturbing to pros, especially on ball sales.

There always is difficulty in appraising the pro merchandising situation accurately because, as pros themselves know, sales will show wide differences between two clubs that may apparently have the same class of membership and the same character of pro merchandising service at work. However, the following reports from pros who have been asked to give the general close-up on conditions in their districts give as precise a picture as it is possible to get.

## From Grange Alves, Cleveland:

"There has been a decided improvement over any of the last four years throughout our section. My own year was the best since 1931.

"I believe we will always have downtown competition to combat and see no remedy. Manufacturers have to live the same as pros and if the pros can't sell the tail-end numbers or discontinued lines with which they are over-stocked, the makers can't eat them and are bound to dispose of them wherever they can. I don't blame them for finding a market.

"There will be many who will disagree with me but they don't place themselves in the other fellow's position. A willingness to look at things clearly and fairly from the other man's side of the fence would settle practically every controversy

in pro merchandising, and make the adjustment profitably.

"If industry continues its strong comeback, I look for pro business in 1937 that will be up to the old-time standard, but we have to have general business in good condition before we can get ours."

## From Fred Brand, Pittsburgh:

"Considering bad weather in the spring and a late start there has been far more golf played this year during open weather than in any other year since 1930 around here. Sales have shown an increase at the pro-shops.

"Store competition is decidedly less and the inroad of employees' co-op buying has not been as noticeable this season as formerly.

"What seems to explain the pro business

recovery is the pro himself. Pros have made great strides in gaining members' confidence and have convinced members they can get better deals from the pros than from the stores.

"Continuance of the present business revival means a very bright 1937 for pro business."

#### From Ed. Newkirk, Lincoln, Neb.:

"From May 8 to September 26 we went without rain and when it did come, it came on a Saturday. We had temperature of 100 degrees or more starting June 25 and continuing for 68 days. A few blows, moderately described as "dust" storms, were added to our weather.

"Weather is what the pros in this territory consider competition and it's tougher to buck than any other obstacle to pro sales. Stock food crops were sharply reduced by the drought, which does not justify any great optimism for next year's pro business. However those members and pros in this section who were not 'ploughed under' this year are a doughty collection and continue to expect an improvement, if only because misfortune is bound to get tired of batting them down."

#### From Willie Hunter, Southern California:

"Play has increased tremendously this year and sales in even greater proportion.

"Down-town store competition is not serious. It's the chain drug stores and the numerous non-club semi-pros who do the chiselling out here. Pros have come through the storm better than the sporting goods stores and the sports departments of established stores. These legitimate retailers seem to be pretty much at the mercy of the price cutters who use golf as an intermittent side-line and may be practically on the way out, which probably will leave the manufacturers with a miserable retailing situation. The Southern California PGA, with foresight, is working to protect its own members and their golfers against merchandising developments that will curtail the progress and pleasure of the game.

"Our greatest need at present is greater co-operation from manufacturers and their agents. Selling to questionable accounts is inexcusable, especially after attention has been called to such cases. In our section we probably have 30 so-called pros who solicit business at cut prices. These men do a good volume, which probably is the reason they are sold at wholesale. If so-called pros without a stocked place of

business were not sold merchandise for resale, a larger part of the chiselling on pro-grade merchandise would be eliminated.

"If manufacturers would take action to keep merchandise out of the hands of these men, this retail volume would be placed in the legitimate channels and there would be less reason for sporting goods stores to cut prices to compete.

"Employees' co-op buying is at its worst at the movie studios where they buy practically everything at 15% to 20% off on orders from studio purchasing agents. The raw part of this is that these people are well able to pay full retail price. The pros pay the full price to see movies.

"The Southern California section keeps working on our troubles and at least has the satisfaction of preventing the increase of adverse conditions. We work in close cooperation with the Amateur body on all matters which touch either body and are receiving more encouragement than ever before.

"Our Bulletin is a great success and has brought to the attention of club presidents, newspapers and manufacturers' agents many matters that previously have been out of sight.

"We believe earnestly in having our own house in order before we attempt to correct others. Our own members are promptly put on the carpet for infringement of rules or conduct that reflect on the association.

"The PGA has gained much strength during the depression and as a body should take close cognizance of manufacturers' selling policies. More constructive work along merchandising lines should be done and such work should be given added thought and plenty of discussion at annual meetings, instead of the routine bushwa.

"It has been said that we in Southern California are more fortunately placed than in other communities. If this is so, it is only because we keep hammering for improvements and give more than the average PGA officer's time to fighting any attempt to increase unfair competition. Other sections are reconciled to certain conditions being established and take the line of least resistance.

"Sales promotion and the elimination of unfair practices should be nationally directed and sectionally carried out.

"Despite all these things, we as a bunch can do pretty good individual jobs of taking care of our playing public by getting into their good graces. Golfers appreciate,

as everyone does, little courtesies and services and the more they know what you do for them the quicker the sales jump."

#### Walter Pursey, Pacific Northwest:

"There has been a slight increase in play, but there is still lots of room for improvement. Club and ball sales are noticeably better, especially in the better grade of clubs. Out here bag sales haven't shown the increase of other sections because of companies that are not normally in bag retailing, buying quantities of cheap bags and selling them at 10% profit or less. The golfer finds out soon that he has been gyped in materials and workmanship, but the damage has been done to the pro. The cheap stuff kills the reputation and sales of the entire line and eventually the manufacturer learns that it costs him dear to sell through outlets that have no excuse for being in golf retailing and certainly no lasting interest in the golfer.

"Outlook for 1937 is promising in this section. We all are confident of a steady improvement."

#### Al Watrous, Detroit:

"Play has been heavier than any season since 1930. Club, ball and bag sales were good last year and better this year. With the improvement, competition from downtown stores, "buy-it-wholesale" and employees' co-ops also has increased, but I believe the Detroit district pros have suffered less than other sections from this competition. Our men do some very smart and prompt work, individually and collectively, in outwitting this competition instead of just crying about it.

"Outstanding progress in this district has been toward school instruction. Group instruction at public schools and at public and private courses has been featured, especially with juniors. The Michigan PGA free golf instruction classes with a publicity tie-up with the Detroit News was a grand success in developing new golfers.

"The outlook for 1937 is very bright. Improved business conditions in this district and the National Open for Oakland Hills are bound to stir more golf interest.

"Attractive displays of good clubs at our shops are a feature of the districts pro operations. Our men are especially careful about selling clubs exactly fitted to member's requirements and seeing that a fine new bag is fitted with fine new playing equipment. Our pros have educated their members to discuss golf equip-

ment with lively interest and display new clubs with pride.

"Women's play has shown a big increase at both private and public courses. Women are carrying a far more complete and better quality playing outfit than ever before. Our pros have taught the women to realize good equipment plays an important part in the game. Members are relying on the advice of pros more than ever before and the pros are justifying and increasing this confidence."

#### Dick May, New England:

"Play has been very good in this section although Rhode Island pro business has felt the effects of horse racing. We are running well ahead of last year in sales. 'Buy-it-wholesale' deals this year have seldom come to our attention. On first class golf merchandise I never hear of down-town competition underselling the pros, so I think that New England has little complaint in this respect.

"The New England pro tournaments have been remarkably well patronized this year; prize money in the weekly pro-amateur events averaging well over \$100.

"I firmly believe 1937 will be the pros' best year since the crash."

#### Elmer Biggs, Illinois:

"In early 1936 there was a marked increase in golf interest. Then along came extremely hot weather to put the brakes on golf. However, in the face of the adverse weather conditions, there was an enthusiastic buyers' market. Had there been normal weather conditions, I believe the game would have shown an increase in the number of rounds over 1928, as it was headed toward that prediction this spring.

"Surprising to me was the demand for best quality merchandise. In club sales, golfers who formerly purchased cheaper merchandise or department store bargains this year demanded the manufacturer's best. This also was very much in evidence in the ball sales. Members who have been 50-cent ball buyers for the past few years changed to the top-grade balls. However, manufacture figures will probably show that ball sales did not increase in direct ratio to the number of rounds played, probably due to the increased durability of the vulcanized cover, and that for the three dry months it was practically impossible to lose a ball on the average course.

"Competitors of the pro-shop have real-

ized the necessity of legitimate profits on golf merchandise sold to the point where there are fewer and fewer bargain sales on high grade, legitimate new model merchandise.

"Most down town stores that handle golf equipment in their valuable spaces are now working with the pros to eliminate the buy-at-wholesale, phoney discount, or cooperative buying arrangements. Cooperative selling will become the biggest menace in this business. Large corporations that are selling their employees on a cooperative basis will realize their mistake and perhaps correct it only when their product is being sold the same way. I cannot believe that executives of large manufacturing corporations would want to cut out the legitimate dealer and sell direct to the consumer.

"A few years ago pros had the difficult job of showing the stores the necessity of a reasonable profit on golf merchandise. Today the stores and pros have a common cause in licking the buy-at-wholesale and cooperative buying arrangements. It shouldn't be hard to convince golf manufacturers that the proper outlet is through legitimate merchants and not to cooperative buyers who at best are hand-to-mouth, unsatisfactory outlets.

"Somehow or other the pros have been able to work their way out of difficulties, and I believe they will handle this situation.

"Naturally, I believe the future of the golf business lies in Junior promotion. The day is past for golf to be known as an old man's game and the youngster of today will be the customer of tomorrow.

"My own inventory is low and I am told this is true in most pro-shops and with a normal amount of interest in the game there should be an increase in volume next year, particularly from the Juniors. The promotion done in the past few years with Juniors will begin to show not only in the number of rounds played, but in the sale of merchandise."

**John R. Inglis, New York:**

"Play in our section has increased this year. Lessons and sales are well ahead of last year.

"Along with better business for the pros has come serious competition from stores, wholesale deals and 'what have you.' Worst competition is that of stores that advertise dishonestly. Manufacturer laxity in selling at wholesale prices to people not entitled to such prices is about doing away

with the established retail prices. This is forcing the day when the boys will realize they are being used as an advertising medium and not as retailers entitled to a fair and protected profit. It is compelling us to tell what price we will pay instead of being just buyers at whatever price is set by makers. Instead of advertising others' clubs and balls we should have our own brands and handle the other merchandise on special order when we can get the right price for it. The boys in this section have done a pretty good job on PGA ball sales which shows that if they have a good thing they can sell it."

**William Robertson, Wisconsin:**

"Play was brisk up to July 15 when the players began to get tired of hard, dry courses and the heat. After Labor Day play again increased with the courses in good shape. Play generally has been greater than any other season since 1931. Pro sales seem to be about 35% better than in 1935. The buy-it-wholesale problem is bad but it is up to each pro to fight it the best way he can. All the pro is asking for is a square deal. The manufacturers that give him that — whether they are pro-only or not—are the ones who will get the future business from pros, and the others are on the way out.

"Prospects for 1937 are good. Players are not looking for price so much now. They are more interested in quality in every item sold in the pro-shop."

**Dewey Longworth, Northern California:**

"I find clubs that had a tough time and took in members for payment of dues only now have added an initiation fee, and some of them have a waiting list. The condition of most clubs has improved, and are on the way to a sound operating budget.

"Play has increased in this section this year about twenty per cent. Club, ball, and bag sales have increased about twenty per cent.

"We haven't been bothered much with down-town store competition; our greatest competition comes from the 'buy-it-wholesale, and the so-called cooperative buying of corporation employees.

"The outstanding pro progress was in four clubs in this section giving the sale of balls to their professionals.

"The outlook for pro business in 1937 is bright. I think we should promote junior golf—create interest by holding different kinds of tournaments. And a field



that has been overlooked is that of having professionals appear before luncheon clubs, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Cooperative, Lions, Dads, athletic clubs; also women's clubs of all kinds.

"I did this kind of work in Kansas City in 1926, appearing at these luncheon clubs as their speaker, getting on a large table, demonstrating the swing, telling them about the fundamentals of the swing, answering their questions, and in general, entertaining, instructing and interesting them in golf.

"Out here I have appeared at a Kiwanis Club meeting and gave them a talk on the caddies of the United States, the amount paid them in one year, what golf taught them physically, morally and mentally, and the aid provided by golf in helping poor boys get an education.

"These talks create a desire for men to play golf. These men need the exercise, and can afford to play."

#### Ads Get Stores into Jam—

##### Pros Practically in Tears

**P**ROFESSIONALS in the New York metropolitan district suffered inexpressible shock recently upon learning that two New York stores, that also deal in and vigorously advertise golf merchandise, were subjected to the grave indignity of having their advertising questioned.

B. V. D. Co., Inc. was issued an injunction in the United States District court restraining the Davega-City Radio Co. "from advertising bathing suits in such a manner as to confuse the purchaser regarding the product offered for sale and its corresponding price."

R. H. Macy & Co. was cited by the Federal Trade commission on charges that Macy advertising made it appear that Macy's double-edge deluxe blades were made under the direct supervision of Macy's at every stage, whereas the blades were stock blades sold to retailers generally by the Utility Blade Corp.

Heart-broken pros hastened to assure divers and sundry that such unfortunate references to instances of poetic license or mere accidents should never, never be associated with some of the store advertising of golf clubs and balls that appear in the New York newspapers. Well, hardly ever. Those store ads of golf equipment that some question are bits of whimsey that bring some romance into a drab world and certainly should not be

discouraged by having tough and cynical guys yelling for the coppers to come in and make a fair decision.

The pros, perfectly miserable because quibblers were putting up a squawk, are contemplating making early and earnest pleas to their congressmen so that neither the Federal trade commission or federal courts will be permitted to take from the trusting sucker the privilege of striking out on a fast-breaking, wide advertising curve. A group photo of N. Y. Met. district pros and amateur golfers who have confirmed by investigations the truth of golf merchandise bargain ads run by some New York stores appears on page 9,180 of this issue.

#### Annual PGA Get-Together Due at Chicago's Congress, Nov. 9-12

**A**NNUAL meeting of the PGA will be held at Congress hotel, Chicago, Ill., November 9 to 12, with the first day's session for the executive committee.

The meeting promises to be one of the liveliest in the pro association's history. End of the depression finds that treasurer Mackie will proudly report the PGA in its strongest position financially and in number of members. The PGA ball deal resulted in bringing to the members an amount averaging the annual dues of the members as well as augmenting the association's treasury substantially. Among matters to be discussed at the Chicago meeting is extension of the PGA trademark license to apply to approved clubs, bags and other items of playing equipment and apparel.

The ball, as a result of an energetic merchandising and advertising campaign, got the association into the Big Business class with problems that accompany the profits. At the annual session the various phases of pro merchandising will get a thorough going-over, together with other leading matters such as pro promotion of golf and protection of the profits ensuing tournament bureau activities, club relations and further co-ordination of sections. In the latter respect effective work has been done by President Jacobus this year.

**Heads Michigan PubLinX**—James Powers of Grand Rapids was elected president of the Michigan Public Links GA at its annual meeting, and Gracewil Lawns of Grand Rapids was awarded the association's 1937 tournament.