

AN ORDER IS AN ORDER

By HERB GRAFFIS

AT THIS time of year much in the golf business depends on pro realization of the fact that in business an order is an order. Whatever clearances of shop stocks have to be made are not wise when the pro who has not paid for some of his unsold clubs, wants to ship them back to the maker. That practice is practically extinct among successful, competent pros, and fortunately does not prevail among unsuccessful operators in other businesses, or American commerce generally would be in a hell of a fix.

The pro can't eat clubs during the winter. Neither can the employees of manufacturers. Clubs must be turned into money. Returning clubs at the end of the season has been partially responsible for one of the silliest, most expensive merchandising operations in golf—that of starting the next season in late March or April with big cut-price store sales of "obsolete" models. The practice has cost pros at least five dollars in next year sales for every dollar's worth (at retail prices) of clubs turned back to manufacturers at the close of the preceding season.

Before a season starts, store buyers look for something special to offer. Manufacturers need dough to finance their operations. So in desperation they unload returned clubs to the stores.

At times I have suspected that a considerable volume of "obsolete" clubs were actually manufactured during late winter to care for this spring store sale demand. I asked a manufacturer friend to give me the truth concerning his own case. He replied:

"Certainly we make up some of the 'obsolete' clubs. What happens is this—we get clubs back from pros at the end of the season to a volume that forces us to get rid of them for whatever cash we can get and in whatever way we can without throwing them into the river. There aren't enough of these returns to supply the entire store demand for spring 'specials' and as we can't play favorites among good legitimate store accounts any more than we could play favorites among pros, we make up some 'obsolete' stock, rather than lose heavily on our returned goods.

"Do you think any first class pro business man, if he were running our business,

would do anything else?" asked the manufacturer.

This returned goods evil is gradually being eliminated by the pros not mainly because they are concerned with the manufacturers' financing problems but because the pros have become aware that they don't get through the off season unless they convert their merchandise into cash profits. Highly valuable to the pros has been their discovery that plenty of golf clubs can be sold in September and even in October by adroit merchandising. There are huge and highly profitable "sales" of women's fur coats in August with the temperature around 100 degrees, and the sellers' offer of free storage until cold weather. If the fur dealers can do this, the pros can sell golf clubs in October. Christmas sales of high grade golf clubs came back in great shape last year, as additional evidence that the golf club selling season doesn't end right after July first.

When the returned goods evil is eliminated, the pros will have a basis for squawking against the early season cut-price sales at stores, as responsibility for the "obsolete" models can then be laid to faulty production control by the manufacturers.

Spring Pay for Fall Buys

Now comes the part of the problem that is easily under control of the pros—fall ordering. Pros are very human businessmen. They want to help pleasant and hard-working salesmen. Consequently the fall orders are placed often without due regard to spring ability to handle payments and sales. Shipments come flooding the shop in the spring and if the pro hasn't kept a complete and accurate record of orders as he placed them in the fall, he begins to suspect the orders have been padded. With this suspicion he starts the season wrong so far as the suspected

manufacturer and the pro himself are concerned.

A careful study of spring requirements and conscientious maintenance of fall order records is the habit of the successful professional, and the less experienced fellow will find it profitable to follow this method, effectively immediately.

However, although the fall ordering season is one of the important features of September, the smart pro remembers that just because it's getting near the fall it's not too late to sell and turn his stock into money instead of into store competition for next year.

A CENT A SHOT

Easy-Payment Idea Puts
Good Clubs in Hands
of Many Members

ONE of the most productive pro selling ideas that has come to our attention lately is that of the cent-a-shot payment plan originated by Jim Devlin, who has been pro at the Nemaocolin CC, Beallsville, Pa., for 14 years.

Striking evidence of how well the plan is working is seen in the charts on each player-customer's game that Jim keeps in his shop. After every round the player's score is registered on Jim's chart not only as a check-up on the bookkeeping but as a signal to Jim that the member may need some special instruction for his game.

The idea is one which, if subject to patent or copyright, probably would bring Jim a good piece of money for royalties resulting from its effective use. However, it's Jim's tough luck his bright idea is of such nature that it cannot be legally covered, so he passes it on to the other boys in the belief that it will do as well for them as it has done for him.

Now for Devlin's explanation of how the plan works:

"I first pick out the member who I know will improve his game with a new set of clubs, either irons or woods, and get into a conversation with him. While doing so I mention the great improvements that have been made in the past few years with golf equipment and how the scores in all the tournaments are so much lower, much of it due to the improvement in the clubs. When talking I pick out a Wilson Off-Set iron, to give an example, and point out the new features of the club which catch the member's eye and imagination.

I then go to work with my plan and ex-

plain that practically everything today is sold on a "Budget Plan" and that is what I want to do with my members. To show how interested I am in them I ask them to take my set of clubs out and play a round. If they like my clubs I can let them have a set with down payment of \$15 to \$25. Every time they play after that they pay me one cent for each shot they take, which I apply to their account and keep a chart in the shop showing them how they are improving.

In the event they do not show the improvement in their game that they or I think should happen, I look them up and watch them hit a few shots and in most cases I can find out what is wrong, which again shows I am interested in their game.

The member becomes a salesman for me and comes out to the course more often which is what I am mainly interested in as my shop becomes headquarters for him and his friends. He wants to show them what the new clubs have done for him. Again I go to work and show his friends where the above member has his clubs more than half paid for and before the end of the season will have them fully paid for without being hurt by putting \$30 to \$75 on the line at one time. Friends become interested and fall in line, which makes my worries real small ones as far as store competition is concerned.

My sale of balls and accessories naturally increase as the members get into the habit of visiting the shop every time out. Of course the plan I have outlined works in all price ranges and takes quite a bit of personal attention, which after all is why my club employs me. After 14 years at this club, this year I find business better than ever.

PROOF that a golf tournament is a certain national publicity-getter for a civic event was supplied by the tournament held at the Wheeling (W.Va.) CC as a feature of the Wheeling Centennial celebration. The event was 54 holes, 36 Friday and 18 Saturday morning, for \$1,000 and was well attended by a fine field of Ohio, western Pennsylvania, D.C., and W. Va. Pros.

Billy Burke won with 206, passing Ralph Guldahl, with whom he was paired, on the 16th hole of the final round. Phil Perkins led by two strokes at the start of the last 18 and began his finale with an eagle but slipped to a tie at 207 with Guldahl for second money.