

# SHOULD CHAMPS OKAY STORE CLUBS?

By JACK FULTON, Jr.

**M**ARION B. SCOBELL, pro at the Baton Rouge, La., municipal course, brings up a subject that has given many a non-tournament pro, the playing stars, manufacturers and the PGA grey hairs in trying to do the right thing. Scobell asks for an answer. What the answer is, Scobell has a right to know because he is an outstanding pro businessman in his section, and not one of the fellows whose queries are made or received lightly.

He questions the endorsement of a club by a PGA champion when such a club is featured in the advertising and sales campaign of a large mail-order house.

Viewing the situation from his angle Scobell comments:

"For the past several years the golf pro has had a real tussle trying to keep the golf business in the golf shop where it rightfully belongs.

"It is true that chain store competition still has somewhat of a death grip on the business. However, by real salesmanship and with the cooperation of a large group of the manufacturers, the pros have been gradually gaining back a large amount of this lost business.

## Endorsement Disturbs Him

"During a recent radio broadcast I heard that a certain national champion had personally endorsed a club sold by a large mail-order house. At first I thought there must be some error and decided to look over the daily paper. As you can see from the enclosed clipping, I found it to be true.

"One argument the pro has been able to use so far is that store clubs were not endorsed by national champions. However, it would be hard to convince the public of the fact in this case, as you can see that the endorser is a PGA champion."

The clipping Scobell enclosed is an illustrated free write-up of the sort that large advertisers push into the newspapers especially in the smaller places. The larger city newspapers throw these "puffs" into the wastebasket. The radio ad mentioned by Scobell was paid advertising.

Now let's go into an analysis of the situation Scobell mentions, because such cases have been coming up for years and pros have been worrying and complaining

about them. Frankly, it looks to us like the situation will continue—as long as there is a market for golf clubs pros will have competition that will try everything to overcome the advantage the pro enjoys because of the pro's intimate connection with the club's buyers, and the pro's strategic selling location at point of use.

What is there to Marion's statement that "chain store competition still has somewhat of a death grip on the (golf) business?"

## "Death Grip" Is News to Us

As near as we have been able to dig up the figures covering the last ten years—which includes good, bad and average times—chain stores have had no "death grip" on the golf business. Facts indicate that the chain stores run a poor fourth in club sales, both in number and in total retail sales volume, to pros, department stores and sporting goods stores.

In a town like Baton Rouge the gravity of chain store competition is over-emphasized because local merchants, in many cases, were unable to gear up their merchandising to meet the newer competition and lost out. However, advertising and selling magazines repeatedly present tales of smaller town merchants who have beat the everlasting hell out of stiff competition from chain stores, by careful buying and sharply localized, persistent and resourceful merchandising and advertising.

Maybe some of these stories point out the answer so far as Scobell and other pros confronted with chain store competition are concerned.

It does seem that one flaw in the merchandising relations between pros and manufacturers is a neglect to get together on offerings of lower priced clubs to meet store competitive situations. The manufacturers have grown so accustomed to thinking of pros only as retail outlets for the better grades of clubs that they haven't acquainted the pro trade with the



In Green Lakes State Park, a few miles out of Syracuse, N. Y., the CCC boys whose camp buildings can be seen in the background have built the 18-hole Green Lakes GC. Photo shows the sixteenth green of the layout. Robert Trent Jones was the architect.

availability of clubs in cheaper prices for battling the price competition of stores. This competition hits especially hard at municipal and fee courses.

Manufacturers' close-outs of discontinued lines should be more often bulletined to pros of first grade credit standing. Scobell and other pros can pick items from the lists of lower-priced clubs that will run chain store price competition dizzy. There have been numerous instances of pros at fee and public courses, especially, who actually welcome competitive newspaper advertising. They display the ads on bulletin boards at their shops and alongside these ads list bargains in their own stock that beat the store offerings.

Regarding the endorsement of store clubs by national champions, so far as we can recall, there is only one line of clubs bearing a champion's name that is pro-only. The plain truth is that the tournament pros who hope for some financial return from their efforts and success in advertising golf haven't been able to depend enough on exclusively pro distribution of their name-goods to keep them in shirts.

#### **Home Pro More Important Than Brand**

The reason for this possibly contains the answer to Scobell's question. To the players at Scobell's course, Scobell should be (and probably is) far more important in club purchasing than Shute, Manero, Armour, Sarazen, Burke, Cooper, Jones, Little or any other champion whose name appears on golf goods.

The home club pro, properly established as an expert in the opinion of his members, is the fellow whose word carries

final and heaviest weight in the purchase of clubs. So it is up to the home club pro to keep his players constantly reminded of this fact. Advertising activities that will cost him nothing in cash, will do the job for him. Most newspapers in the smaller cities and towns will welcome a series of weekly golf instruction articles and notes, and the majority of radio stations are glad to get alert and dependable pros to furnish them with a weekly golf talk.

#### **Use Publicity to Out-Sell Chains**

Pros who put their minds to it can get a large amount of effective selling publicity through newspapers, radio, luncheon club and other addresses and golf demonstrations. Solution to the problem of out-slugging the chain stores on local publicity is within the pros' grasp.

The tournament pro is in a rather tough situation. His fame is difficult to attain and transient unless it is maintained by wins against fierce competition and by strong advertising. There must be wide markets to warrant strong advertising, so the tournament pro himself wonders how much market his fellow professionals will allow a line bearing a tournament star's name.

The champion wants royalties on the sales of as many clubs as reasonably can be sold. He figures he can't pay the groceryman with reputation, and too many times when a fellow has won tournament glory he finds himself mainly in possession of reputation and debts. He, naturally, wants to get out of hock. At the same time he wants to have proper consideration for the interests of his comrade professionals who are not in the tournament field.

The fellow generally turns down offers made to him by manufacturers who have not the slightest concern for pros as retailers and rides along with one of the leading manufacturers who are interested in the pro market. Manufacturers of this latter type have on one hand the sincere desire to protect pro trade which yields them a lot of income, and to give decent consideration to the name pro who deserves a reward for his achievement and his advertising of the game.

But the manufacturers haven't been able to figure out an answer that will remove competition from the pros in selling any more than it has been possible to remove amateur competition from the history of tournaments in which pros have competed.

Judging from the record, pros who fear a blow from store competition of any sort can employ their own knowledge of the golf business, which should be superior to that of the store men, in keeping any golf merchandising situation well under control.

In case it will stir up any pro to realization that his own advertising and merchandising efforts can definitely whip competition, it might be cited that the stores in general consider the pros have so much of an edge on them in every way, that only earnest, smart effort can keep a store in the golf business.

#### Surprise Action Gives Gate to Radix Cup as PGA Trophy

**A**BANDONMENT of the Radix Cup, solicited and accepted by officials of the PGA as a "permanent" trophy for annual award to the pro having the year's lowest medal averages during PGA-approved competitions, has been announced officially.

The trophy is to be replaced by a Harry Vardon memorial award made under the auspices of the PGA. A national movement to unite American pros and amateurs in subscriptions to a Vardon memorial had taken form prior to the PGA official announcement but was in abeyance pending such advices from British pro and amateur golf authorities as are considered required by the amenities. Nationally prominent amateur and pro sponsors of the American Vardon memorial plan now are undecided what action to take, if any.

Harry G. Radix, donor of the trophy at PGA solicitation, is a former president of the Chicago District GA, a USGA

committeeman, and long active as a substantial booster of pro golf. His sole comment on the action has been an informal expression of relief from a growing embarrassment due to a PGA political situation.

The action taken on the Radix trophy, unprecedented in sportsmen's organizations, came as a complete surprise to most officials of the PGA.

#### Chicago Park District Issues Excellent Caddie Manual

**A**N EXCEEDINGLY valuable and interesting "Manual for Caddies" has been issued by the Chicago Park district, as a guide for caddies working at the CPD public courses. The book is profusely illustrated and is written in plain detail covering every phase of caddying work.

Contents of the book include: Ten commandments for a caddie; How this book can help the caddie; The caddie and his job; Around the clubhouse; At the first tee; Along the fairway; At the Putting green; The right club for the right shot; The parts of a golf club; Par—the standard of play; Rules for the caddie to learn; Special rules; Etiquette of the game of golf; Words and terms used in golf; Historical data; Chicago's five park courses; A review of golf activities at the Chicago parks in 1935 and 1936.

The book is part of a series of eleven recreational books prepared by the able staff of the CPD in cooperation with the WPA. It is 48 pages and a substantial cover. A copy may be secured by sending 25c to Tom Walsh, golf director, Chicago Parks District, Burnham Park, Chicago.

#### New England Golf Salesmen Organize; to Hold Three Tourneys

**N**EW ENGLAND golf salesmen have organized. George Weaver of Spalding is president and Russell Mattern of Acushnet is sec-treas. Others active in the organization include Bruce Murdock of Penfold, L. B. Dalton of Kroydon, George Wolfe of Dunlop, Fred Phillips of Hille-rich and Bradby, Pen Halligan of Bristol, George Nickerson of Wilson and George Hurley of US Rubber.

The salesmen's association plans to have three pro-salesmen tournaments during the year. First meeting of the group was held prior to the annual New England dinner at Boston, April 14.