

Futurama for Pros

By Don Young

ABOUT two years ago I watched one of the best merchandising pros I have ever known spend 30 minutes with a salesman buying \$1,500 worth of top-grade clubs—and 1½ hours buying \$200 worth of beginners sets.

His explanation was simple: "I can buy good clubs from any of the first-class manufacturers. They all have them. What keeps me awake nights are the beginners. If I muff 'em the stores get 'em. Once they get 'em they may be lost for a long time.

"Too many pros," he continued, "lose sight of the fact that in order to keep their local market active they must continually be injecting new blood into it. We can't expect to sell all of our old customers new clubs each year, or even every two years. But we can maintain a steady demand for good merchandise by grabbing the beginner the minute he comes into the market. A share of these will buy medium price equipment, but for the most part they want something inexpensive. In either event, satisfy him then and he'll be back next year, or the next, for good clubs. But miss the beginner, or oversell him, and it's just too bad."

Buy Above the Minimum

I inquired of this pro what he demanded in the way of such merchandise to meet the problem and the low-price cut-throat downtown competition. His reply was simplicity itself.

"Anyone with merchandising sense," he answered, "knows there is a line below which golf equipment ceases to be golf equipment. Below that standard it is junk, pure and simple. I never allow myself to be drawn below that line, regardless of the price pressure that may be bothering me, because regardless of whether a beginner should happen to buy such merchandise of me or of a downtown store, it is almost sure, in most cases, to prove unsatisfactory. Consequently I go above that line, merchandise at a very small margin if necessary, and have very little replacement or adjustment trouble. The merchandise proves satisfactory and is sold at a price that the beginner is willing to pay. I am every bit as careful, so far as it is possible, in fitting a set of these

low-priced clubs to a beginner, as I am in fitting the club champion with a top range number. I have customers that stick with me year after year. That is what is commonly known as business-building. And in 20 years of pro-shop selling I have been unable to discover any suitable substitute for it."

"Don't you have some trouble," I asked this pro "in finding merchandise that will successfully compete with cut-throat competition?"

Carries Exclusive Pro Lines

"Trouble is no word for it," he declared. "When I got wise to myself some years ago that successful pro merchandising means selling to 100% of the club membership, instead of merely the 40% that demands, needs, and appreciates good equipment, I sweat plenty of blood finding stock to do the job. There was low-priced merchandise available, of course, but the downtown stores could whip me on price. I finally decided to give the bulk of my better business to the company that also could furnish me with a satisfactory, low-price line that wasn't carried by any of the downtown cut-price stores. Within two years after adopting that program my club sales showed an increase of over 60%."

I mulled this pro's words over in my mind for a considerable time. Suddenly I was struck with the fact that no manufacturer's representative had ever presented the pro merchandising problem to me in that light. I wonder why?

As pros we are all vitally interested in again dominating a market that we are allowing to slip away from us. But if we are to do so, we must seriously consider the methods by and the foundation on which leadership in merchandising is built.

As a class we have in the past been too much inclined to assume a boulevard attitude. Boulevard merchandising is a nice clean, refined trade—but the casualty list in that type of warfare is exceedingly high. Pro golf is a shining example.

There are naturally plenty of spots in

The first ambulance for Britain paid for by PGA of America efforts, has been shipped.

our profession where exclusive Fifth Avenue merchandising works. But as a whole it won't. The consumer base of golf is getting broader, and lower in price. We must not forget that most of the merchant princes have found it necessary to maintain a bargain basement beneath the smart, exclusive emporium that has made their names synonymous with fine merchandise.

Whether we like it or not, the beginner is the most important guy in the whole setup to us. He's a bang-up prospect for addition to our active merchandising list—a list that is never too large, even at its best. So we'd just as well make up our minds now as anytime to play ball with this boy—and at his own terms. He is at a loss to understand why we pros cannot furnish him with beginner's equipment

at the same price it is available downtown.

One of the most urgent problems in pro golf in these times is that of letting the public know that it doesn't have to pay a premium for buying in a pro-shop but gets plus value and expert individual attention as well as a select stock of merchandise at all prices by going to the pro.

Too long we've been doing business on the Broadway hit show box-office basis, and wondering why we're not getting more volume in club sales. The movie popular-price type of competition is cutting into our sales. The tragic part of it is that the pro could handle the lower-priced lines with the same command of the market as he has in the upper-priced lines, if he'd study this opportunity and keep his stock in a price balance best suited to the financial situation of all players at his club.

Gift Sales-Push Profitable to Pros

GOLF gifts for Christmas continue to grow in volume as a part of pro department business. Comparatively few pros were able to register substantially in this business up to a couple of years ago, despite the fact that store Christmas business in golf is a big part of stores' sports volume over the holidays.

Pros who have been most successful in getting this Christmas volume say that not the least of its profits is the education it gives in salesmanship and marketing policy. One discovery made by these pros is that women, in particular, make up a big market for Christmas golf presents. The pro who telephones, or calls in person, with a definite suggestion of golf equipment items for husband, son, daughter, or good friend is welcomed with his shopping help.

One thing active pros have learned about this Christmas present business is not to stall on it. One pro who is very active in Christmas selling found out that one of his big corporation prospects had placed an order for 600 gift duffle bags early in September. Duffle bags, head covers, balls and putters are items most favored by corporations that send Christmas presents to their customers.

On much of this business, despite the pro's "in" with the purchaser, there is keen price competition. Usually the ball price competition is keen, but pros who sell hundreds of dozens of balls as corporation Christmas gifts, do business by

pointing out that when a ball of the pro-shop grade and standard Grade A brand is sent as a present it really scores, whereas a private-brand ball is received as evidence of the giver's desire to get off as cheaply as possible while trying to observe the formalities.

Solicit Members Early

Because many club members are in executive positions and are responsible for the selection and purchase of their companies' gifts, the pro should lose no time in calling on them with his suggestions for Christmas presents. These men know the established retail price for the sort of merchandise that the pro carries, hence when the pro makes a price concession for quantity purchases it carries weight with the prospective buyer.

Several companies offer a personal name marking service on balls in quantity lots. This has been responsible for some large gift orders pros have received. This business must be solicited early as the Christmas gift rush necessitates plenty of leeway in delivery date.

A great boost to pro solicitation of Christmas gift business is the gift packaging and premiums various ball manufacturers make available. The pro who will call on his members with an assortment of these packages is set to do a lot of off-season business as a reward for his energy and salesmanship.