Sound Merchandising Key to Pros' Postwar Position

By DON YOUNG

★ During the past decade and a half a general awakening has taken place throughout the golf industry generally to the fact that the average club pro is something other than a fellow who spends his summer club hours midst pleasant, profitable surroundings. As a matter of fact the awakening has gone even further by discovering that the guy is useful for activities other than playing buck nassaus with the club champion each Saturday and Sunday, decorating the warmest and most comfortable leather-upholstered chair at a bowling alley five months during the winter or basking under a southern palm from November 'till April.

By a stroke of good fortune this economic bolt of lightning seems to have struck both pros and club officials alike. Needless to say its searing effects have proved beneficial to everyone concerned.

As for the club pro of today and tomorrow, if he is successful today and continues to be so in the future, he is in a business sense a figurative "swoose". He was recently most aptly described to the writer by a well-known club official who said:

"I really don't know of a job that requires more downright versatility and ability than that of being a successful golf club professional. I have a son interested in entering the profession and I hesitate to encourage him, fearing his inability to fill the requirements necessary for success in the field. In my opinion a successful club professional must be a combination professional man, business-man, magician. He first of all must be a decent player, a competent instructor, and thoroughly versed in everything pertaining to the game. In addition he must be the type of business man qualified to successfully merchandise in a highly competitive field with a limited available clientele. And lastly he must be a master of personality and diplomacy. Aside from the arts, I know of no profession that demands so much—and rewards so little if all of the requirements are not met."

It is entirely possible that the gentlemon hit the nail squarely on the head. Please note, however, his use of the adjective "successful".

Of all the aforementioned requirements, the one probably most disregarded by both pros and club officials is that of merchandising. In the past the private club pro has been far too prone to rely on member-friendship to ring his cash register. Club officials, in hiring their pros, seldom inquire into the matter of their merchandising ability. It has been far too easy for them to mentally observe that if the pro doesn't have it they can get it down at a cut price store.

Such a situation is certainly not a favorable one for the pro. Every dime spent for golf merchandise outside his shop not only hurts his pocketbook but detracts that much from the prestige of his profession. The club official may not realize it but it hurts his club as well. That same dime, even though it might have gone into the pro's pocket, nevertheless would have contributed that much toward club activity and financial soundness. It hurts as well the manufacturer, who is forced to finance the distribution of his product through both the pro and the cut price store. The member who spends the dime suffers his rap by paying the freight. With three casualties already suffered, we find the fourth victim to be the most important of all—the game of golf.

This dissertation on golf merchandising by no means suggests that the problem for everyone concerned, aside from cut-rate stores, could be easily solved by turning over completely the retail distribution of golf equipment to the pro. Far from it. First, it would create a monopoly, a word having no place anywhere in golf—at least since the grandslam days of Bobby Jones. Second, pros as a class, at present, would not be competent to handle it even if the monopoly were desirable. Third, the democratic principle of competition, the heart and soul of golf, would in itself be defeated by such an arrangement.

There is another word, however, that is most desirable. The word is "domination". It is as Yankee and democratic as roast beef and indeed just as palatable to a business-hungry pro golf market.

It is a remarkable fact that after 50 years of golf in America no one "class" has emerged as dominant in the retail distribution of golf merchandise and playing equipment. The pro, it is true, has made rather remarkable strides in that direction in the past ten years, but he still has a long road to travel to reach his desired destination. Whether he eventually reaches his goal is strictly up to him, his ambition, his ability, and his good business sense.

However, there are signs here and there of dominance in the field. One finds it in the pro shops of certain metropolitan locations. These shops are amply stocked, beautifully displayed, and the merchandise is backed up with sensible advertising. The man behind the counter knows what he has, has it at the price you can afford to pay, is capable of giving you custom attention, and can show you how it should be used. Regardless of what one may find at the cut rate stores, such a pro shop combination is unbeatable. It is, incidentally, the personification of the word "domination".

It is regrettable, however, that this dominance in the retail golf equipment market exists in such a small minority, even in metropolitan locations. In far too large a percentage, even shops in metropolitan clubs are not only understocked but no concrete sales program is in effect. These shops seem to operate on the principle that should the member desire something not in stock (which he inevitably does), the merchandise is available by the next day from a downtown distributor. Probably about 75% of these cases eventually buy downtown. Further, this same type of shop helps cut the entire profession's merchandising throat by requesting from the distributor or manufacturer a credit memo covering what merchandise is left in the shop at the end of the season.

Therein, whether we like it or not, lies most of the reasons for the cut rate store having a successful golf department. The manufacturer or distributor must clear his shelves of this returned merchandise and must take a loss in doing so. The pros get very little of it—for the simple reason that the pros themselves returned it. So their members buy it the following season at the cut rate marts at a figure considerably below what the pros sold it the previous season.

There's no percentage for the manufacturer in taking back merchandise and disposing of it at a loss. Neither, by the way, do your members like it. It's human to resent paying one price for an article at a pro shop and later see it downtown at a lesser figure, a circumstance that has led many golfers to believe they pay more for what they buy from the pro.

Neat way of the pro fighting himself, isn't it?

Admittedly pro merchandising is a highly specialized field and obviously some unusual business practices are necessary because of that fact. When such practices, however, are so basically unsound as to effect the very structure on which sound business is built, someone or something is bound to suffer. In this case everyone suffers. Boiled down to raw fundamentals, the golfer himself suffers most because he eventually, in one way or another, pays through the nose for these commercial shenanigans. Viewing the entire setup as a whole, and with a weather eye to the future, the pro, the club official, and the manufacturer should all give this some serious consideration.

It might be suggested therefore that a great deal of good would result from pros and club officials conferring as a unit in planning and conducting local pro merchandising programs, with manufacturers lending a helping and guiding hand to the over-all picture. The idea should prove a cashable one to the pro as it should tend not only to promote greater member interest in a financially important phase of his job, but tend as well to improve the standards and financial soundness of pro merchandising generally, an activity that should in the future become an increasingly important department of the golf pro's profession, his club's activity, and the manufacturers' methods of distribution.

Even though pro shop merchandising may be regarded as a specialized undertaking, the basic principles of operation are almost the same as in any other type of retail distribution. We find three types of golf clubs in America: large, medium and small. There are exactly that many sizes in any other line of retail business. One can easily find outstanding successes in every size, each attained at varying locations and under radically different circumstances.

If one were to select one of these successful merchants, regardless of the size of his business, and delve into his history, it would be found that success was probably a direct result of the application of three cardinal principles: first, analysis of trade territory and type of trade within that territory; second, careful buying both in quality and quantity to suit the demands of that trade; third, vigorous sales promotion in keeping with that type of trade and kind of business.

These principles are comparatively simple to apply to pro merchandising—if the pro will take the time and trouble to do so. In doing so the pro might liken himself to the bond salesman, a business that requires an intimate, every day knowledge of a limited clientele's financial status. In the pro's case it is an intimate every day knowledge of his clientele's golfing requirements. A private card index file, posted daily, is a great help in this respect. Scanning it thoroughly every Monday morning maps out the week's merchandising campaign.

Perhaps the biggest headache in pro merchandising, as in any other type of business with a limited clientele, occurs in the purchase of merchandise for the season ahead. If a mistake in judgment is made at that time an entire season's merchandising program can conceivably prove a financial failure. This angle is so loaded with dynamite that a great percentage (too large a percentage, in fact) of pros refuse to buy until the season is almost or actually open.

In pursuing this course the pros are kidding nobody but themselves. By refusing to obligate themselves in advance to a reasonable amount of merchandise, they pass the buck to the manufacturer. The manufacturer cannot wait for the season to open before making his product, and in planning his year's manufacturing program must do so without benefit of having a fair idea as to what the pro field desires and will require.

The pro should get it firmly in his mind that he is a legitimate business man and as such should conduct his business as any other legitimate business man is forced to do. If he makes the mistake of overbuying there is no reason why he should cry to his manufacturer to take the rap for his poor judgment. Special events with merchandise prizes at the tail end of the season affords one way of disposing of surplus merchandise. The holidays offer another opportunity. If necessary the merchandise can be offered at reduced prices the following season, making attractive items for beginners and bargain hunters. It is far better that the pro sell his own members at reduced prices than have a competitive outlet do so—an event that is sure to happen if the merchandise is returned to the manufacturer or distributor.

Everything considered, it is apparent that the basic problems of pro merchandising do not differ greatly from any other retail business, aside from the fact that the pro enjoys the advantage of knowing almost to the exact letter how many potential customers he has. He can take advantage of this fortunate circumstance by analyzing in advance each one individually, anticipating their needs, and placing advance orders for a reasonable percentage of the total. Having taken the first step in the season's merchandising program, he can follow this up by personal contact, letters, and the many other subtle ways open to pros to sell merchandise to golfers. His efforts incidentally should not be confined only to a busy four or eight months period, but should be continued throughout the year.

It requires no seer to predict that there will be a tremendous post-war demand for all golf equipment. The demand will be as proportionately great as the demand for new electric refrigerators, electric irons, vacuum cleaners, and many other items taken off the civilian market by the necessities of war. The demand will be just as proportionately great in Lickskillet, Georgia, as it will be in Seattle, Washington. "Who will get the bulk of this business?" is a question that every pro in America should be asking himself—and starting right now to do something about it.

The time set for the big new golf equipment market is sometime in the future. The time for the pro to prepare himself to be the **dominant** figure in that market is **now**.

J. S. Clapper, Maintenance Machinery Manufacturer, Dies at Minneapolis

JOHN SAMUEL CLAPPER
1869-1944

John Samuel Clapper, 75, chairman of the board of directors, retired president and one of the original founders of the Toro Manufacturing Corporation, died at his home, 510 Groveland Avenue, on Thursday, August 3rd, after an intermittent illness of long standing.

Born in Mexico, Mo., on February 1, 1869, his earliest business career was as salesman for the International Harvester Company, and later he became branch manager for them in Des Moines, Iowa.

In 1906 he located in Minneapolis for the Racine-Sattley Company, remaining with them approximately four years, and in 1910 he was appointed service manager for the Gas Traction Company. In 1912 he became Minneapolis branch manager for the Emerson-Brantingham Company, and in 1913 production manager for the Bull Tractor Company.

In 1914, in cooperation with H. C. McCartney, J. L. Record, J. F. McCarthy, P. J. Lyons, Paul Knoll and several associates, he organized and became president of the Toro Motor Company, later reorganized as the Toro Manufacturing Corporation. He retired from the presidency and was elected chairman of the board of directors in May of 1943 and was chairman of the board at his death.

As past president of the Rotary Club of Minneapolis, vice-president of the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association, and director of the Associated Industries of Minneapolis, Mr. Clapper was active in many civic enterprises in addition to his industrial activities.

In the field of sports, particularly golf, trapshooting, and hunting, he was an enthusiastic participant and a strong competitor.

Mr. Clapper was one of the pioneers of specialized machinery for golf course maintenance, his early experiments with fairway mowing equipment having begun following the close of the first World War. In the ten years following the war's end the number of golf courses in the United States increased more than 800 percent. The phenominal growth of the game was due in no small measure to the improvement, speed and economy in golf course maintenance made possible by mechanized upkeep equipment.

Indeed, golf lost one of its great men in the passing of Sam Clapper.

W. D. Vanderpool Dies

Wynant D. Vanderpool, prominent New York banker and USGA official for many years, died August 19 at York Harbor, Me., of a heart attack while watching the Maine State Tennis Championship from the veranda of the York CC. His age was 69.

A graduate of Princeton university and Harvard law school, he developed a fondness for golf in his youth and his interest in the game was retained until his death.

For many years he was secretary of the Metropolitan Golf Association. In January 1924 he was elected president of the United States Golf Association, serving for a year and later became chairman of the association's executive committee and active in the greens section.