



WHAT OF 1946 CLUB and BALL PRODUCTION?



WHAT are the prospects for the manufacture of high grade golf playing equipment in quantity sufficient to handle the probable demand for 1946?

The answer to that question will have considerable bearing on pro income next year, but nobody yet is prepared to make any firm forecasts. Despite extensive unemployment the hiring and training of labor for quality clubs and balls is still a keen problem for manufacturers.

Early in November the government denied ball manufacturers' application for crude rubber for another 90 days. Whether an application made at the end of the 90 day period will be granted is anybody's guess. Information the ball makers get is that there is rubber in the Malay territory, the Dutch East Indies and Sumatra, but lack of help at the plantations and transportation difficulties are preventing the rubber from getting to ports for shipment to the U. S. Furthermore natives in these parts seem to want some more war, consequently the rubber prospects are vague.

Rubber Balls in 1946?

One of the leading ball makers says "likelihood of rubber balls for spring or summer, 1946, is rapidly diminishing." However, this manufacturer believes that as far as the players are concerned the lack of rubber balls will not be any tragedy. He says that recently his company has been making tests on synthetic balls of all makes, against each other and against prewar rubber balls, and has found "the synthetic ball we and other manufacturers are making is 90% as good in every way as pre-war balls, in flight, distance, durability and performance. In fact the synthetic ball is a better performing ball for approach shots and on the green."

That's one expert's conviction. General opinion of those who have had an opportunity to play enough of the synthetic balls to reach any conclusion is that they have been improving greatly as the manufacturing problems were solved.

Nobody's been saying anything lately about the synthetics that were rumored to be so full of zip they'd add vast yardage to anybody's shots and scare the USGA and the R&A about the courses becoming too short.

Jim Brydon, Worthington Ball Co., v.p., expresses the opinion generally stated by ball company executives in saying:

"Our advice to pros would be to place their orders for golf balls early and to take them whether they're synthetic or otherwise, as they'll need all the stock they can get to care for the increased volume of play. Nobody has any appreciable stock of golf balls now; that means both the manufacturer and the pro.

1946 Plan Increase Forecast

"There will be a decided increase in play during 1946. Many thousands of new golfers will come from the armed forces. Golf is no longer a rich man's game, as the increased play at municipal and free courses during the past two years plainly shows. Even with the passing of war industry payrolls golf play should get higher among the wage earners as the game has been proved to be low-priced recreation."

Brydon declared that there's nothing to the alarm some pros have expressed about reprocessed balls carried over in 1946 becoming obsolete. He said, "every golf ball produced during 1945 regardless of whether it's reprocessed or synthetic, will be gladly accepted by players and will be needed to meet the demand."

There are some indications that the synthetic balls made for the armed forces finally have been getting reasonably quick and extensive, although still thin, distribution. For some months there were complaints, and talk about the armed services clubs and balls being held in warehouses while soldiers and sailors at posts, stations and hospitals, home and overseas weren't getting the equipment that had been manufactured.

The usual paperwork snafu has figured in the distribution of that equipment, but according to most recent reports there's no basis for the suspicion that some day the cut-price sports goods outlets may toss a lot of this stuff on the market. Consider the millions who'll still be in the armed forces through the 1946 golf season. They'll be able to use every item of golf equipment the army and navy can get—and get to the eager uniformed golfers.

Production to Be Rationed

Leading manufacturers will distribute their production for 1946 on a quota basis. All of them have been studying available sales data for prewar years and trying to adjust it to postwar conditions so distribution of stocks will be equitable.

Naturally there will be some squawks because there's no chance of getting nearly enough good stuff to go around. Several years before the war GOLFDOM conducted an extensive survey with the cooperation of representative pros and found that in private clubs the members averaged a new set of clubs per member each five years. On that basis club sales in 1946 would be about four times a normal year's volume in the pro shops. That purely mathematical ratio won't prevail, of course, but you can figure out for yourself that with the trouble there'll be trying to produce as many as a normal prewar year's supply of clubs and a demand that certainly will be double that of a normal year, and possibly triple, the rationing of clubs to pro shops won't please everybody.

Even those pros of highest credit rating who order early haven't much chance, the way things look now, of getting all the stock they want. And in view of that condition, what chance will there be for the pro who delays ordering, or who made no effort during the war to show interest in his credit rating?

Hopeful Views

However there is a more optimistic view of the club manufacturing possibilities for 1946 delivery. Some believe that the next few months will show a decided improvement in the labor picture. This, the optimists believe, will provide large sup-

plies of necessary materials and a good type of club factory workmen who can be trained rather rapidly in the manufacture of quality clubs.

One factor optimists believe may be reflected favorably in postwar club production is the lessons of wartime production. Under high pressure and often in the manufacturer of products drastically different from the normal output, golf club and ball plants made some amazing war materiel production records.

As an aftermath of this experience in successfully effecting manufacturing innovations plants in the golf goods manufacturing field have made changes. Bill Kaiser of Hillerich & Bradsby Co. relates a not uncommon sort of experience.

Kaiser says:

"Making room for gun stock machinery necessitated moving out of the way much of our golf club machinery. With the ever-present thought of some day returning to club manufacture we carefully studied how we could improve the sequence of operations when the time for reconversion arrived.

"Results of the application of these studies are remarkable. The new procedure makes relatively simple some of those problems we had to wrestle with in the past. It removes bottlenecks that existed from time to time during certain stages of our production during our busier season."

F. W. Bommer, pres., Acushnet Process Sales Co., takes a very hopeful view of increasing manufacturing capacity to supply an increase of from 50% to 100% in play expected for 1946 over the best of the best prewar years. Acushnet was one of the companies that virtually performed the impossible in gearing up to wartime demands. Bommer says that there's only a dim possibility that prewar natural rubber golf balls will be put on sale before late in the summer of 1946. He remarks; "Manufacturers will turn to the natural rubber product as soon as they can for, despite the fact that they have done a marvelous technical job in adapting synthetic rubber for golf balls, the synthetic product is not quite up to the prewar ball."

Acushnet with its pro-only trade (except armed services orders) reports; "We have shipped out synthetic golf balls in small quantities to practically all our customers and more than 96% report favorable acceptance."

Bommer also comments that even with the advent of the war pro credit continued improving so the pro field generally can claim that it has done an outstanding job in this respect, among all small retailing units.