

Plan Service on Study of Members' Needs

By ALEX G. McKAY

Pro-Greenkeeper, Cherry Valley Club, Garden City, N. Y.

WHILE pros are talking about what merchandise sales volume we'll have this year—if we can get the merchandise—has it ever struck you that much of the estimating of the sales volume is entirely by guess?

Guessing, even expert guessing, is no basis for a successful business.

What each pro should be doing right now is making the most complete analysis of his market that ever was made. Member by member he should go through his entire roster figuring what his club members need. Then figuring what they can afford is another proposition.

There is no place for high pressure selling at a golf club. The pro wants them to buy, willingly, and wants to supply them what they need. The successful policy of pro shop selling is getting them in a mood for buying and interested in having their equipment good. Members don't come to a private club to be sold anything. They want to buy of their own free will and when they please. The secret of attaining good sales volume in a pro shop lies in so choosing and displaying your stock that the member is often tempted to buy. It takes a smarter man to do that than is required for selling by high pressure. The pressure will work on a golfer once. The next time his guard is up.

In more than 30 years in the golf business I have found that the way to get a high and steady per cent of my members' total golf sales is by making it pleasant for them to buy from me and by giving them complete confidence that if their equipment is in good condition I'll say so.

But I, like each of my members, am in business to make money. I would not be serving my members or doing myself any good by being so soft in selling that members who happen to have the urge to buy clubs would go someplace else simply because I honestly felt that what they have is O. K. for them, for the time being.

Individual Analysis Required

Consequently I must know more about each member's equipment than the member knows. That's not something that I can do offhand. I have to look over and make a record of the equipment of each member and the condition of that equipment.

It's not a job that can be done by casual inspection of the bags and their contents.

Every pro, having in mind the game of each member, can tell by feel that after 5 war years, many of his members are playing—or trying to play—with clubs that haven't the right weight or shafts for them. In 5 years the muscles and swings of a lot of our members who have the most money to spend for properly fitting equipment have changed enough to make new clubs advisable.

Let's look at it this way: The reason the club has a competent pro on the job is to supply authoritative advice on the right clubs for each member. That's part of what the member pays for when he joins the club and pays his dues.

So, if you haven't a record of your members' equipment that prepares you to recommend what the player really needs you are not entirely on the job for the club. The fact that such data will make considerable money for you in increasing sales certainly should give you an additional spur in compiling such records.

How are the members' bags? Many of them are at least 10 years old and looking rather shabby. You'd also probably be surprised to see just what a thoughtful survey would disclose to you about the member as a possible purchaser of a lighter bag, either because of smaller caddies or the caddying he may have to do himself when the supply of boys is short at your own club or at clubs he may happen to visit.

Golf shoes are badly worn and the styles have changed. And other golf apparel such as you may sell at your shop will have a bright sales appeal in outfitting members for the first postwar year.

It'll be more difficult for you to make a fairly exact study of what apparel needs of your members are than it will be for you to determine what their needs will be in clubs, bags, balls and shoes—and possibly raincoats. But one thing is sure, you'll be able to order on a much better basis if you consider your members' possible needs individually than you would be just by making a stab at trying to readjust wartime orders of what you could get, to the new and different buying conditions of peace.

New Members' Needs

Another thing that makes a careful study of your members' equipment particularly important this year is that you



Andy Legakis, assistant pro and Alex G. McKay, Cherry Valley pro.

probably have a fairly large number of club members who have joined in the war years and who haven't had an opportunity to buy pro-fitted equipment. It could be that one of the reasons these new members joined the club is because you're the club's pro and they expect more and better service from you than they got before they joined. That means you've done your job well and your older members have been your good boosters.

You've got to show these new members something better than they've been accustomed to in pro department service or you're not holding up your end of the club.

At Cherry Valley our membership has increased greatly. Some of the new members are beginners in golf. One of my great responsibilities at the club is seeing that these new people are started right and on such a friendly and helpful basis that after every lesson or every round of golf they are happy that they joined our club rather than any other club in the world.

We who have been in pro golf quite a while are pretty well aware that golf instruction methods generally have changed just as much as golf equipment has. Perhaps more. Our instruction is an art as well as a science. The science part of instruction doesn't change except as equipment construction and design changes, but the art part of instruction has been changing rapidly. We don't need to be ashamed of having an art in instruction that differs from our methods of 10 years ago. The world's greatest artists in other fields change and develop.

I always am on the lookout for new ideas. If I happen to see some artistry or application of science in instruction that I can appraise as an improvement over the way I have been teaching I don't see any reason why I am adding to or protecting my own good reputation as an instructor by refusing to accept the idea just because somebody else did it first. By my adopting it, my member gets not only the value of my own services but of the other pro's research. My whole

profession is built up and I certainly haven't knocked myself down any. What I want is my pupil to score better and if I can get an idea from some other pro that helps me do my job for the pupil, I'll grab it in a second. Furthermore I don't mind a bit volunteering to my pupil that one of my pro friends—whose name I'll mention—used the method successfully.

Good Assistants Essential

I expect this to be a very good year for lessons. I've hired an assistant who is well qualified to help me handle these lessons. That brings up another point in member service that the pro would do well to check on as he starts his season; his assistant. Good assistants are hard to get. To be perfectly frank about it some pros haven't wanted especially good assistants. They've had the suspicion the assistant might be trying to displace the pro. But look at fine pros who have been assistant to veteran masters who've been on the same job 20 years or more. The old masters have made the kids fine pros. The reputation and job security of veteran pros have been strengthened by their record of taking in and developing superior young professionals.

When you're checking your members' equipment, check your own important equipment in your assistant and shop boy, and if the caddies are part of your responsibility, your caddie-master. Have you gone over with them exactly what you want them to do? You can't expect them to be mind-readers or to know as much as you do about the club's requirements. Many times we've all seen kids come into clubs as assistants because they liked golf and thought they'd get a lot of time to play. They should have more deliberate education from the pro for whom they're working.

We've talked a lot in pro golf about pro educational courses yet we generally have been woefully neglectful in the studied training of our assistants.

In this shop end of our business club-cleaning has deteriorated during the war. Good club cleaners are hard to get for what we can afford to pay. Club cleaning must be restored to prewar standards. The club cleaning income is something that we must protect by giving results that show obvious value for the money spent. We just simply can't afford to have our members annoyed by loose wrappings or other minor flaws and carelessness that the club cleaner should detect and correct.

Still another important thing for the pro to look into carefully as this season is dawning in the larger part of the country is the caddie situation. During the war the boys became accustomed to caddying double. They don't realize that the bonanza days are over and they'll have to

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coming round to your way of doing business. Incidentally, an enormous amount of money was unexpectedly made by seaside courses selling their over-abundance of sand. This surprised them a great deal as I daresay it does you.

The GI Bill of Rights is indeed a remarkable one, for it seems to me to provide for practically every idea and wish that the young American may have. I was playing golf with a well known professional the other day and he was telling me that he had had a request from an American boy now discharged to become a golf professional. He wished to serve under this famous man and learn from him the art of the game and the art of being a successful golf professional. The arrangements have now been made and the boy has started his career. He is doing all this as the result of government aid. This serves him well and also the professional who has taken him on. It makes me think too that any young man today who intends to take up golf as a career should first realize that it is not a get-rich-quick process which some of them seem to imagine, but a definite process of learning, working and eventually conquering. Here again is an opportunity for an American business man to open a school for would-be professional golfers and run it much in the same line as a theatrical agency, drawing his percentage from the successes that he turns out.

Hard working authors like myself have to pay our agents for representing us! So I do not see why such an arrangement between professional and his agent should not work very advantageously for both sides.

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go back to carrying single again. That situation probably will work itself out. In increasing numbers members prefer to carry or wheel their own bags rather than have a half a caddie who's always on the other side of the course with the club they need.

I think all clubs will have to make closer tie-ups with schools to help solve the caddie supply problem.

The rearrangement of the shop to give it a bright new look of the first peace year is going to be something for every pro to consider. We have a great improvement in Cherry Valley's new golf shop. It's close to the first tee and the club cleaning shop is under the same roof. Our old club cleaning department was 100 yds. from the golf shop.

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