

Pro Sales Success Depends On Reputation as Expert

By JACK JOLLY

This is going to be a testing year for the golf business. There'll be a flood of business. No doubt of that. But with this great volume of demand there'll also be retail outlets eagerly competing for merchandise to supply the demand. This demand will represent the business of hundreds of thousands who are fairly well set in the habit of buying from the pro because they are experienced golfers and know that the pro puts quality ahead of price. These buyers who have done business with the pro for years know that the pro's prices are strictly competitive, quality considered. They also know that the pro can't afford to sell unsatisfactory merchandise at any price.

But the newcomers to golf are not acquainted with the basic policy of pro merchandising. They are unaware of the considerable difference in equipment that may look almost the same to the inexperienced eye. They don't know the great difference there is having equipment properly fitted to the player's game, as well as to his purse. Many of these new players are private club members. Hundreds of thousands of them will be playing at daily fee and public courses. But in one way or another each of them must be impressed with the fact that the pro is the foremost authority in the sale of golf goods.

The reputation as the man who knows the best and sells only the best in the various price classes is the foundation of the pro's merchandising success. If he's just another dealer, selling the same stuff, and getting by in a smaller shop because he has a retailing outlet closer to the point of use of the merchandise, he will miss the tremendous advertising value that should be inherent in the pro business.

Older pros learned this when their business was being transformed from a handicraft operation in which they made balls and clubs, into a retailing operation in which they sold in quantities larger than they would have been able to supply from their own shop manufacturing operations.

The best test a pro could apply to merchandise when he was making the switch to retailing emphasis in the old days was "is this product up to the standard I'd demand if I were making it myself?" You'll see that the veteran pros still are buying by this test.

When I went into the Silver King ball business that test continued to be governing policy of the business. There have been many opportunities to increase our

sales by enlarging our selling field to include outlets other than pros and you can appreciate that there'll be many more with the postwar market for golf expanding so greatly. Somebody's got to take care of that market or the whole game will suffer. But it won't be me. That would involve loss of an intimate personal relationship and sacrifice of the high handicraft tradition that has been the basis of pros' largest and steadiest profits.

Any pro who is a sound and knowing businessman knows full well that there are objections, from the manufacturers' viewpoint, to the strictly pro-only policy of Silver King. Limiting your retail outlets presents a selling problem. You have to have your quality and sales appeal so high that your selling expense will be kept low on a basis of cost per ball that will compare favorably with that of the big volume general distribution brands. But again you get back to the platform that made it possible for the very successful veteran pros to adjust to new conditions. You give the customer the best he possibly can get, and you give him something that he can't buy a lot of other places, and the customer will prefer to do business with you.

The customer won't go to an awful lot of trouble to learn about what you have and to come to you, unless he's one of the comparatively rare older amateurs who still makes a hobby of having the finest golf equipment. So you'll have to inform customers about your policy and get them so well acquainted with your standing as an expert in golf merchandise they'll talk about you—and give you free advertising.

I know from my own experience and observation of more than 30 years in the golf business that energetic down-town competition can be made to make business better for the canny, vigorous pro merchant who overlooks no chance to emphasize the distinction and superiority of his shop as a place to get exclusive merchandise as well as smartest selections of a few general standard brands, but everything in the shop expertly suited to the purchaser's need.

Where the smart pro has the advantage over any other retail outlet is that the pro thinks of the purchaser as a golfer and the other store thinks of the purchaser as a customer. There's the personal difference that has meant and will continue to mean millions of dollars in income to the wise pros.