

"First With the Latest" As Pro Shop Sales Policy

By HERB GRAFFIS

Merchandising competition of a smart and strenuous sort is ahead for the pro but from evidences of pro planning this winter the pros are not only going to be able to meet the opposition but definitely profit from the pressure.

From interviews and letters I've learned that there are many alert pros figuring on innovations in their 1947 shop merchandising. One of the likeliest looking ideas that has been mentioned is that of making more of a special feature of new goods. Pro endorsement makes the market for the greater part of golf goods whether or not the goods are sold in pro shops. But pros have found they haven't made strong enough point of this factor. The wise buyers for stores knows that what pros O.K. will go with the golfing public but the golfing public isn't keenly aware that the pro approval is the prime reason that better grade merchandise is offered.

This year in emphasizing the importance of pro endorsement of new merchandise several leading pro businessmen say they are going to have sections in their shops in which the newest merchandise will be given special display. They'll put into selling operation the slogan of a metropolitan newspaper which advertises it is "first with the latest."

In this section will be the latest accessories, wearing apparel and clubs. The customary policy at pro shops is to put the newest stock in with the other stuff. In comparing notes this winter pros discovered that often members showed up at their shops with something new that the members boasted they got at some store which was the only place the item could be bought at the time.

The pro may have had the item in stock for weeks and considered that he was giving it a good display yet he not only missed out on a sale but on the prestige of being quick to get for his customers what they wanted.

Pros in New York and Chicago have found that Abercrombie and Fitch and VL&A are experts in grabbing new merchandise and featuring it although in the golf and golf accessory lines some of the items are decidedly too limited in marketing possibilities to warrant the pro tying up his money in what is not likely to move.

How far to go in loading up on the new items is a matter to be decided after due consideration of the factors governing buying at different clubs.

Why Price Variations?

Three of the home club pros who are making the winter circuit discussed this subject of emphasizing the newness of merchandise after they'd finished a round in the Los Angeles open. One of them remarked that the most difficult problem in pro merchandising was that of making plain the reasons for a difference of several dollars in various golf clubs. "To the prospective buyers they all look about the same. The purchase is made mainly because of the reputation of the brand and confidence that there must be some unseen reason for the price variation," the pro declared.

Another commented that newness is an element that amply justifies a premium price. "It gives the member something to talk about with pride when he is able to say he's got clubs more advanced in design and construction than the rest of the fellows have although he may not be quite sure what the improvements are," said this pro. "However, pros very seldom make a strong point of accenting the newness of models in their shops. Even though this year practically every model will be new the members won't realize what changes have been made. Distinguishing the notably improved models from the rest of the stock and telling the members what changes have been made is one of the pro's important selling details this season," said the second professional.

The third pro said that the main reason for putting new items into the spotlight was because of the chance it gave the pro to show that he was on the look-out for anything that would interest and help the members. He declared that when a member got something good and new elsewhere than in the pro's shop it might get the member into the habit of thinking that the pro waited until something was brought in and sold to him instead of keeping a close watch on all sources of supply.

Thus the conversation went with angles that will occur to almost any experienced pro, especially those who have sad and costly recollections of being caught with some novelty merchandise that couldn't be

sold. The established standard lines of clubs, balls and bags, fortunately for the pro, will continue to account for the staple volume of shop business. The pro-only lines will help him to hold a goodly part of the quality market but where he is going to have to use first-class buying judgment and alert merchandising is in the lower price ranges of playing equipment. The pro, according to his colleagues who've studied this phase of 1947 shop selling, will have to pick lines that are of greater value than the equipment sold in stores.

That'll be possible in the case of the larger retail outlets. Buyers for these stores play strongly on their large volume purchases and buy so close to the price line they don't leave much leeway for the manufacturer to supply them with a class of merchandise that the pro would want for his customers. But there's no denying that the big retailers of golf goods as well as the smaller sports stores will have good merchandise and a lot of it before the 1947 season is far along. The market will be plenty large, too. Hundreds of thousands of golfers do not have access to pro shop stocks and aggressive bids also will be made by stores for the business of club members or fee course players who do have pro shops fairly handy. So instead of the 1947 picture being one that any pro can look forward to in a cocky and relaxed merchandising mood, it'll be one that will challenge him.

Pro Knows the Answers

But the challenge is not a frightening one. What the pros learned during war years in having to keep shop volume up with merchandise other than clubs, balls and bags, taught them a lot about how to retail in competition with specializing experts. Pros then went hunting for what could be sold in pro shops. They made some bad guesses in their desperation but as a general thing they learned more about becoming pretty smart buyers. They also were reminded by their experience that a good buy is a good sale. The customer is disposed to buy whatever looks good enough to the pro authority on golf goods. The pro has to win this reputation of authority by doing more than offering the obvious in his shop.

He's expected to have, under normal circumstances, some standard brands of playing equipment in stock. The extent and price range of the stock depends on the character of the club membership. But in addition to that members now expect him to go hunting in the markets for the very latest in almost everything for golf play.

The pro can go broke catering too much to this desire of the members but by exercising discrimination in selection and display of new items can keep his stock within reasonable limits yet make it plain that he is the one from whom the newest and best in golf goods always can be bought.

DETROIT DGA FIRST POSTWAR YEAR A BIG ONE

Detroit District Golf Assn. report of 1946 work shows following highlights:

CADDIES — Good cooperation between caddie-masters and chairmen. Recommended uniform caddie rates for district generally maintained except at remote clubs. Accented enlarging scope of caddie activities and welfare work, providing food at nominal cost for caddies, guaranteeing payment for caddies for reporting if they don't get work, bonus for caddying in rain and payment for waiting while members have lunch. "Caddies Nights" at theaters, hockey games, etc. on district-wide program. Strong promotion and good prize lists for caddie tournaments. Close tie-up with Western GA caddie scholarship program.

CLUB RELATIONS — Reporting clubs told of play increase from 10% to more than 30% over 1945. General increase of member clubs estimated between 15% and 20%, while entire district including public and fee courses increased 30%. Detailed report of increased member club expenses was presented, with increases of expenses over previous year going as high as 65% in golf and 75% in general expense at one of the finest operated clubs, not only in the Detroit district but the entire midwest.

MUNICIPAL COURSES — Detroit's 6 muni courses had 324,611 paid rounds and \$280,408 gross income. Armed forces 5000 rounds were free as were ladies' free day at Rouge and high school team play in competition.

FEE COURSES — Michigan GA's 28 privately-owned fee courses within 50 miles of city had increase of 25% in play over 1945. Increased operating cost was 40% over previous year.

GREEN SECTION — Figures received from 20 18-hole courses showed gkpr. salaries ranging from \$4,200 to \$1,500 a year. Hourly rate paid course workers ranged from \$1.25 to 60 cents. Average was 93½ cents. Eight clubs furnish house to gkpr. Average of fertilizer used annually was 23¼ tons. Sixteen clubs had used 2, 4-D and reported "very good" results; 4 had not used 2, 4-D. Average fairway cut during season is 1 in. Average height of playing season cut of greens is ¼ in. Course maintenance expense for year ranged from \$37,299 to \$1,150, with average being \$15,860.

The DDGA has 30 private clubs as members. Tournament program was exceedingly active during 1946.