

Know Pro Shop Merchandise

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What makes selling of pro-grade clubs a job that requires well-informed men in the pro shop is the superficial resemblance of clubs that vary widely in price. Usually the retail buyer of golf clubs can't tell the difference between a \$4 club and a club that retails for \$9 and far too often the assistant in the shop or the pro himself isn't too clear about the reasons that legitimately account for the difference.

The pro doesn't see the factory cost sheets or operations which in some instances make an expensive club a real economy. The pro shop salesman knows that the set of woods or irons he sells a player normally will be used by the player for 6 years or more. Even if the player plays only 25 rounds a year that means he will be using those clubs for a minimum of 150 rounds. So the difference in cost between a cheap and a first class set of golf clubs, per round, is about the cost of a bottle of beer at the club.

In the old days when clubs were bench-made the member could see the care used in the selection of shafts, heads and grips, the craftsmanship used in the making of the clubs, and the expert consideration of the needs of the player for whom the club was designed and made. Then there was not the need to give today's required explanation of the price difference between clubs.

The pros and their assistants then either knew all there was to be known about clubs and the material that went into clubs or they couldn't hold jobs at even second-rate clubs. Factory production of clubs has changed that. The younger professional or assistant today rarely is compelled to know as much about clubs as the earlier pro generation had to know. He may think that a casual knowledge of clubs will get him by as long as he knows from his own playing experience a fair amount about the merits of equipment design and construction. But unless he has a very sound and thorough knowledge in this phase of his job—far beyond the knowledge and ability to make minor repairs—he can't do the selling job and the member service job that should be done at a first class club.

Know the New Features

This year particularly the man in a golf club pro shop should be very well acquainted with all the many new items of design, construction and materials in evi-

dence in all popular lines of golf clubs, whether or not all the lines are stocked in his shop.

This year, more than ever before, there have been refinements introduced into designs with the purpose of helping the high-handicap player as well as the expert get greater certainty of results. Do you know all these features and the reasoning behind them? You should to qualify yourself as an authority on golf playing equipment.

It is not the easiest thing in the world for an assistant to get this sort of information. The demand for clubs is so heavy that the salesmen don't often have time to explain in detail all the new features to the assistants.

In talking with pros and assistants in Florida the past winter I have been reminded that there is a lot of room for pros improving the knowledge of their assistants and their assistants' capacity for member service by carefully going over the new equipment with their assistants. At Red Run GC Frank Walsh goes over, with his staff, details of new items that are put into the shop inventory whether the new stuff is clubs, balls, bags, shoes or any of the apparel items and accessories that now are quite a factor in pro shop sales volume.

That sort of "briefing" on the merchandise enables the assistants to give the members the same standard of expert service that Frank gives them when he can personally attend to them. It's a logical part of assistants' preparation for the work that is entrusted to them but it's surprising how often it is overlooked by some pros who never would think of allowing an assistant to give a lesson unless he had a very clear understanding of the methods of the head professional.

The information required probably could be best obtained by the pro or assistant spending some time in the club and ball factories seeing what is being done and having the design and material and construction processes explained to them. But that is impossible. Even if the pros and assistants could afford the time and money to go through the plants their presence would handicap the plant workmen. However I do think that in some cases it would give the pros and assistants plenty of a basis for making sales talks on the class

of workmanship put into the better grade of clubs.

Especially now with most factories having to train a lot of new workers there are noticeable variations in the type of workmanship that can be determined by close and expert inspection of the finished clubs. The more expensive the club logically the better the available craftsmanship that goes into its manufacture.

Need More Facts From Makers

There is considerable of a field for the manufacturers to increase their service in supplying details of raw materials, design, manufacturing steps and inspection so the pro and his assistant would have full data available. A great many of most clubs' members have manufacturing businesses of their own. They are interested in the whys and wherefores of the mechanical details of golf clubs and balls. But not much of this sort of information is given to the pro and even less to the assistants. Generalities are expected to cover the territory.

For instance, on the new laminated wood heads, the pro and his assistant are told that the heads are glued together under heavy pressure and are impervious to moisture, and that's about all. The qualities of the wood used, some details of the various pressure processes and why the manufacturer uses the one he has chosen, the exactness—if superior—in applying the sole plate and shaft, the increased strength and durability of the laminated club (if it does have those qualities), the job that can be done in precision finishing, the character of the varnishes, the tests of how the ball reacts to the clubhead material, and many other points should be available knowledge for the pro or assistant who is willing to study to know the merchandise that he sells.

There are many things about the design, material, heat-treating, boring and finishing of the new iron clubs that the pro and assistant should know but he will have to do some work to learn these things. The why of changes in shafts and wherein one type of shaft varies from another in cost and performance also should be knowledge for selling use by the men in the pro shops. The sort of leather used in the grips—or other grip material—and how it's treated and how the grip is built up and made firm are other items that the salesman in the pro shop should know. And just what manufacturing processes and inspections are made to see that properly constructed and balanced clubs result should be known to the man who's doing the selling in the pro shop.

Using Authoritative Information

Certainly the pro or his assistant won't have to go into a long and detailed explanation of the elements in a superior club and justifying its price every time some member shows an interest in buying a club. But with a fund of authoritative information on hand the pro or his assistant can drop bits of it now and then to tactfully work into the members' minds the idea that a golf club is something more than just a head, a shaft and a grip.

There is protection for the pro in this sort of knowledge. It is a sure thing that there is going to be a lot of retail competition for the pros and any advantage the pro can get by knowing more about all golf merchandise than the "downtown" retailer's salesman know, is needed to keep the pro shop at the head of the golf merchandising procession.

Furthermore this complete and authoritative knowledge of the shop's merchandise is something that's due your members. The function of the pro shop at a club is not only that of convenience, it is supposed to provide an expert service that is one of the assets of belonging to a good club.

Every pro and competent assistant has winced at seeing clubs that are poorly fitted to players because the player thought he could get a set cheaper than it would cost him at a pro shop. Fat men playing too upright clubs, shafts too short or too long, clubs too light or too heavy, long thin men playing clubs not right for them; all cost the players fun and money. These rather obvious matters are the result of the pro not having done a strong and complete job of making himself known as an authority who knows all about golf clubs and how to assure the player getting the best clubs for his particular game and at a cost within reason.

Time after time a pro or an assistant has been shocked by a member to whom he's been giving lessons showing up at the club with a set purchased elsewhere. The member, obviously, considered the pro or assistant a satisfactory authority in teaching the game but hadn't thought of the man also being an authority on playing equipment.

Know your merchandise as a thoroughly informed authority and let the members know that you know it. Then you'll have them not only firmly in the habit of buying from you but talking so much about what you told them about clubs, balls and other shop items they'll bring customers from the outside to you.

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