

FEBRUARY • 1949

# More Sales Pressure Needed to Keep up Pro Shop Sales

By HERB GRAFFIS

Pro shop sales at winter resorts during December and January warn pros at clubs farther north they'll have to open the sales throttle wide this spring and summer or suffer a slump in shop volume.

The postwar sales honeymoon is over. But there doesn't seem to be any reason for a smart pro who's willing to work getting panicky about the outlook. Christmas sales by pros who applied sales pressure were remarkably good. Pros who didn't work hard on Christmas gift selling suffered a slump in sales but so did many retail stores which used every trick and force selling brains could devise.

In southern California the season is 12 months long and the influx of winter resorters consists of people who generally have been pretty well supplied by their home club pros. Around the Miami and Palm Beach areas the tourist business seldom is felt to any extent in pro shops until the second week in January.

Resident population increase in southern California has been greater than in any other area in the nation. Hence this sector should afford a reasonably reliable preview of what pros may expect in business this year.

After visiting representative clubs of various private, fee and public classes in southern California my conviction is that the pro this year will have to use more selling effort than he ever used before.

The answer to 1949 profits is strictly up to the pro — even more than it depends on the club and the members. The winter started off well in the shops of Willie Hunter at Riviera, Harry Bassler at Fox Hills fee courses and George Lake at Long Beach's municipal establishment

but only because of the efforts of three stand-out men in their respective classes and their well-trained assistants.

## Stock to Attract Market

Hunter is a star at stocking his shop to meet the market. For instance, during the Los Angeles Open when the weather was so "unusually" cold Willie didn't do much seat-cane business with gallerities who, needed to keep moving to keep warm, he sold a lot of plaid tams and other warm headwear and warm sports shirts in his shop. He also made an effective selling display of larger bags to cash in on the playing displays of such bags carried by the caddies of the tournament stars.

Hunter changes his shop display for tournaments. He makes it plain that he is prepared to care for crowds just as he has his shop normally showing members that he has almost everything they need. By constantly studying his market and adjusting his merchandising fire Willie overlooks no bets.

During the National Open last year Willie sold 85 of the then \$25 Scot seat canes. He sold some of them at the present higher price and sold some cheaper seats even though conditions were not favorable, during the 1949 LA Open.

Hunter believes in having something unusual in his shop. Al Chapman had his painted necktie artist, Miss Nina Johnson, painting ties to order in a corner of Hunter's shop during the LA Open. It was an interesting and unusual exhibit that brought income that otherwise would have passed the shop.

The tie operation again demonstrated what pros learned during the war when they couldn't get golf playing equipment



### LEITH SHOWS HOW HE SOLVES PROBLEM OF PRODUCTIVE DISPLAY

Problem of attractive and productive display in small shop is well solved by Forbes Leith (R) and his asst., Joe Stolarik, at Glen Flora CC, Waukegan, Ill. Frequent change of display of items on table and of clubs on wall display keep members aware of the extent of Leith's stock. Everything's kept immaculate in the shop. Notice the display of putters and special clubs prominent by the case. This display invites—and gets—a lot of business from players whose putting, approach and recovery shots indicate need for improvement that a new club might fill.

and had to look for other lines of merchandise to keep their customers in the buying habit. Golf apparel is an important staple in pro shop stocks. The apparel has to be tops in its price class. The pro endangers club, ball and bag sales if he permits his customers to think that shoddy apparel is indicative of his merchandising.

Harry Bassler gives a tip-off on how to keep pro department volume up by saying, "No matter how hard you think you're working, when business shows signs of dropping you have to go after it harder." When he saw store newspaper advertising increase in fighting for Christmas business Bassler put on his own campaign.

#### Trade-in Allowances with Care

Bassler sent out letters advising that anyone buying more than \$25 in his shop before Christmas could apply the letter as a \$5 payment. Many of the letters went to golfers who wanted new sets of clubs and wanted to trade in old sets. By not getting off base on trade-in allowances Bassler was able to sell a lot of woods and irons at a good profit.

He's strongly of the opinion that the party is over for pros who expect to make good money on good jobs and keep on

playing, too. He says that it's becoming more apparent that a pro has to make contacts to sell. Harry has three assistants teaching and does considerable teaching himself. Teaching is the big point of origin of hottest sales leads. Bassler advises that strong promotion be given to lessons as a prime feeder for club sales.

George Lake at Long Beach has found that the lesson promotion, even on the delayed motion of junior class lessons, sells playing equipment. Lake's job of junior promotion is one of the finest performances in municipal sports management and has publicized Long Beach as a model for junior golf development. The kids' interest has brought their parents into the game. Some of the parents formerly played and want to get new clubs. A number of golfers who play at Long Beach's muni course bought used clubs at rather high prices during the war. These people want high allowances on those clubs they bought when war plants were paying fancy wages and clubs commanded a premium. Today's prices of new clubs don't justify the allowances these golfers want for their old clubs. Hence their desire for new clubs has to be steamed up to the point where they'll pay the price. George Lake has found that

energetic promotion on the junior and adult levels is the best way to create this needed attitude for sales. This promotion works out pleasantly and profitably for the entire community in building heavy traffic for the Recreation Park courses.

### "Get 'Em While They're Hot"

Several very successful pros, writing from Florida, advise that they're getting back to their clubs in the north this year earlier than usual. They have decided that an early start is going to be required to make sales par in 1949.

Before the season starts the golfer always is hot and eager. He thinks this is the year when he'll have the answer. He is in a soft mood for buying new clubs. His house account at his club hasn't begun to reach a monthly sum that makes him wince. Incidentally, a pro at a private club who will look over the annual statements of his club for the past ten years, usually is surprised to see how much more house spending has increased in percentage than pro department business has enlarged. I've been with some pros who thought they were doing very well in improving their volume but who found that bar and restaurant business at their clubs had increased far more in percentage.

One point an observing pro mentioned about early spring business should be kept in mind by all professionals. He said "while there still is snow on the ground many fellows come out to the club Saturdays and Sundays and spend 15 to 100 dollars playing cards and for drinks. I ought to be able to get 20 per cent of that money without the fellows missing it and give them something in return. Last spring I sold 92 dozen new balls for practice balls to these early birds by working on a hunch that Sam Schneider wrote in *GOLFDOM* about players really not knowing what results they were getting from their practice unless they used new balls. I sold 37 putters directly as the result of having a putting carpet and cup in my shop where the early birds could practice and gamble."

Byron Nelson has told in *GOLFDOM* about getting back on the job when he was professional at Inverness so early that the course was still soggy and closed, and selling 17 sets of irons one Saturday.

The pro who begins to work hard and early not only gets sales prospects in the most receptive mood but he beats the store competition to the draw and gets customers in the habit of buying at

the pro shop throughout the entire season.

Getting to the shop early is only part of the work. The customers must be prepared by advance advertising. Most of the fellows send out an opening announcement. They could make good use of a series of letters or circulars; one on lessons, another on clubs and bags and a third on golf apparel.

### The New Look in the Shop

An important move in pushing up spring business is that of brightening up and rearranging the shop. In too many cases people who come into the shop have the idea that the same general look of the shop means that the shop stock is the same and there's no new inducement to buy.

A retailing expert once said to me that more attractive boxes for golf balls were the only major improvement in golf pro shop display and selling since he began playing the game, 30 years ago.

He maintained that golf club packaging and retail display was not nearly on the same level as other items of packaged merchandise intended to retail for from \$50 to \$125. We had quite an argument as I believe that pro shop selling has come a million miles since the old days of bench club-making when a pro shop was a combination shop and store.

"No need getting into a fight about this," the retailing authority said to me. "I've been through the same debate with our sporting goods department men." You all have a lot to learn. You've got enthusiasts to sell to and you don't work the market as you should. You're sportsmen rather than merchants. The dealer in rare stamps could teach you a lot about how to sell to enthusiasts."

Well, whatever the pro can learn about stock selection, display, advertising and other sales contacts, and selling, he may have to use this year. The lost sales of war years have been made up since VJ day and from now on it looks like selling will be normally tough. That isn't alarming but it does mean that business just won't fall into the pro shop.

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