

Check Now on Pro Shop Operating Plan

By HERB GRAFFIS

Businessmen pros are taking steps to protect themselves against any slump in general business from postwar boom volume to normal. These able pros are checking up on each detail of their operations. Pros who usually got back on their northern jobs in late March or April from winter vacations are returning early this month.

A major problem pros continue to discuss is that of getting well qualified assistants. Many of the younger men want assistant jobs mainly for the purpose of bettering their own games and with an income that pro department operations seldom can afford. A first class assistant should be competent in shop operations, help handle club events, and teach so the pupil won't think he or she is getting brushed-off when the head pro can't handle the lesson and turns the pupil over to an assistant. The pro can't be everywhere at once and unless he's got able and conscientious assistance the job in a moderate-sized or larger club isn't handled to the pro's own satisfaction, let alone that of the members.

But pros admit that part of the fault in the assistant situation is the pros' own. There has been very little planned training to take the place of that boys used to get in the days when they started on the bench. There has been work wisely done in working out commission arrangements on sales and lessons that give the assistants profit incentive and add to the pro's net income but there's still a lot of room for pros to establish mutually satisfactory pay systems for apprentices.

Pros don't expect any heavy competition from cut-price store sales of clubs this year as stocks of clubs available and high manufacturing costs don't indicate that the situation will permit price-slashing sales such as stores used to have. But the thoughtful pros do believe that the increase in younger golfers who play fee or public courses is going to be a factor that will keep the stores busy in pushing club sales.

How to get to this market before the youngsters may get in the habit of buying

from stores rather than pros is something foresighted pros are discussing. In some districts pros plan to go into co-operative newspaper advertising advising golfers that they can buy equipment from pros at private clubs even though the golfers don't belong to the clubs. Individually some pros have been making profitable bids for this business.

Plan to Play Up Expert Fitting

Manufacturers in making available shafts of several grades of stiffness or softness have made it possible for pros this year to make a strong play on fundamental of club merchandising that has been steadily deteriorating since bench club-making became extinct.

That fundamental is proper fitting of clubs.

Pro authorities have estimated that right now between 40 and 60% of golfers are playing with clubs that don't fit them. Part of the reason for that condition lies in the fact that as a golfer gets older his clubs need to be changed. On that point alone the pros generally haven't done a good selling job. Older golfers with plenty of money are playing with clubs they bought 10 to 15 years ago. Many golfers didn't get good fits in their eagerness to get clubs made the first two seasons after the war although pros practically begged many of these buyers to wait until clubs of properly fitting weights, lengths, lies and shafts could be secured.

Pros point out that in the majority of cases when a player is properly fitted with clubs he buys at a store the fit is by accident. And to be frank, many pros maintain that a large percent of younger assistants have a whole lot to learn about fitting clubs.

Modernize the Pro Shops

It's a sure thing that smart pro advertising and sales work this year and in years following is going to stress getting pro expert fitting of clubs. It's an essential of the right sort of club selling job that only the pro who knows the buyer's swing can handle correctly.

During its 22 years GOLFDOM has per-

sistently campaigned for pro shops that would reflect accurately the character of the club as well as of the pro. Often pro shops are oversights in architectural planning and are too small, too dark, poorly located, poorly laid out and difficult to operate as a function of any good golf establishment, private, public or daily fee.

A result of GOLFDOM's campaigning has been that club officials and golfers now compare, consciously or unconsciously, one pro shop against another as an indication of the character of a club's operations.

But whether or not the shop's location, size and layout are favorable to the pro's efforts in trying to get business and serve members, it's certain that this next month or so is going to see considerable revision in shops done by the pros themselves.

Painting, rearrangement of cases and tables, new curtains, floor covering, lights and pictures, new arrangements of club, bag and shoe displays and improved storage facilities, are going to be provided.

Sunshine in the Shop

Pros have found that golf, a sunshine game, should have its playing equipment and apparel displayed for sale in a sunshiny shop even if the sunshine has to be supplied by an electric substitute. GOLFDOM has seen pro shops in which improved lighting and brighter colors of walls, ceilings, rugs, furnishings and fixtures have been credited with a 50 per cent increase in sales volume.

Already this year businessmen of the type that constitutes the greater part of private club membership are rather scarey about conditions in their own businesses and to get them to forget gloom and loosen up in pro shop buying the shop has to be a cheerful-looking place. Check your shop thoroughly so you can do all possible work in freshening it before the season starts, if you're in a northern or central state.

As previously mentioned, club members are getting more observant about pro shops and as they get around they may compare your shop with one in which the pro and his assistants have used brains and sweat, often in doing work for which the club actually should pay. This winter I've heard officials of two clubs tell why professionals I thought were quite able fellows were fired. The officials in both cases said in effect, "the man was careless and just didn't give a damn. If you doubt you should have seen his sloppy shop. Our members and their wives noticed that and regarded it as a tip-off to his general attitude."

This past winter members of GOLFDOM's staff in talking with first class businessmen pros from all parts of the U. S. heard practically unanimous agreement on one thing and that's the importance of putting price tags on all merchandise.

One pro whose sales volume is amazingly high told Joe Graffis:

"Any pro who doesn't put a price tag on everything on display is passing up about 20 per cent of sales volume he doesn't know exists at his club. When I started marking my merchandise with bold price tags that everybody could read I began selling to people that I didn't know had the slightest interest in the merchandise. With the women's buying becoming more of a factor in pro shop selling you need prices to get them over the suspicion that everything in a pro shop is sold at a premium price."

Another pro whose shop does the biggest business of any private club in its district said to me; "Price tags make inventory control easy. We've had plenty of cases in which my assistants had to look up the retail price of clubs before they quoted members and some cases in which mistakes were made against us. Men, whether they're rich or poor, don't like to ask prices in a pro shop. Let them know what the price is on everything and you'll be surprised at the sales that make themselves."

This fellow pointed to a display of putters, flanged nibbies and other special approach clubs in one corner of his shop. Each club had a tag on which the price was prominently and neatly printed. That corner alone did \$1400 worth of business last year without me or my assistants saying a word until we were asked about the clubs. The price tags did the talking that opened the sales."

One thing about price tags; be sure that they are very neatly printed and don't look like some guy just wrote on them the first figure that popped into his mind. If you can get the price tags printed in type for clubs, bags and ball, so much the better because such printed tags look like standard price for the merchandise.

We once suggested to a manufacturer that he get printed price tags to be displayed on his clubs in pro shops and he said that some pros objected to this as they preferred to put on their own prices so they could mark up if the customer was hard to sell and wanted a discount or a high trade-in allowance. Since that remark

was made I've talked with a lot of pros about it and have found that in so few cases are prices marked up so the pro is only pretending he's making a concession. I wonder if the suckers ever are fooled when they're buying and getting a discount which isn't a discount.

Generally the pro shops are giving such exceptional value in merchandise and service they have only one big problem which is the problem of making the prospective customers aware of the helpful character of pro shop merchandising.

Better check every phase of your pro department's operations right now. Do it completely and carefully and you'll get your good share of 1949 business.

Shot-making Turf Tests on North-South Mixture

Fred V. Grau, USGA Green section director, arranged with pro Rodger Peacock to hit balls with an 8-iron off grass plots at Green Section test field as one of the many interesting demonstrations for crowd of 200 at 1948 field day.

Grau's comment on the shot-making tests: "U-3 bermuda with B-27 bluegrass, one year old, cut $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. No replaceable divots removed. Scars fully healed with bluegrass on November 15, one month later.

"U-3 bermuda alone, cut $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. No replaceable divots. Scars not healed November 15 because bermuda is dormant.

"U-3 bermuda with mixed seeded bents, one year old, cut $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Replaceable divots removed readily. Scars not healed on November 15. Replaced divots did not grow.

"Mixed bent grass alone, one year old, cut $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Large divots removed. Healed poorly when replaced.

"Common Japanese lawn grass with mixed bents, cut $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, one year old. Replaceable divots removed which did not heal when replaced. Scars still bad November 15.

"Common Japanese lawngrass with B-27 bluegrass, one year old, cut $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$ and 1 inch. No replaceable divots removed. Scars were slight and have healed completely with bluegrass on November 15.

"Common Japanese lawngrass alone, cut 1 inch. Divots removed, not replaceable. Scars still evident November 15 and will not heal until Spring 1949 when Zoysia resumes growth.

"Each shot was made so that the club

hit the ball first on the down stroke and pinched it against the turf. Roger said the bermuda and the Zoysia with bluegrass represented the most perfect turf for hitting controlled shots.

"Zoysia cut at 4 inches presented a rough that would fill the pros with dismay if it were on a course where a championship were being held.

"Roger Peacock was asked to intentionally take a divot from the Zoysia-bluegrass and bermuda-bluegrass turf. He succeeded on the third try but nearly succeeded in breaking his club and his wrist.

"Believe it or not we were as amazed as the crowd was. It was unrehearsed and we were ready for anything. As it turned out it was the hit of the day. Surely a turf that tough would be good not only for tees and fairways, but for lawns, athletic fields, ball diamonds, school grounds, drill grounds, polo fields, tennis courts (maybe), and other places where resistance to wear and rapid healing come first.

Research in North-South Mixture

"Now what we have to do is to prove (1) that we can maintain a balanced mixed turf of southern and northern grasses, (2) that any turf professional can grow the mixture, (3) that it will give the same results at Beltsville as at Kankakee and Kalamazoo. This ought to give the cooperating stations something to shoot at and it ought to lick the Poa annua problem.

"Best of all, this mixed N-S turf is weed-free. No insects or Jap beetles have hurt it and it has thrived with no irrigation. No diseases have hurt it. One reason for our success, I am sure, has been the deep thorough tillage with the Aerifier, adequate timely fertilization to favor the "under-dog grass", and MINIMUM IRRIGATION.

"Seed of B-27 bluegrass is becoming available. It is in commercial production in Oregon and acreage is being increased.

"Seed of Zoysia is not yet available. It, and U-3 bermuda, still must be planted vegetatively. Of the two, the U-3 bermuda spreads and heals more rapidly. Both have been winter hardy at 32° below zero for several years."

Western Open Dates Set

The dates for the 46th Western Open Championship of the Western Golf Assn., originally scheduled for June 16-19, at the Keller Golf Course, St. Paul, Minn., have been changed to July 28-31.