

Inventory of Sales Ideas Finds Pros Well Stocked

By HERB GRAFFIS

With the sharp rise in the price of golf playing equipment that's come with inflation and the increase in prices of raw materials and wages, pros have been paying more attention to their inventories than ever before.

It only takes the past two years' experience to remind a pro that when his year's business begins he has an inventory of from \$5000 to \$15,000, represented by cash or credit, in his shop and that he has to use his head to come out in the black.

He knows that the member who bought a set of irons from him the previous year probably won't be buying another set for five years unless there are some drastic changes in design and construction. The pro knows he grossed about \$30 on that sale—and netted a whole lot less—so the sale represents a net income of less than \$6 a year from the purchaser.

The pro wouldn't be nearly as good a businessman as the members who hired him if he doesn't give some thought to what he should average in sales per member. Some members, of course, won't come up to the average the pro considers is proper for the job, but others will go over. The same average income per capita should be estimated per player on public or semi-public courses.

Only experience and careful consideration of previous year's sales, lesson and club-cleaning income will enable the pro to determine what his average per player should be.

The figure, which really is sales per for the course, is significant because sometimes the pro realizes that it may tip off who may need more attention—or who's been buying well above the average but has been getting a good, but not special, amount of attention. Consideration of that phase is another good reminder to the pro as he knows it's always dangerous and usually costly to "play pets" among his members.

Then the pro may suddenly realize that it takes a lot of brains and good judgment to be a successful pro.

Brains In Pro's Inventory

That brings you to the biggest item in the pro's inventory; brains.

The more I get around among pros the more I am made aware that many of them are really exceptionally good small

retailers. They use their heads as well as their muscles to make money for themselves and advance their clubs.

Some cases of astute pro business operations that lately have come to my attention include that of Eddie Burke at Woodridge CC, New Haven, Conn. Eddie's members are strong for encouraging the caddies. The caddies want good clubs. So the members buy from \$500 to \$700 in prizes—mostly clubs—from Eddie's shop as caddy tournament prizes.

Another case is that of Ellsworth Vines at Wilshire CC, Los Angeles. Ellie is a brainy golfer as he was a brainy tennis star. He was heady enough to get into the semi-finals of this year's PGA championship, although he had to outsmart a back injury all the route. At his club when he sees some fellow who's using clubs that are so old the player has outgrown them and they're a definite handicap to the player's game, Vines sends the member a reminder card discreetly tipping off the player to a set of new clubs that can be bought, several months after the rush is over, at a price that gets Ellie out with a profit, converts inventory into cash and gets the owner of the new clubs playing more golf.

Catching Customers Young

Then there's Jim Thomson, in his 33rd year at the Mohawk CC, Schenectady, N.Y. Jim never overlooks a chance to encourage youngsters around the club. A lot of the times the kids probably were nuisances but after 33 years many of them have become excellent and firm customers.

The idea that pros might be slow about spending a buck to make two has pretty generally vanished. The way pros use newspaper space now shows fine examples of effective use of small space. For instance, there's Bill March at the Elk's CC, Ft. Wayne, Ind. He gets many who are beginning golf—or thinking of taking it up—with a small ad in Ft. Wayne newspapers which reads:

BEGINNERS—Don't buy a cheap set of golf clubs to see if you like the game. Likely as not you'll never enjoy the game if you start with unbalanced and poorly fitted clubs. Buy a set of used but expertly reconditioned Pro Model clubs. They don't cost much and they are exactly fitted to you.

That small ad does a lot of business.

Joe Steiger, pro at Coos CC, Coos Bay, Ore., has very successfully handled the job of making golf grow in a pleasant small town. When Joe went to the Coos club it had 65 members. Now it's got 305. A lot of that promotion was thru reconditioning trade-in clubs of original members so the newcomers could get "test sets" at low prices. The very old clubs Joe converted into junior clubs, in some cases grinding the heads down. He saw to it that caddies got fitted with those so the kids became enthusiastic about golf and the caddy supply was adequate. The caddies pay for new or used clubs out of earnings, on the installment plan, in most cases.

Joe Sullivan at the Yale golf course, New Haven, Conn., is a great promoter and he too works on the basis that the big job is to get the new ones started and that requires clubs. Joe's golf teaching program at Yale creates a quick market for good used sets. He doesn't have to display used sets; just tip off a student that there's a good used set available that'll fit him.

There are other pros at college courses who are expanding the golf market rapidly by being able to offer good used sets. The students, most of whom are on rather close budgets, want to play but prefer their own clubs to renting.

Trade-Ins Growing Factor

This trade-in set selling at public courses and among office and factory workers, college students and caddies has become quite large business nationally during the past couple of years. Some watching is necessary to prevent the demand for allowances on sets being traded in on new clubs from getting out of line and tying up the pro profit, but during the past two years the trade-ins have been an appreciable factor in bringing new players into the game at a time when new club prices are fairly high.

Ole Clark at Longmeadow (Mass.) CC is another one of the pros who believes that an important part of the pro's job is

that of being his own advertising manager. Ole says that the club papers always are looking for news and advertising and the pro can't have a better medium of printed expression. The advertising represented by shop display is something else that Clark watches carefully. He keeps changing his display so there are often new "headlines" to catch the eyes of those who come into the shop.

Harrell Butler, at the Oklahoma City (Okla.) G&CC, is another of the progressive pro businessmen who makes discreet use of newspaper advertising. At a club like his he couldn't advertise in the newspapers to the general public but in the case of trade-ins his assistants use newspaper ads and sell from their homes. These ads get some customers who can be interested in buying new clubs.

Bill Hook, at the Kenwood CC, Cincinnati, O., also uses newspaper advertising to dispose of used clubs and that carries weight with a lot of intermittent or beginning golfers who know that what's had the approval and use of Kenwood members must be a pretty good buy. Hook disposes of used clubs, in addition to the newspaper advertising channel, thru range and public course pros on a percentage deal.

In the metropolitan districts at the better clubs the pros often carry stocks that exceed in value the inventory of many a down-town retail store. At a club such as Pelham CC, Pelham Manor, N.Y., where Buck Luce is pro, Buck simply has to keep stock moving to prevent having heavy capital tied up. He campaigns smartly for the members' Christmas business in golf equipment and apparel and by watching his stock closely always is offering fresh merchandise.

When there are apparel items that haven't sold as the playing season is coming to a close Buck reduces the prices on these items for sale to the caddies. He says that gives the caddies a break and protects the price structure of business with the members. It also keeps him from

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Pres., Professional Golfers Assn. of America

INVENTORY OF IDEAS

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getting caught with stock that might go out of style.

Buying Season Made Longer

There is a very strong trend toward considering the golf equipment buying season as meaning any month when golf can be played anywhere in the country. Gene Root, pro at Denver's Lakewood CC, says that while he reduces prices on some apparel items in the shop after July 4th, he keeps club prices at standard because the players who have been "looking" in the spring probably have the desire for the clubs still alive and can be encouraged to buy. He suggests that the player and he go to the practice range and hit a few balls with three or four clubs of different weights, shafts and other specifications.

The players who have this opportunity to try the clubs and get some helpful and interesting pro advice on the tee, see the pleasant possibilities of the new clubs. They begin to realize that as long as they are going to be using the clubs for several years late summer is not a bad time to buy as other club expenses will be diminished then.

Another point, according to Root, extending the club and bag selling season

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in sections that formerly were considered five or six month seasons is getting to be more logical with so many members taking winter vacations. The winter vacations have made the golf season much longer but it's up to the home club pro to see that his members are properly outfitted with golf equipment before they leave their home clubs.

Oklahoma turf conference at Oklahoma A & M College, Stillwater, Okla., Oct. 22-23 has an all-star program of practical experts assembled by H. F. Murphy. Fred Grau, O. J. Noer, Tom Mascaro, Bob Dunning and other headliners of turf scientific and course work are booked to address what is certain to be record attendance.

Spalding issues book of its sales policy, telling of the background of marketing, pioneering, product research and development and advertising accounting for big sales of Spalding sports goods.

Joe Kirkwood, after playing an exhibition at Armed Forces GC, Ft. Jackson, S.C., with Mel Hemphill (Forest Lake), Dave Todd (Columbia CC) and Mike Serino (Armed Forces), told the other pros Ft. Jackson course is best of the armed forces layouts for conditions and compares favorably with some top private clubs.

Western Golf Assn. annual meeting Dec. 7 at Chicago.

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John H. Nutting and associates have purchased the Lexol Division of the Martin Dennis Co., Newark, N. J. from the parent company, The Diamond Alkali Co. The business of making and distributing Lexol leather conditioner will be continued under the name of The Lexol Corp., with offices at 289 Bloomfield Ave., Caldwell, N. J.

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