

Proper Fitting of Clubs Is Basis of Pro Marketing

By JACK ISAACS

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Jack Isaacs, veteran home club pro who knocked out tournament stars in getting into the semi-finals of the 1953 PGA championship, does an exceptionally large business in club selling at Langley Field. Jack bases his sales operations on expert fitting of clubs. His remarks on an essential function of expert pro service points to the need of much more emphasis in education and performance in this phase of the pro job.

IN MAINTAINING and increasing their leadership in golf goods merchandising golf professionals must increase accent on proper fitting of golf clubs.

Pros got into merchandising for two reasons; their ability to supply players with playing equipment and the convenience of the pro retailing outlet.

In the old days when the pros made golf clubs, either at benches in their own clubs or in working for the early clubmaking companies, every pro had to learn a lot about fitting the clubs to the individual buyers. Then the pros saw how properly fitted clubs and effective teaching were coordinated essentials in valuable service to their customers.

When conditions in the golf business changed and many of the younger pros came onto jobs without the background of clubmaking as a qualification for correctly fitting clubs pro golf found itself in need of a new, important and planned field of study: club fitting.

Older professionals who have given considerable attention to the education of their assistants make sure that their boys get good basic training in correctly supplying players with clubs. But there is by no means enough of that training provided. In its absence pro golf may weaken its competitive selling position.

I earnestly urge that the PGA Educational committee which is doing an excellent job in instruction research and im-

provement give considerable attention to club fitting. Development of expert capacity in this direction is not only a service which the pros' customers have a right to demand but, because the pro is in a position to see the buyers swing and use clubs, gives the pro an exclusive and valuable merchandising asset.

Club Fitting Program

Each sectional PGA meeting this spring might well devote time to having experienced professionals present, compare, and appraise their ideas on fitting clubs. If we'd all do that we eventually would impress upon our customers the fact that we have a highly valuable expert service they can't get at stores.

Many professionals realize that the accent on having properly fitted clubs was sharply diminished shortly after World War II. Players were so eager to get new clubs when manufacturing was resumed that they'd buy anything the pros had in stock even though many pros begged customers to wait until they could get clubs that were far better for the individual's use.

We still see the damage of that situation in observing how many golfers—men and women—are trying to play with clubs that are poorly fitted to them.

By being unable to control that post-war impatience the pros definitely lost some of the tremendously valuable and unique factor of public recognition as experts in club fitting.

My own situation differs from that of many pros but in general I have the same problems and responsibility in correctly fitting clubs. I am the professional (and superintendent) at the Langley Air Force Base course which I built about six years ago.

Quite a few of our players may be transferred to other fields in this country or overseas and they want to take the right clubs with them.

There, of course, is a large percentage of younger men and their wives—who also play a great deal of golf—and the person-

nel differs from that of the average private club in having the older officers (in their 40s and 50s) very much more adept physically and in much better physical condition than men of the same ages in civilian life.

Shop Stocked for Club Fitting

The first thing about fitting clubs you'll see in the front and in the storeroom at the back of my shop. That is a big, carefully selected inventory. I have—even in the winter—about 80 sets (more irons than woods, of course) in stock. There is a wide variety of swing weights and from 42 to 44½ in. lengths in woods and 37 to 39½ in. in irons.

It has required a great deal of study to assemble this stock to properly do the job. I've carefully determined about what my market would be in various types of players who would be correctly fitted by my stock.

And right there let me point out that the pro who does his ordering in the fall without first figuring the players to whom he should sell clubs and the clubs that would suit them best is not handling his business as an expert should.

A not unusual error of less experienced professionals is to order too heavily of the type of clubs that would suit them rather than their players.

In the display room of my shop is quite a variety of clubs. Every set and all the putters, wedges and approach clubs are plainly price-marked. This gives me the magnet of a wide price range. With few exceptions my stock is pro-only. When I see a man or woman showing interest in any set of clubs I am handy for them to enter into a buying conversation.

And remember, it's a BUYING, not SELLING, conversation.

My job at this point is that of a specialist available for expert advice to the buyer.

I find out discreetly what the buyers want to, or can spend.

Fitting to Price

Fitting the price often is a service in which the pro's help is very valuable. I have seen many golfers who practically threw money away in buying clubs that they thought were cheap but which weren't anyway near the clubs for them.

In explaining the differences between store stuff and the lines which merit pro approval I tell about construction, design, shafts, materials, balancing, uniformity and the check-ups that manufacturers use during manufacturing and assembly processes.

Then, of course, if I don't know the buyer's swing I want him or her to hit some

balls. I need this information for my own guidance sometimes but always it helps to dramatize the purchase and give an impression of personalized fitting.

The types of builds obviously are primary factors in fitting. A lot of these young fellows in the air force are big young men. I have noticed, too, that the young women are getting taller and I think that one of the points the manufacturers had better be giving more thought to now is longer shafts on clubs for the majority of younger women players.

What calls for plenty of exercise of the pro's judgment is determining whether the club user is an athletic type or not. And, along that line, what sport conditioned the buyer? Whether the man was a tennis player, football lineman or baseball star may have a lot of influence on his type of swing and the club fitting job. The same sort of judgment must be applied in the case of the young woman club buyer.

Study of how the buyer grips and swings brings some of the most important answers in fitting. I've noticed that the strong right-hand hitter who bulls the ball around will be all over the lot if his shaft is too whippy. But the typical strong younger player generally wants a club that is too heavy and a shaft that's too stiff for him. I am hopeful that the new Rocket shaft will solve a lot of these cases as it gets the whip down where we used to try to put it when we were working on wood shafts — where the clubhead can be felt.

Selling With Feel

A great deal of the fine art of properly fitting clubs comes down to providing the players with clubs that give them a good sense of clubhead feel. The man or woman who can't feel the clubhead doesn't have much of a chance to ever play good golf.

And often the inability to feel the clubhead comes from being off balance in trying to swing a club that isn't properly fitted to the player. Without balance it's impossible to feel the clubhead.

A peculiar thing I've often noticed in fitting clubs is that in winter when the player is stiff and perhaps a bit numb the club feels lighter. In warm weather when he loosens and his touch is more sensitive the clubhead feels heavier. Possibly other professionals have noticed the same condition and have thought about its effect in fitting clubs.

One of the most frequent problems in correctly fitting clubs is that of adjusting the grip to the individual's right and left hands. Next, I think, is the matter of

changing weights in woods. There is where the professional with bench clubmaking experience makes himself very much worthwhile to the buyer. And there, too, is where the PGA Educational committee has some work to do.

When I started in golf as a caddie at the Country Club of Richmond, Va., where my brother Charley was pro, I was fascinated by the clubmaking bench. In 1928 when I got my first job, at the Laurel GC in Richmond, I thought I knew everything. I was making my own clubs by then and continued to make them until 1930 when I discovered that others knew how to make steel-shafted clubs as well, or perhaps better than I did.

And as my experience in professional golf has increased I have seen the development of fine clubmaking into an art and science at factories.

Now I see that the application of this art and science to the greatest advantage of the golfer is a responsibility that every qualified pro must be competent to assume.

The more we pros ourselves realize and the more we impress on players that correct fitting of golf clubs to each player is an essential, invaluable service of the truly first-class club professional the better golfers will be served, the better they'll score and the stronger will be the pro's merchandising position in a larger market.

"The Bobby Jones Story" Is "Must" Reading for Golfers

"The Bobby Jones Story", published by Tupper & Love, Atlanta, Ga., (\$3.95), has been compiled from the newspaper columns and magazine pieces of the late O. B. Keeler by his widow with the aid of two talented old pals of O. B. and Bob, Grantland Rice and Innis Brown.

It is an entertaining, exciting and instructive classic. Unless you read it you haven't qualified to enter into any discussion about great players and you miss the liveliest close-up of all golf chronicles.

Keeler was Jones' literary accompanist from the time Bob played in his first East Lake club championship through every competitive start including the Grand Slam. O. B. got into Bob's head and heart as well as seeing all the outside shotmaking. And everybody who ever covered golf will tell you O. B. could write golf far better than anyone ever assigned to the game.

"The Bobby Jones Story" is the one chronicle of "inside a great golfer" you'll ever get a chance to read. There never will be the tie-up between a great golfer and a

great golf writer there was between Bob and O. B. There are dozens of such revelations as Jones telling Keeler that "grim concentration" wasn't for Jones. Said Bob, "If I walk along like an Indian, concentrating desperately on the next shot with an eighth of a mile to walk before reaching the ball, I feel sort of fagged in my head when I stand up to the shot."

Bobby Jones wrote the preface with the customary distinguished grace of a grand gentleman sportsman and remarked "If fame can be said to attach to one because of his proficiency in the inconsequential performance of striking a golf ball, what measure of it I have enjoyed has been due in a large part to Keeler and his gifted typewriter."

Rice wrote an introduction that gives an excellent stage-setting for the superb job by Keeler.

Shag Bag Rack That Increases Practice



Harold Sargent has a shag back rack made of light angle iron in his shop at East Lake CC, Atlanta, Ga., that gives these bags the same neat, convenient storage the caddie bags get.

Hooks in the vertical bars are large enough to allow bag straps or handles to slip on easily. The shag bags are filed alphabetically.

More attention is given shag bag storage by pros and quite a few shops have this storage where it can be seen from the shop. These pros have found that such showing of bags not only encourages practice and lessons but is a suggestion to put marred balls in the bags instead of continuing them in play.