

Play Increase Greater Than Sales Rise, Pros Say

ESTIMATES from well informed pros in 20 of the 30 PGA sections indicate that play in the U. S. for this year will be about 10 per cent ahead of 1953 and shop sales volume up about 6 per cent.

Checks on the estimates will be available later this year when the National Golf Foundation nation-wide survey of play is completed, and in spring, 1955, when the club and ball manufacturers' associations release their figures on 1954 sales.

Business for the year has been spotty, with the Pacific Coast pros probably doing better than those in any other section although a generally satisfactory increase has been registered in the New York metropolitan and New England sections. In most central areas and in the south play and pro shop sales got bumped by long spells of unmercifully hot weather.

Weather rather than regional economic conditions is said by the pros to be the primary factor determining play and sales figures. It is apparent to some pros that in order to learn definitely just how weather is affecting their sales they'll have to keep weather data on their sales records as many course supts. do on their work logs in order to make closer comparisons of their selling efficiency from year to year.

Trade-ins Figure Large

Trade-in sales figure continue to grow in the pro business picture and are credited in several sections as accounting for the larger part of the increase in new club sales as well as getting many newer golfers and public and fee course players in the habit of buying at pro shops. The trade-ins also are a growing headache as often the customers are much tougher traders than the pros and some local markets for reconditioned clubs may not be too brisk.

Pros will have to have more coordinated sectional work to deal with the trade-in situation. There has been discussion by pros and by makers about plainly marking on each club the year of its manufacture. Many players don't realize how long they've had their clubs and not only expect too much for what they think is a comparatively new set but fail to realize

their physical changes have made the clubs ill-fitting to them. A major problem of the year marking of course would be dating and possibly depreciating the selling price of clubs carried over in stock from one year to the next.

Women's play increased this year with least improvement in the south and greatest rise reported in up-state New York. Reports point to slightly more than 20 per cent of all golf play being that of women. Upstate New York also shows the best picture in women's play from the pro shop sales viewpoint. It's the only reporting section of the country in which pro shop sales to women were estimated at a higher percentage than that of increase in women's play. The husbands must be good providers in that area.

Most of the Pacific slope pro shops and those in Oklahoma and the Detroit and Chicago district are doing fairly well in women's club sales but they're not selling women's clubs in the same ratio that their men golfers buy clubs.

There's a definite improvement in women getting away from the beat-up clubs they've used for too long, but still a lot of work to be done for the ladies.

Junior golf in every reporting section is in a condition of healthy, accelerating growth.

Apparel, Shoe Sales Big

Apparel and shoe sales in pro shops will range from 5 per cent to 45 per cent of estimated total pro volume, according to pro authorities who expressed their observations and opinions.

Apparel and shoe business has been a life-saver in sections where playing equipment sales have been holding their own. An interesting aspect of these reports is that in metropolitan district pro shops where smart local store competition is keen, the shoe and soft goods volume runs from 20 to 35 per cent of the shops' total sales, which indicates pretty good merchandising by the pros in taking advantage of their strategic position.

Pros in some sections are hit by cut-price competition from stores, discount houses, military posts and purchasing department "sales" by corporations that insist on getting straight retail prices and

protecting their own dealers and price structure.

Judgments vary on how to handle these situations. A few pros opine that the answer may be sectional pro co-operative newspaper, radio and television advertising on an aggressive price competitive basis. They hesitate to go all out on such policy however as they fear this may weaken the pro "top quality" reputation and bear down the entire price structure which has been built on the foundation of pros demanding the best for their trade. These fellows point out that manufacturers of quality golf goods share with the pros a tremendous stake in providing highest quality goods for golfers at reasonable profit.

With golf goods demand no longer principally limited to a quality market, the problems of merchandising balance between private, semi-private and public course pro shop outlets and other retailers will have to be solved by mutual consideration of pros and leading manufacturers, several pros declared. Their attitude is that other retail outlets for golf goods don't much care about what happens to foremost golf goods makers but the leading manufacturers and the pros have to swim or sink together.

Another delicate financial problem is serious at some private clubs, so says one of the most successful veteran pro businessmen. He says the difficulty of developing and holding a group of good caddies when kids stand around while members who could afford caddy fees drag carts, is calling for action by club officials.

Assistant Problem A Headache

In every district the assistant problem is pressing. Seasonal nature of the work, long hours, Saturday, Sunday and holiday work, and shop duties being ahead of practice and play come as shock to the young golfer who thinks it's a lot of fun at big money to be in pro golf.

Some professionals say they've had good results getting older men, either pros or amateur golfers, in their shops. Others believe the right answer is to start training boys.

What all the pros reporting agreed was that much more work had to be done by pros collectively and individually in recruiting and training desirable assistants, not only so the assistant would know what to do to serve the club's golfers properly, but would learn what he should know to eventually handle a job of his own with

credit to himself and professional golf and value to his employers.

Pro Operating Costs Jump

Increase in over-all operating costs of pro departments, according to all but one pro reporting estimates for the sections, have been alarming. In the past two years at private and public course pro departments where the players get first class service operating costs have increased from 25 to 45 per cent.

One professional who is considered by many of his colleagues as the soundest businessman in his district says "The pros who, in a straightforward manner, present their club boards and employees with a realistic picture of mounting operating costs and make an effort to enlist consideration as partners in licking the problem will succeed and survive."

Another says the pro department has to pay closer attention to minor expenditures which total big at the end of the year.

The possibility of better shop layouts to save salaries of assistants and other employees is suggested by several.

The majority of the pros who commented on rising pro department costs admit they don't know what to do to solve the serious problem.

Caddies "Field Day" Gets Boost from Sports Editor

FRANK McGRATH, sports editor, Fall River (Mass.) Herald News, gave about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page in story and pictures covering the annual Caddies' Field Day at the Fall River CC.

Pro Marty Higgins says McGrath's story not only had the club's caddies and members talking and buying papers but the strong coverage and lively detail had every other kid of caddying age in town, and the parents of a lot of them talking.

Pres. McIlwane of the club paid the members' thanks to the kids at a dinner which concluded a day of golf, driving, approaching and putting contests, scholarship and other prize awards. Interesting detail of the Fall River caddies' education is a quiz program, with any kid who can't answer caddying and golf questions Higgins asks putting a nickle in the kitty and the jackpot going to the boy who has the right answer.

McGrath's experiment in giving caddies big time treatment in his paper paid off in interest, goodwill and circulation among youngsters of caddying age, and their parents.