

Golf Sales Figures Show Pros Where They Stand

By HERB GRAFFIS

GOLF professionals can get a lot of satisfaction and guidance from the figures on sports goods sales in 1954, as recently released by the Athletic Goods Manufacturers Assn.

The Association figures showed that golf equipment accounted for \$51,263,963 (at factory selling price including excise tax) out of a total sports goods reported volume of \$132,379,773.

The golf business represented about 38 per cent of the total of the 1954 sales made by the 73 members who include all the leading manufacturers of sports goods.

This sales scorecard in detail should have considerable study by every businessman professional. It shows that the pros are doing a tremendous business; so big that they've got to keep making use of every advantage they have in their authoritative position with golfers, their strategic sales outlets, and their knowledge of what merchandising methods score best with golfers.

Other retailers aren't going to look at golf's position in sports goods marketing without wanting plenty of the golf business. The warning doesn't have to be spelled out for any pro with business brains. Competition is going to continue to be keen. So the professional simply will have to continue his solid progress as a merchant.

Box Score Shows Golf Tops

A table of athletic and sporting goods sales for the past six years appears on the following page. It should be thoughtfully considered by every selling professional.

The figures are in factory selling prices including excise tax. The jobbers' and

other distributors' and retailers' figures are not shown.

Record years in the respective divisions of merchandise are underlined.

"Athletic shoes" do not include golf shoes. The biggest athletic shoe item was ice skating shoes, with 758,485 pairs. Baseball was next with 707,507 pairs, then came football with 406,552 pairs.

Nor does "athletic clothing" include apparel items sold in large volume in pro shops.

Golf didn't show the biggest sales gain percentage in 1954 over 1953. That was made by "helmets, pads, etc." which increased 18.2 per cent.

The golf equipment sales increase over the previous year was 5.2 per cent. Tennis sales in 1954 were 7.2 per cent ahead of 1953.

Now, as you've looked at the figures and considered the gains (and losses) in the sports goods markets you can see where the pro must attend to every detail of marketing intelligence and energy to keep his percentage of increase steadily satisfactory. With the big volume in golf the percentage figures creep up slower than in other fields where there's less volume.

Pros Are Accurate Forecasters

A survey made among pros by GOLF-DOM last September forecast with close accuracy a sales increase of "about 6 per cent" in 1954 pro shop business against the pro shop business of the preceding year.

Again we want to thank the professionals who answered our queries about business in their sections and enabled us

to make another accurate estimate in advance.

Getting into details of the golf playing equipment sales report for 1954:

In 1954 golf ball sales as reported by the Golf Ball Manufacturers' Assn., representing well over 90 per cent of the entire ball production, reached 2,949,848 doz. compared with 2,716,552 in 1953.

In the highest grade balls sales figures in 1954 were 1,815,242 doz. compared with 1,711,816 in 1953. This class of ball was the most popular seller. It meant \$14,447,100 in 1954; average of \$7.96 per doz. at manufacturers' selling price. John W. Sproul, Pres., Golf Ball Manufacturers' Assn., says that the professionals have 71 per cent of this top quality ball business.

Ball Sales Point Pro Lesson

These ball figures are highly significant to the informed and studious pro businessman.

Conservative estimates, based on extensive surveys, indicate that the number of golfers increased between 8 and 10 per cent in 1954 over 1953. Offhand you might expect that the beginning golfers would favor the cheaper golf balls and that the cheap ball volume would be considerably boosted because of the large number of women and junior beginners who would be expected to account for a considerable part of the cheap ball market.

But the figures show that the cheap ball sales increased only a little more than 2 per cent than the pro-grade ball volume.

The ball figures show a strong quality trend that is particularly impressive if the pro remembers that in 1941 the top grade ball business was only about 42 per cent of the total. The cut price balls and the private brand balls sold cheap by national advertisers had pros on short end of their bread-and-butter business in golf balls.

Now the way the ball business figures

for the pros is that on the top quality balls the pro makes \$4.35 a dozen. On the inferior ball, retailing for 80 cents the pro makes \$2.60 a dozen. This \$1.75 per dozen reduction in legitimate profit means that the pro who sells 500 dozen balls a year tosses away \$875.

If the pro could compensate for this loss by increased volume or could be giving his players a true saving there might be an argument for pushing \$875 away from the cash register.

But his experience shows he would be unwise to fight the pronounced general trend toward quality. The pro knows how the golfing public's psychology has put across the high quality tournament compression type of ball in giving the pro a convincing lesson on the futility of trying to buck the quality appeal. The pro also knows there's a waiting list for Cadillacs, and some people who the pro might think would have trouble buying roller skates for transportation manage to get the money to pay for the top-priced car when they can get one.

Leading pro businessmen see in the attempt to push cheap balls on pros a serious danger of cheapening the entire pro market and educate the golfing public to go for cheaper lessons, cheaper clubs, cheaper golf shoes, cheaper golf clothing and cheaper club cleaning and storage.

However, the story of the trend toward quality in golf, as in everything else, is plainly in the ball and club manufacturers' associations' figures.

The figures plainly show the strength of the pro position in top quality ball sales and pro influence on the newer as well as on the experienced golfers.

The ball sales report confirms the opinion of most successful pro businessmen that this is no time for the pros to risk their market leadership by pushing cheaper balls or endangering the present

GOLF HAS BIG LEAD IN SPORTS GOODS SALES

(Factory Selling Price Including Excise Tax)

	1954	1953	1952	1951	1950	1949
Golf Equipment	\$51,263,963	\$48,707,666	\$39,511,870	\$46,971,306	\$41,789,127	\$30,751,418
Baseball - Softball	26,072,531	24,911,342	20,494,320	26,067,383	29,220,703	20,312,555
Athletic Shoes	15,570,659	14,441,110	9,007,185	12,103,461	12,478,224	12,803,214
Inflated Goods	14,054,865	14,084,006	11,216,394	10,855,682	11,299,996	7,556,147
Tennis Supplies	6,919,553	6,419,805	5,119,397	5,814,029	5,702,461	4,015,970
Athletic Clothing	6,757,826	6,198,890	5,422,584	5,288,127	6,183,170	7,623,400
Helmets, Pads, etc.	4,561,349	3,859,192	2,732,893	2,990,730	3,409,863	2,548,452
Boxing Gloves	478,322	675,196	910,537	450,532	555,691	
Miscellaneous	6,700,705	7,507,791	5,881,997	5,293,694	6,412,650	10,844,820
Total	\$132,379,773	\$126,804,998	\$100,297,177	\$115,834,944	\$117,051,885	\$88,832,576

(NOTE: 1949 athletic clothing also included in miscellaneous.)

satisfactory price and profit status of pro-grade ball business, in any way.

There's another picture in the bag sales report. In 1954 there were 570,140 bags sold; about 27 per cent ahead of the previous year. But the manufacturers' dollar volume in bag sales was \$5,186,849 which was \$30,942 less than in 1953.

This was accounted for by the over-all average price of bags dipping from \$10.53 to \$9.08. Most of the slump was due to the more expensive bags, representing more than 100,000 bag sales, dropping in average from \$24.21 in 1953 to \$19.91 in 1954.

The stores get a larger percentage of higher-priced bag business than they do of top-quality ball business. So here is a situation that calls for the pros taking advantage of a price drop that gives them a good chance to really cut into store business.

Pros Direct the Club Buyers

The club sales figures showed that the pros are the controlling factor.

Club sales increased 300,917 to a total of 4,372,162 clubs reported sold in 1954 by members of the Golf Club Manufacturers' Assn. of which Henry P. Cowen is president.

There were 2,979,746 irons sold last year; 147,813 more than in the previous year.

Woods sales last year were 1,392,416; an increase of 153,104 over 1953.

Why wood sales increase was greater than the increase in irons sales—although only 5,291 more—you'll have to figure out for yourself. Perhaps the sales of 5-woods last year, which were pretty good at a lot of pro shops, partially accounts for the showing of the woods.

In view of the number of beginners it was rather surprising to see that the ratio of a fraction over 2 irons sold per wood club sold was maintained as it has been quite uniformly since the 4 wood clubs and 8 or 9 iron clubs sets became popular.

That ratio was held although the cheapest grades of woods and irons sold in such quantities last year that the average cost of irons (at factory selling prices) dropped from \$5.68 in 1953 to \$5.47, and the average costs of woods dropped from \$7.99 to \$7.51.

However, the pro-grade of woods and irons accounted for the largest sales dollar volume in any of the price classifications. Second best sellers were the cheapest grades. The in-between price ranges, according to reports GOLFDOM got from

quite a number of pros last year, present a good opportunity for pro shop sales—particularly to beginners and women—without cutting into the top quality club sales. The cheapest stuff according to most pros is going to be store business and hasn't enough margin to allow the service pros give with sales.

Furthermore, many pros can do better for the cheap club buyers, and for the pro shop business, by supplying this trade with clubs taken in trade on first class club purchases.

Frisco Pros, Olympic Members, Say Par Will Win Open

Richard J. Smith, chm., Public Information committee of the Olympic Club, says that San Francisco area pros who have played Olympic's Lake course since it was altered for the Open, figure that 280 (par) will win the championship.

Woods are tight at many holes, in some cases fairways are 40 yds. wide and bordered by close rough, additional bunkering by Robert Trent Jones has toughened some holes and tees have been moved back. Greens aren't any too big and are not severely contoured. The boys won't have those downstairs putts with the cups on the third or fourth steps from the bottom.

The course is in superb condition.

Smith says San Francisco fogs aren't bad in June and as the Lake course is well protected from westerly winds, morning fog won't be low enough to delay play.

Ticket for practice round, Monday thru Wednesday, the three days of the Open, and play-off, if any, is \$12. Practice round ticket is \$2 per day, admission for first two days is \$4 per day, and for Saturday \$6. Play-off, if necessary, will be \$4.

Florida Turfgrass Conference at Gainesville, Aug. 9-11

Third annual University of Florida Turfgrass Conference will be held Aug. 9-11 at Gainesville.

The opening session will have authorities telling of new and important advances in turfgrass development and maintenance. The second session will feature management of new grasses for golf.

The third session will be devoted to "troubleshooting in turf." Diagnosis and treatment will be covered on all major phases of turfgrass disorders.