

PROS' MARKET SURVEY

New Courses, Kids, Brighten Outlook

Opening of more than 100 courses this year offset the adverse effect of bad weather on golf play. Number of rounds played in 1955 is expected to exceed the 1954 total by at least 5 per cent.

Pro shop sales this year should be about 4 per cent ahead of the 1954 volume. There is a good possibility of pro shop Christmas golf gift sales boosting the 4 per cent forecast. There is a 35 per cent increase over 1954 in the number of pros participating in the "Christmas Shopping At Your Pro Shop" campaign.

The estimates of this year's golf business have been made by experienced professionals in all parts of the country.

The professionals collaborating with GOLFDOM in this magazine's annual survey of pro business report that play and shop sales generally showed satisfactory growth in southern and west coast states, was fair in the central states and was spotty at courses in central Atlantic and northeastern areas.

Prolonged hot spells with accompanying unattractive course conditions, slow play and shortage of courses which combined to discourage many golfers, and floods which put some courses completely out of use for days, curtailed golf activity.

In districts where they're accustomed to hot weather the unusually torrid stretch didn't seem to diminish golf.

Pros at semi-private courses in localities where race tracks operate said that the tracks took play away from golf this past summer.

Women's Play Up 10 Per Cent

From what the reporting pros have observed the increase in number of rounds played by women this year over the previous year's total can be conservatively estimated at 10 per cent.

In the Carolinas women's play has been

approximately 25 per cent greater than last year, Dugan Aycock estimates after comparing notes with other professionals in the territory.

Only in two of the PGA sections did the pro observers believe that there's been no increase in women's play.

More women playing, rather than the same number of women playing more rounds, accounted for the over-all increase. Several pros reported that women's play at a number of private clubs in their districts had been heavy enough to arouse complaints from men members.

The percentage of women's sales to the pro shop total volume varied from 5 to 25. Only two sections reported that sales to women golfers were increasing in line with the increased amount of golf played by women.

Women's Sales Opportunities

Obviously there is need for a lot of pro thought and effort in developing women's buying of golf equipment at pro shops. One pro, in commenting on big variations in women's business at pro shops in his district, says "Pros talk about women needing education in pro shop buying but what's needed is pro education in selling to women. At more than half the shops I've seen around here a woman would almost have to go exploring to discover women's clubs in stock."

Junior Progress Great

The brightest spot in the year's picture of pro business is junior promotion.

Without exception pros reported 1955 has been the biggest year of interest and participation in junior golf at private and public courses. Classes are larger than ever before. Tie-ups between public courses and school system physical edu-



SANTA CLAUS SHOWS UP AT MIAMI SHORES

One of the busiest, neatest, biggest-stocked small pro shops is that of Jim MacLaughlin at Miami Shores (Fla.) CC. Jim is at the left in this picture. His asst. Joe Benner is with him.

Note the neat signs on the showcases. The Christmas gift idea of golf balls is pushed strong. The ladies are reminded that the pro shop has just what they want.

The Christmas motif on the club and umbrella display panel and holiday decorations elsewhere on the walls of the shop suggest to shop visitors that here's a place to do Christmas shopping.

cation and competitive sports programs now are general practice.

Private clubs are not only giving more attention to junior boy and girl classes and competitive play but often are making courses available for high school team play.

A highly satisfactory reflection of pros' training of the kids shines in their conduct on the courses, their observance of the rules of golf and their safety precautions.

Sales of junior clubs have been picking up decidedly.

Several sections reported that parents now are very much interested in getting their youngsters started in golf.

Store Competitive Situation

Store competition hasn't been felt as severely by pros this year as in previous years, according to most pro observers.

In some sections cut price ball competition from stores is biting into pro volume but there has been no evidence of heavy competition in price cutting on clubs in the same districts.

Several pros advise that store price-cutting on golf goods seems to have had the effect of getting stores into a costly battle between themselves for the cheap business with their net profit dwindling.

In at least two sections stores are complaining about public and semi-public course pros being brutal competition. Pros who have caused the store complaints bought close-out items and advertised them vigorously the following spring and summer.

There has been strenuous store competition in a few sections this year but generally the pros have learned how to buck store competition by educating players to quality, expert club fitting and other personal service. On the cheaper stuff store competition always will be energetic, pros concede.

Price Increase Studied

Some pros are concerned about the increased prices of clubs and balls. The pros wonder how far — if at all — the increase may curtail top quality club buying which

is the part of the market dominated by the pros.

Others figure the price increase with longer margin to help pros meet increased costs of doing business is just as inevitable in golf as in the automobile business or other industries and probably won't be noticed by 90 per cent of the prospective buyers. The other 10% may require smarter selling.

Pros and golf goods manufacturers, like businessmen in other fields, are caught in an inflationary movement. Material and labor costs are mounting.

The ball price increase was certain to come. Rubber prices have almost doubled, and balata (cover stock) prices have increased decidedly since the present ball prices were set.

Pros looking at the price situation in the same way their members in business have to handle price increases, tell GOLFDOM that 1956 problems will include cautious control of trade-in deals, and closer study and development of sales possibilities among club members or players at pay-play courses.

Comment from professionals in districts where women's play increased decidedly this year was to the effect that to move into the women's golf market strong and get the women playing with new clubs more of a feature should be made of pro-only lines of irons at \$8 and woods at \$10.

Pro Expenses Increase

Pro department operating costs have increased, at some clubs as much as 40 per cent in the past three years, with 20 per cent being the usual figure of the three year increase. Two pros estimated that shop operating costs either had not increased this year over last or had dropped slightly, due to reducing the size of pro shop staffs.

Increased shipping costs were often mentioned as factors in mounting pro shop operating costs.

Income from golf car rental was said to have been a "lifesaver" for pros at numerous clubs this year. The cars promoted play in very hot weather and accounted for revenue offsetting a hot weather slump in shop sales.

Apparel and shoe business has been better in pro shops this year than last, according to pros' reports to GOLFDOM. Great popularity of Bermuda shorts cut into the summer sale of slacks somewhat but spring and late summer slacks sales plus general practice of buying two or three pairs of shorts accounted for an

overall increase in shop revenue from pants.

Women's Bermuda shorts sold very well in pro shops this past summer. Some pros were slow in stocking the women's shorts, due to unfortunate experience with women's golf dress business, but when the pros did get smart shorts on display they sold.

Members Need Information

Among the major problems that pros will face in 1956 is that of getting club officials to inform members of the logical position of the pro department in the private club plan.

It is becoming apparent that many members of private clubs do not realize that pro salaries are nominal and that the service of the pro department is mainly financed by the pro out of his earnings, otherwise the club would have to pay a substantial amount for this essential of good club operation.

Consequently these inexperienced and uninformed members do not understand that patronage of the pro shop is, basically, an obligation of private club membership as well as a convenient and economical service.

GOLFDOM now is consulting with club presidents on this subject and plans to announce, early in 1956, a powerful and attractive educational campaign to remind club members of their cooperative role in pro department operations.

Ryder Cup Team In Challenge Warm-Up

The 1955 Ryder Cup team has been scheduled to compete against a Challenge team in a match at the Midland (Tex.) CC, October 22-23.

The Ryder Cup team consists of Tommy Bolt, Jerry Barber, Jack Burke, Jr., Doug Ford, Marty Furgol, Chick Harbert, Chandler Harper, Ted Kroll, Dr. Cary Middlecoff and Sam Snead. Harbert is playing captain and Lloyd Mangrum has been designated Honorary Captain by the PGA Executive committee.

Jimmy Demaret will captain the Challenge Team.

The Challenge squad, selected by the sponsoring Midland Club and its Tournament Chairman, Fred Hogan, will be composed of Demaret; Billy Maxwell, Bo Winger, Don Cherry, Vic Ghezzi, Mike Souchak, Al Besselink, Fred Hawkins, Byron Nelson, the Texas PGA Champion, and Bob Rosburg as alternate.