

Memphis Pro Reaps Profits from Low Key Selling

By EMMETT MAUM



A relaxed, friendly atmosphere is what Pat Abbott of the Memphis CC strives for in his pro shop. The member who comes in to do nothing more than talk golf is just as welcome as the fellow who makes a purchase. Abbott recommends this attitude to other pros, says it moves more merchandise in the long run than high pressure selling.

"Don't force the club member to buy your merchandise. Sales will come without resorting to pressure tactics!"

That is the advice of Patrick Abbott, genial pro of the Memphis (Tenn.) CC, who operates a profitable golf shop, but is just as concerned with keeping club members happy as he is in making money.

"Some pros become so sales conscious they scare members away," says Abbott. "Of course, a pro is in business and has to keep an eye on the profit and loss statement, but he should bear in mind that for many members the club is almost like home. They come out to play golf and enjoy themselves and resent having merchandise shoved in their face whenever they step inside the pro shop."

In Abbott's opinion, pros should strike a happy medium in their sales efforts. Some feel that their shops are being run strictly for the convenience of members, while others put all emphasis on selling. Pat prefers a middle course in this respect, feeling that the pro should master the knack of selling merchandise without making it

obvious that he is pushing it. Clever and attractive displays play an equally important part with the salesman in spurring the buyer to action.

Members Benefit From Pro Shop

Abbott feels the pro should supply all golfing equipment to club members. He doesn't claim this as a divine right of the profession, but an idea that should be sold to golfers because they benefit most by it. "I've long contended," says Pat, "that I know a member's needs in shoes, clubs and balls better than any outside competitor. The lesson tee gives me that advantage. After I have seen a golfer swing a club several times I can do a much better job of fitting him than if he just comes into the shop and starts ordering."

"I think this is tremendously important," Abbott continues. "If more pros were to emphasize this point, I'm sure they'd sell more merchandise without resorting to high-pressure tactics. Golfers who are satisfied with the shoes, clubs and balls you sell them are bound to come back and buy other articles because they have confidence

Give the member what he wants, but

draw the line at cheap merchandise

in the merchandise you handle."

The Memphis pro keeps as much merchandise as possible out where members can see, touch and test it. Long observation has taught him that the golfer is an impulse buyer — a fellow who, when he sees or picks up an item which immediately strikes his fancy, buys it without hesitating. Clubs and bags in Abbott's shop are shown in two long, open racks at right angles to large showcases in which sportswear is displayed. Several merchandise tables and counter racks are used for displaying smaller articles, while slow moving items are shown in a display window facing a sidewalk that leads from the pro shop to the first tee. The window is changed every week.

Keep Notes on Equipment

To keep abreast of members' needs, Pat and his assistant, Parvin (Doc) Mitchell, keep notes on the condition of clubs, bags and shoes. If these notes are systematically kept and occasionally reviewed, Abbott points out, they offer numerous opportunities to make sales by suggesting replacement of worn out equipment.

Pat carries only quality equipment in his Memphis CC shop. He has never handled anything else, realizing it would undermine business if he did so. "I miss a sale here and there," Abbott says, "when I tell people I don't stock such things as cheap clubs or bags. I explain the stuff won't hold up long enough to justify their putting money into it. If they insist on buying it, I lose a sale, but at least, I keep my friends. Sooner or later most people become unhappy with cheap merchandise and come back to the shop and replace it with something better."

Speaking of women golfers, the Memphis pro declares that great care should be taken in fitting them with proper clubs. "It's a job I don't rush into," Abbott says, pointing out that the weaker sex is just that and it takes at least a couple sessions on the practice tee to decide the weight and length of woods and irons a woman can handle. Too many pros, says Pat, overestimate the strength and power of a woman and poor club fitting results.

During the summer of 1955, the Mem-

phis CC experimented with a new program which, Abbott believes, will develop some fine golfers among the coming generation.

Summer Day School

"Last June, C. D. Smith, a member of our club, came to me and suggested a summer day school for children of from 5 to 14," Abbott relates. "We put our heads together, worked out the details and with a little fanfare started the school in July. It ran until August."

From 9 to 10 a. m. Pat had the youngsters out for group instruction. Then, they went to the swimming pool and had classes in that sport. Following lunch, John Kraft, the tennis pro, gave the kids lessons on the courts for one hour.

"At the end of the summer, several kids could hit the ball quite well as the result of their golf instruction," Pat recounts. "The cost to members who sent their children to the day school was nominal, yet there were enough youngsters (20 to 25) out there to make it worth my time. Teaching children is a little harder than instructing adults, but actually it's a lot more fun."

The day school was in session Mondays through Fridays. This summer the club plans to start the juvenile program much earlier and give it the benefit of a lot of advance publicity. "We believe this can be built into something big," says Pat, "and certainly it will develop many golfers for the future."

Besides serving as pro at Memphis CC, Abbott manages to find time to give regular group lessons at Southwestern College, located in Memphis, and to coach the golf team there. And just to prove that professionals are versatile, he occasionally takes part in plays produced by the city's Little Theater group.

Labatt Open Offers \$26,800

The Labatt Open, offering \$26,800 to winners, will be held at the Royal-Quebec GC at Boischatel, Quebec, July 12-15. Included in the prize money will be an extra purse of \$1,800 to be distributed among the Canadian pros who finish highest in the tournament.