

OCTOBER • 1957

70 Million Rounds**Total Sales Up 11 Per cent****Ball Sales Up 7 Per cent****Club Sales Up 3 Per cent****Apparel, Shoe Sales — Satisfactory****Cost of Doing Business — Ouch!**

1957 Golf Business GOOD; But Pros Still Have Problems

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

REPORTING from all sections of the U. S., competent pro observers estimate that the number of rounds of golf played this year will be about 6.5 per cent greater than the 65,700,000 rounds of 1956.

New courses accounted for a great deal of the increase. A net gain of approximately 170 courses will be registered this year and bring the total of U. S. courses to about 5,560.

Continued substantial increase of play by women and juniors also hiked the total forecast for the year and offset the damage to golf business done by adverse weather, mainly by heavy rains in much of the country until almost mid-June.

Ball Sales Up

Ball sales at pro shops this year will be up about 7 per cent over last year, including expected Christmas gift business, according to the pros' estimates made for GOLFDOM. This is a good recovery from the ball sales slump in the early part of the season when rain restricted play in so many sections.

Total sales of pro shops this year will be 11 per cent ahead of 1956, the pro observers reckon. Apparel and shoe volume was up satisfactorily in most sections.

Unless the Christmas gift business in clubs is bigger than in previous years, 1957 dollar volume of club sales will be only

about 3 per cent ahead of last year. Again, bad weather was the reason why sales were retarded.

In some districts club sales were 20 to 25 per cent ahead of last year, with good spring business and late summer sales in close-outs sweeping up the market.

Costs Continue to Rise

The pros were squeezed by increasing cost of shop operation again this year. Rise over 1956 was from 5 to 20 per cent with 10 per cent increase in cost of doing business most commonly cited.

Generally, the private club pro shops seemed to increase their percentage of their members' total buying of golf playing equipment and apparel. Semi-private and public courses held their own, in a few cases jumping due to vigorous sales promotion. In a couple of districts slight declines were noted.

The percentage of balls sold at pro shops to players in various district courses ranged from 25 to 80, with the private club part of the top-grade ball business being estimated at 75 per cent.

Pros figure that pro shop share of bag business this year should be about 60 per cent. Estimates vary widely on pro shop share of apparel and golf shoe volume. A number of pros said that at their clubs they did at least 90 per cent of the men's and women's golf shoe business and shared in 40 per cent of apparel spending.

This will be one of the big years for

increase in women's and junior's play, so the pros forecast. The percentage of increase in women's play all over the country averages 15 and junior play increased, as near as the pros can figure, about 20 per cent.

Women Moving In

At the majority of private clubs women's play this year accounted for from 20 to 35 per cent of the total rounds played. In three districts, pro observers said that women's play at private clubs was at least a third of the total. Women's play at public and semi-private courses all over the U. S. averages between 10 and 15 per cent with many more women eager to play as soon as the gentlemen will give them room.

Incidentally, pros frequently comment that women can no longer be rapped for slowing play. The women haven't been speeding up much; men are just getting slower.

But along with a big increase in women's volume and percentage of play comes a problem for the pros. Women's business in the pro shops isn't increasing in proportion to the increase in women's play.

This doesn't necessarily mean that women are buying their golf goods elsewhere than at the pro shop. As close as a lot of pros can figure out, many women have not been sold on the idea of using good golf equipment.

New Emphasis Needed

The next big move in pro shop merchandising is going to have to come in increasing women's club, ball and bag buying. Only four of 92 pros reporting from golf districts coast to coast and from Canada to the border, said that women's buying in pro shops in their areas was increasing in ratio to the increase in women's play.

Pros' wives put them into big merchandising business when the wives took over during the war in many places where the pros were in military or war production service. Maybe the pros' wives can come up with the right answer to the problem of increasing women's buying of golf goods in pro shops.

Interesting thing about women's business is the fact that in many pro shops the biggest buying of apparel for men golfers' wear is done by women. Comment by observant pros gives interesting



They put the greens to bed at Kasumigaseki CC in Tokyo where the International Golf championship and Canada Cup matches will be played Oct. 24-27. This Japanese custom is presided over by Fred Corcoran, tournament director, who was in Japan this summer completing arrangements for the 30-nation event. Sam Snead and Jimmy Demaret represent America, which has won the last two Canada Cup affairs. International trophy winners have been Antonio Cerda, Argentine, 1953; Stan Leonard, Canada, 1954; Ed Furgol, U.S., 1955; and Ben Hogan, U.S., 1956. Hogan declined to compete this year because he hasn't played much competitive golf.

highlights of the prevailing situation and prospects:

"Women's buying at pro shops around here is about in proportion to women's play and is increasing." *George Heaney, Brookside, Pasadena, Calif.*

Three-Pronged Problem

"The pro business problem has three prongs; one, competing with cut-price retailers; the second, the difficulty of getting capable assistants; and third, the danger of the price of good golf equipment getting out of line with the increasing popularity of golf and the newer golfers' capacity to pay." *Walt Silkworth, Rydal (Pa.) CC*

"So much of the professionals' time is devoted to unpaid service for the good of golf that more attention must be given

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Pro Business Good

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to retirement and insurance funds for these builders of the game. In 1958 the pro will have to face serious problems of increased costs of operation, competition from price-cutters and education of members in the benefits and obligations of doing business with the professional." Paul Haas, *Transit Valley CC, E. Amherst, N. Y.*

"Excellent coverage by newspapers supplementing continuous effort in pro shops to better serve members, an improved junior golf program, the Walker Cup matches and more pro exhibitions have increased golf interest and play this year in the Twin Cities area. Our problems of higher prices of golf goods and cut-price competition are going to be made tougher by the difficulty of getting and affording good help in the shop. Don Waryan, *Woodhill, Wayzata, Minn.*

"More rebuilt and new courses with more new players makes the pros' big and urgent job seeing that the newcomers get started right, not only in learning the game from a qualified PGA professional but in learning from this competent professional what to buy to enjoy the game and get the most for the money." Denny Champagne, *Dubsread CC, Orlando, Fla.*

"The most trying problem in operating a golf shop next year will be the same as it has been this year; the problem of obtaining and training capable assistant professionals." Leonard Schmutte, *Findlay (O.) CC.*

"Next year the pro is going to have to keep his overhead from rising. This means he will have to find, hire and school assistants who can help him cut costs and give high standard of service."

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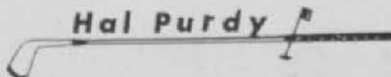
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"A critical task for the pro next year will be determining what price balance of pro shop stock is best for his market." Dan H. Langford, *Oakwood CC, Enid, Okla.*

"I am looking forward to seeing many new municipal and private courses being built in New England. The municipalities especially should be far more active in building courses. These courses improve the value of land in the area and support themselves without burdening the taxpayer. The new highway system in Massachusetts should mean more course con-

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struction." Eugene F. (Ship) Wogan, Essex CC, Manchester, Mass.

"Professional golf could make good use of more promotion of the game and planned advertising and merchandising of pro shop goods in each section." Leland Gibson, Blue Hills CC, Kansas City, Mo.

"I think an extensively used slogan put before the public in 1958 would help promote golf. Something like 'Go Golf.'" Ralph Morgan, Willow Brook CC, Tyler, Tex.

"The most valuable development in pro golf would be more advertising locally and nationally. We always are going to have competition and it will get bigger as the market gets bigger. What we need is to educate and win the good will of golfers and encourage them to be better customers for their own good." Joe Brown, Des Moines (Ia.) G&CC.

"Top quality pro-only merchandise that is competitive and accent on competent,

conscientious fitting of golf goods by a friendly and informed specialist, is the pro story we've got to get across. Price is hurting pros. Pros often give too much for trade-ins. However, expert service and personal contact will win for the pro." Jimmy Scott, Ulen CC, Lebanon, Ind.

Golf Car Rentals Help

"Electric car income helps appreciably to take up the slack in revenue due to higher prices on equipment stiffening sales resistance." Bill Hall, North Fulton GC, Atlanta, Ga.

"Ball sales around here increased considerably this year, with an increase in moderate-priced balls being noted at numerous shops. Manufacturers will help pros in 1958 by holding the line on prices and pros will have to study pricing of their shop merchandise to make the strongest appeal to their golfers." Joe Donato, Norwich (Conn.), GC.

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