

Recession Not Felt

Golf Sales Forge Ahead in Spite of Spotty Weather

By HERB GRAFFIS

Weather, more than general business conditions, has accounted for keeping pro business from a substantial increase the first 5½ months of this year.

Professionals who, for a number of reasons, are well qualified appraisers of the golf business situation in their respective territories were sources of information indicating that up to May 21 pro business nationally stood as follows:

CLUB SALES . . . A little ahead of same period in 1957;

BALL SALES . . . From 5% to 10% ahead of last year;

LESSONS . . . Up to 15% ahead of last year.

APPAREL, SHOES AND ACCESSORIES . . . About 10% ahead of same date in 1957.

Bad weather in April and the first half of May in Eastern districts hurt pro business. Balmy week-ends in April in the midwest encouraged a lot of play, lessons and shop business made up for unfavorable weather elsewhere.

The improvement in apparel business some pros attribute to more buying of better grade merchandise and better display in pro shops.

Two professionals commented that a change in style seems to be a factor in large sales of shirts, with the trend being away from the gaudy colors and designs.

Thus far the recession has had very little effect on golf business. Several pros comment that the general business slump has given some people a little more time for play but that if the recession continues there is bound to be a drop in play at public and daily-fee courses.

The principal reflection of the recession on pro business has been to make buyers of golf goods at private and pay-play courses more price-conscious.

The pro consensus is that continuance of the recession will reduce golf play and sales but at present golfers at private, public and semi-public courses don't show signs of being hurt.

Store Competition Spotty

Store competition is spotty. The "discount houses" are reported to be tougher competition for the pros in some sections than the stores are.

In several areas golf range professionals and small clubs that do not have professionals are cutting prices on pro-only golf goods.

In large metropolitan districts store competition is costly to pros at clubs where members' income is just barely in the private club bracket and to the pros at pay-play courses. When money is tight the so-called "bargain stores" take the business away from the pros. There's been some development of member understanding of the obligation to buy from the pro and give him a chance to make a living out of his service to the club.

Several pros report that the pro-only Pro-Fit shaft has been a definite factor in beating store competition.

In some cases pros have boomeranged the store competition by



When the Vista (Calif.) G & CC was officially dedicated this spring, the traditional ribbon was cut, well known pros gave exhibitions and several VIP's spoke. But a new twist was added when the local high school band played a concert on the patio of the two-story clubhouse, a remodeled farmhouse. The \$250,000, 9-hole course fills a great need for Vista residents who formerly had to travel a considerable distance to play golf. The course is 2,750 yards with a par of 34. Bill Mast, who holds a similar post at San Clemente CC, is pro at Vista. Steve Treadway is his assistant.

stocking competitively-priced lines.

Trade-In Big Factor

Trade-in allowances also have been used by pros in some districts to beat store competition.

The pro authorities reported that trade-in allowances were made in at least 50 per cent of all pro shop sales of clubs and at many private and fee clubs every sale except to beginners, involves an allowance for used clubs.

Pros comment that now in most cases the sale of a set of new clubs means making two sales as the traded-in set also must be sold.

One of the top businessmen in pro golf says that if it weren't for the traded-in allowances pros wouldn't be able to sell nearly the number of clubs they do now and the bottom would drop out of the quality club market.

No professional reported any difficulty in disposing of the trade-ins.

The buyers are players at public courses, beginners, caddies, juniors and golf ranges. Some of the trade-ins are used as rental sets.

Generally the pros who take the trade-ins figure that they are lucky if they don't make an allowance and a resale that amounts to cutting the price of the new set that is sold. But there doesn't seem to be many pro complaints about this as it definitely results in increasing the gross volume and profit on club sales.

Allowances Still Reasonable

Only a few cases of pros being prevailed on to give unreasonably large allowances on traded-in sets are reported. That is an improvement over the situation a couple of years ago. Maybe the pros are getting to be smarter traders and are not stampeded by pressure of the potential new club buyers.

There were signs, a few years
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Golf Business Good

(Continued from page 28)

back, that the trade-in clubs might be the headache that used cars are to the automobile dealers. Pros' good business judgment appears to have the trade-in situation now well under control.

One professional comments on the trade-in marketing:

"Trade-in club business now is so big and important that we may be missing the boat by regarding it casually because we have no trouble in getting rid of the clubs we take in.

"I am thinking of putting these clubs into good shined-up, revarnished condition, getting the grips renewed and putting a decalcomania on the shafts or wood head showing that the clubs have been renewed by me.

"I believe I'll make money on the deal and get good advertising."

Pro Rising Costs Shared

Apparently about half of the private clubs have been understanding and helpful concerning the sharply rising costs of the service they expect from the pro department.

Raising costs of club-cleaning and storage, better contracts and with substantial salaries, absorption of some of the costs of assistants' services and, in a few cases, paying for additional assistant's service with golf car revenue, have eased the load of higher operating costs for some pros.

But there's still a lot to be done in balancing the higher cost load in pro department operations. Many club officials haven't the slightest idea of how pro department services to members have increased and costs have jumped beyond a fair division. Several instances are reported of adjustments being promptly made when club officials were acquainted with the situation.

Tournament Interest Small

Most professionals advise that their club members don't have the slightest interest in the PGA Tour-

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nament Bureau's disputes. One pro advises that members in his locality have been told the PGA side of the latest case and feel that some sponsors should have no part in golf for the good of the game. Another professional believes that the average member feels the PGA should clean up its house. Two more express the opinion that club members who have great regard for their own pros wonder why the PGA can't conduct its tournament operations on the high class basis on which the USGA operates with clubs that are hosts to its championships.

Women's Golf Picture Bright

On the completely bright side of the golf business picture as pro authorities see it is women's golf.

Only one pro reported that women's play so far this year isn't ahead of last year's figure at his club and, generally, in his district. All others said that increase in women's play has been from "average" to "excellent."

Women's buying at pro shops isn't increasing in proportion to the increase in women's play. The women are close buyers, especially of clubs. They are doing quite a lot of apparel buying for their husbands and children in the pro shops so several pros advise.

National Senior Open

The second National Senior Open is scheduled to be held at Spokane, Wash., Sept. 13-15. George Howard, pro at O'Donnell GC, Palm Springs, Calif., is pres. of the National Senior and Joe Albi, pres. of the Athletic Round Table, Tacoma, is tournament sponsor.

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