

81,430,000 Round Total for Year

## Continued Surge of Women's Interest in Golf Increases Sales, Play in 1959

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

**G**OLF PLAY for 1959 will be about 11 per cent ahead of 1958 and shop sales will almost be seven per cent ahead of last year, according to observations and estimates of professionals in all sections of the country.

Each year professionals cooperate with GOLFDOM in taking a good, clear look at the golf business. These men have proved such able forecasters that their data has made GOLFDOM's annual report remarkably accurate advance information on what the score will be in the golf business for the year.

There are 3,454 9-hole and 2,535 18-hole courses in operation in the U.S. Soundly-based, conservative estimates place the number of 9-hole rounds for this year at 33,736,000 and the number of 18-hole rounds at 47,694,000. The total of 81,430,000 rounds was registered despite a slow start in some areas due to wet and cold weather and a slowdown because of hot and humid weather in July and August in many districts. The bad weather in late summer seriously damaged many courses and again demonstrated that course condition and volume of play are parallel lines on the golf business chart.

### Comfortable Clothing Helps

Increased comfort, with style, in women's and men's golf apparel has encouraged many to play more golf than they formerly did in intensely hot weather.

Growth of women's golf play continues to dominate the game's development.

About 15 per cent more rounds will be played by women in 1959 than last year. Pros estimate that the increase in teenage girl instruction at schools and on golf courses will show 1959 averaging about 12 per cent ahead of 1958.

Junior play at public courses is steadily increasing but no general estimate of this year's increase can be made. Not enough figures are available.

Kids playing the public courses usually are graduates of pro classes, have good golf manners and play without delay. There hasn't been much increase in junior play at private clubs. Lack of encouragement by officials, and not necessarily slow play by members and the boom in women's play, explain why private courses lag behind public courses in use by young-

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### Pro Report at A Glance

- Play up 11 per cent over 1958
  - Pro Shop Sales 7 per cent ahead of 1958
  - Women's Play 15 per cent ahead of 1958
  - Junior Play — trend is upward but accurate figures aren't available
  - Women's Club Purchases up 20 per cent over 1958
  - Women's Lessons up 15 per cent over last year
  - Trade-Ins figure in 57 per cent of new club sales
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Michigan PGA pros, who took part in the sixth tournament conducted by the Veterans' Administration Hospital in Battle Creek, line up to get their awards from William J. Moore (r) of the VA's special service. From left are Ron LaParl, Glenn Stuart, Ben Lula, Gene Bone, Joe Belfore, Larry Tomasino and Tom Talkington. Tomasino and Bone tied with 64s over the Par 34 VA layout and Tomasino defeated the defending champion in a playoff. Talkington, Lula and Stuart had 65s with Lula claiming third place following a playoff. Warren Orlick and John Monitz had aces. Orlick's came on the 110-yard 6th hole on which his playing partners followed with a 2, a 3 and a 4. Hospital patients caddied for the pros who have donated much of the equipment used by 200 Hospital golfers. Golf building also was built by pros.

sters, so pros comment.

#### Boom in Women's Buying

Women's buying of apparel for themselves and others of their family shows another good increase this year. Their purchases of clubs are up about 20 per cent, the increase being equal to that of women golfers. Sets of five irons and two woods are the big sellers to women at pro shops this year. Some pros have been very successful selling moderate-priced clubs and bags to women at private and pay-play courses.

Golf ball buying by women still is far short of the men's rate. Pros report they haven't yet solved the problem of getting women, who need every possible help in getting distance, to keep from hand-capping themselves with balls that are too old to have much elasticity and which have been played so much they've been batted out of condition.

#### Last Too Long

From the sellers' viewpoint, golf balls last too long. Estimates of play and of golf ball sales this year indicate that the ball averages two rounds. Not so very long ago when the top grade ball was selling at 75 cents the ball figures on production and the rounds played were approximately equal.

Up to about 10 years ago, golf balls accounted for about 50 per cent of most pro shops' sales revenue. This year the majority of shops will show about 30 per

cent of their sales income due to balls. The increase in clothing and shoe sales at pro shops has cut down the ball (and club and bag) percentage of entire volume even though the pros, especially those at private clubs, are getting a larger percentage of members' golf playing equipment business than they got a decade ago.

As any one who knows golf business has learned, averages can be misleading. None of GOLFDOM's staff ever has seen an "average" golf club.

#### Sales by Percentages

As a general guidance, information GOLFDOM has received from representative pros at private, semi-private and public courses, shows that their own and other pro shop businesses in their territories has the following percentages of sales income as the "average" and as high and low figures:

Balls . . . 30 per cent; High . . . 55;  
Low . . . 25

Clubs . . . 30 per cent; High . . . 60;  
Low . . . 10

Bags . . . 10 per cent; High . . . 25;  
Low . . . 5

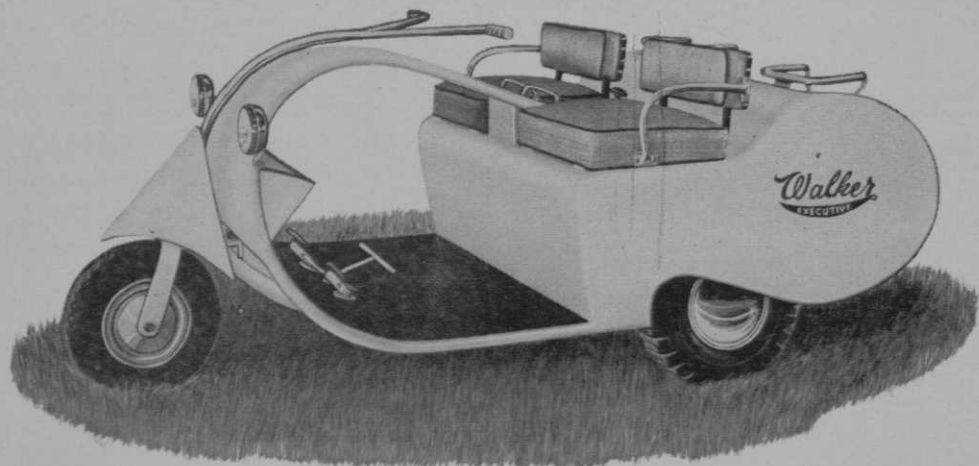
Apparel . . . 22 per cent; High . . . 50;  
Low . . . 5

Shoes . . . 8 per cent; High . . . 25;  
Low . . . 5

Conditions accounting for the variations are interesting and practically limitless. Some of the low percentages are bal-

*(Continued on page 104)*

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## Women Boost Sales, Play

(Continued from page 40)

anced by high percentages in other classes of merchandise.

Pro department operating costs continued to mount this year. Increases in club cleaning and storage charges, when the pro got them, just about stood off increases in payroll.

### Trade-In Situation

One of the perplexing problems of golf business is that of accepting used clubs as partial payment on new sets. The trade-in deals either made or ruined the automobile business, depending on where a fellow stands in that field. With the price of golf clubs — especially in the pro quality line — now representing a substantial investment, the trade-in deals have become a big factor.

Top grade clubs are moderately priced compared with some other sports quality equipment such as boats, guns and fishing tackle but sales of golf clubs often need boosting by trade-in allowances.

Professionals at some of the top clubs won't take trade-ins and members don't expect them to but at other clubs trade-ins

are an important part of club business.

Trade-ins figure in a majority of the pro's sales. According to pros consulted, trade-ins are taken on an average of about 57 per cent of all new club sales.

The importance of the trade-in business to profits is disclosed in one district where steel plant workers buy a high percentage of the trade-in clubs. Pros in this area say that if the steel strike had been called earlier they would have been stuck with used clubs representing more than their profits on clubs for the year.

The golf car is a rapidly growing element in the financial picture at top courses. As yet, there is no common pattern of supply, supervision, operation and maintenance of cars but many pros regard them as a fine revenue source.

### Women's Lesson Business

Women's lessons total almost 15 per cent more than last year. Consensus of pros is that women account for nearly 60 per cent of lessons given. Lessons at a small number of clubs will be fewer this year than in 1958, the loss being almost entirely due to weather cancellations. Lesson increase nationally is indicated at slightly less than 10 per cent. Much of

the head pro's time that is available for lessons generally is taken so there's not much room for boosting the lesson figure until members are willing to take instruction from assistants.

Teaching assistants to teach continues to be one of the problems of top club professionals. And, after the lads are trained, the next problem is to persuade the members to accept the assistants as teachers.

Regarding teaching, here are observations by a club professional who was a famous champion. He says: "Learning to teach is the most difficult part of a club pro's job. The tournament pro, who learns what to do for his own game, has a long way to go before he learns what is good for his pupil's game and how to teach it. The same principle applies to shop selling. What the pro likes for himself may not be suitable for his customers."

### To Push or Not to Push

There's been a question about the extent to which the pro's sales push determines ball sales by brands. A pro isn't going to argue against a customer's preference for a ball. The pro also knows that a buyer often will want a ball that is too

highly compressed for his type of swing. But, for whatever the information is worth in ball advertising and merchandising, the top pros queried by GOLFDOM replied that customers requested golf balls by brands in slightly more than 75 per cent of sales. Percentages ranged from 25 to 100, with the higher percentages being at the top private clubs.

### Support the Pro

As might be expected, members of the upper level private clubs buy a much higher percentage of their clubs, balls and bags from pros than players at semi-private and public courses. Lowest percentages of players' business in clubs, balls and bags was 10 per cent reported by a pro at a resort course. Many of the private course pros reported 90 per cent or higher. Public course pros' percentage of their players' equipment business showed an increase despite tough cut-price competition, especially from catalog houses using the inflated list price lure.

Public course percentages of equipment sales was considerably higher than those at semi-private courses except at those operations where pros have the incentive of profits on sales.

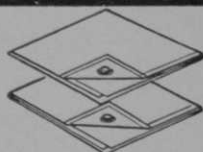
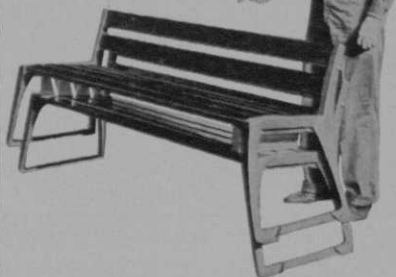
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