
Turf Dealers Say Skimping on Course Upkeep Is Outdated

By HERB GRAFFIS

GOLF course equipment and supply dealers say that 1960 has been one of the best years in sales volume. Next year also should be excellent due to demand for increased playing facilities, modernization of courses and long delayed replacement of equipment.

In the judgment of dealers there is keen awareness of the basic importance of course attractiveness. The days of expensive ashtrays in clubhouses and skimping on course maintenance have passed. Instances of club revenue declining because of course condition not being competitive with that of other courses are cited by dealers. The suffering clubs have held back too long on maintenance budgets and will need a few years to come back, according to expert opinion.

Payment of bills generally has been prompt with some slow spots around the country. In some districts where buyers have been tardy in paying their bills the delays seem to have been due to inexperienced management and weak initial financing rather than business conditions in the area.

Shy on Credit Data

Homesite course developments have accounted for considerable buying of equipment and supplies for construction but they have varied widely in evidence of financial stability. Too many of them are shy about supplying data that creditors

- Clubs decline where maintenance is neglected
- Home-site credit is cause for some wariness
- Supply, equipment prices become stabilized
- Better new club planning evident

require before delivery. Maybe they are promoters trying to catch lightning in a bottle or well-financed operators reluctant to let creditors know the extent of their solvency. The condition is one that is being closely watched by experienced dealers who saw similar operations in the late '20s. Dealers worked out a number of those close cases after they learned from other creditors and the promoters what the financial score was.

Higher costs of doing business and lower profit margin generally have dealers watching credits closer than ever.

Turf conditions have been better and play has been greater in most districts this year, according to the equipment and supply dealers who logically rate as grass roots authorities on the state of U. S. golf business.

Here are highlights of comment from dealers:

Orville O. Clapper, The Clapper Co., West Newton, Mass. — Every course should be examined by a competent golf architect at least every 10 years to keep it abreast of the change in the game and the maintenance standards and equipment available.

Bob Fauteck, C. E. Anderson Co., Royal Oak, Mich. — A good deal of our time has been spent with different groups in planning or constructing clubs. Most of the new clubs have everything fairly well planned and under control and have

cash on hand before they start construction.

J. D. Baker, H. V. Carter Co., San Francisco — In the construction, or at least the planning, stages, the course picture is brighter than at any other time in 20 years. Our only concern is how each project will be financed so those responsible for development and maintenance can operate at full efficiency.

H. P. Riddell, C. E. Greiner Co., Indianapolis — Golf course business looks promising. Better budgets are reflected in better playing conditions.

Rough Is Coming Back

Jack D. Mansur, Fryeburg, Me. — Revenue from greater play is meaning more improvements and higher standards of maintenance. There is more use of the services of experienced architects. Rough is coming back and there is more testing play without the backbreaking long courses that mean higher maintenance costs and which reduce play. Despite short season, several clubs in area have waiting lists. Do-it-yourself courses getting to be quite a factor. Some of the home made courses show lack of construction experience that probably will mean higher costs and other costs later but they at least get golfers started.

Dick Fred, Sidney L. Dryfoos Co., Cleveland — Wet early season held back business but when the sun came out maintenance became normal. Turf condition has been so good there hasn't been any urge or need to experiment with newer materials. There is a renewed interest in topdressing. New construction is keyed to easier maintenance. Course homesite combinations in some instances are going to have same old problems of maintenance deficiencies and expense due to hurried, cheap construction. General business but when sun came out play and earlier than usual at some fee courses but that is the only troublesome sign we see. Long range prospects for golf look better than ever.

Spending Money

Wm. C. Kruckemeyer, Charles G. Kruckemeyer Machine & Parts Co., St. Louis — Average clubs more prosperous than in any previous period. They are spending money to enable supts. to maintain courses in top condition. Almost all clubs in the district are paying bills promptly. Looks like 1961 will be fine year.

C. O. Borgmeier, George A. Davis, Inc., Chicago — Course maintenance business

got off to a late start because of cold, wet, April and May but picked up so 1960 has been another good year. General maintenance expenses have stabilized so no marked increases of prices of equipment or supplies is expected. Labor continues to be a problem due to seasonal employment. Golf should continue to flourish because there is more time for recreation. Equipment manufacturers are presenting new and exciting items of cost- and time-saving equipment which will mean good business in 1961.

Hugh Ward, Jacobsen Power Lawn Mower Co., Columbus, O. — Golf business continues to get bigger. Turf conditions, due to weather, have been better than average. So has play and, naturally, maintenance budgets. Established clubs, almost without exception, are paying promptly. Over past few years we have noticed that course-homesite developers seldom know costs of equipment, supplies and operation of the course after it is built and consequently run into serious financial problems.

Golf Business Booming

Ray McMicken, B. Hayman Co., Los Angeles, Fresno and Phoenix — Southern California and Arizona golf business has been excellent. Play has been greater than expected, a large number of courses are in the planning stage or being built and established courses are being extensively improved. Budgets are about the same as in previous year. Bills are being paid promptly. Headaches are in prospect at courses that developers have built at low cost and are trying to operate with less maintenance equipment and material than is needed. Some developers figure that their courses could have been built for less than half the actual cost of a good job. Automatic sprinkler systems are a new trend and are working well. Another trend is large membership clubs to attract golfers who otherwise would have to wait many hours to get on crowded public courses. If the national economy continues on high level, 1961 should be another great year in golf business. A recession may hit the very expensive private clubs hard.

Jimmy Lambert, Evans Implement Co., Atlanta — Golf business volume in our area has been highest in history and we expect larger figures in 1961. Turf conditions are better, reflecting value of supts' association services and more experienced men. However, maintenance budgets are

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high standing of the man who operates the shop and induces and helps the customer to buy.

The majority of professionals are hiring assistants who have sound training, fine characters, pleasant personalities, initiative and willingness to work. The PGA business schools at Dunedin and in Los Angeles have been of immeasurable value in training the type of young men golf needs in its business. They have done a great deal toward helping the pros who employ them give clubs the standard and scope of service that the good professional wants to give.

Among other major reasons for 1960 being a very good year is the improved design of woods and irons and better playability. This improvement will accelerate sales next year.

The iron blades have adequate hitting surface for the average player as well as the expert. The shaft flexes make possible precise fitting for all types of men, women and Juniors. Without doubt the uniformity of grip construction, now evident in leading manufacturers' top equipment, has increased the usefulness and value of clubs. The woods are designed to get the ball up and give the average player help in solving that problem from the tee or fairway lies.

Skimping on Course Outdated

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tight and club payments aren't setting any new speed records.

Budgets Are Tight

John Gibbs, Goldthwaites of Texas — Volume of equipment and supply sales has been healthy and stable but profit margins aren't keeping pace so free services are being discontinued. Budgets are tight with clubhouses and other facilities getting first cut at the club revenue. Green Chmn. and officers of clubs are urging supts. to patch up old equipment. Play has increased considerably at private and public courses. With heavier traffic, less maintenance and strong demands for perfect playing conditions, veteran supts. are doing their best and hoping for miracles. New automatic watering systems, lease or lease-purchase programs for new equipment and newer strains of grass may work some of the needed wonders. Course-homesite developments continue to increase and give golfers of moderate income opportunities to enjoy private club atmosphere. Quite a few of these projects are building poor courses due to bad

financial planning. These courses will require extensive rebuilding. Prospects for equipment, supply and material business for 1961 look very good. Money seems to be available from a number of sources for financing new courses.

Don Quick, Jack Dayton and Son, Louisville — This year we have worked harder to get our share of the business and it has increased satisfactorily. Volume of play in this area is up 15 to 20 per cent over 1959. Budgets always are too small but that gives us room for increasing sales as the constantly increasing number of golfers are constantly demanding improvement in playing conditions that in most cases are very good. The larger clubs have been paying promptly.

Tiffine 328 Improves Play

Reg Perry, Turtaid, Inc., Memphis — Eight new courses have opened for play in this area this year and three more are under construction. One club being built has two 18-hole courses. Volume of play has increased from about 25 to 30 per cent. Collections have been about as usual. The homesite operation, we believe, is due to become more popular, especially in larger cities. Introduction of Tiffine 328 Bermuda in Southern greens has meant new and different maintenance methods and improved playing conditions that will help account for greater play, better maintenance methods and more golf business in 1961.

George Cornell, G. L. Cornell Co., Bethesda, Md. — Weather conditions and turf have been good in this area. Maintenance budgets were about same as last year with adjustments for increased labor costs. Play increased greatly and continues to increase. This means that getting work done quickly is an important problem and directs attention of supt. and chmn. to the urgent necessity of equipment that will give results fast and economically. Course-homesite projects that are properly financed are bound to succeed in this district.

Byron Reed, E. Baltz & Son, Portland, Ore. — Golf course business here is much better than last year. Turf conditions are better. More fairway fertilizing than ever before. Supts. assns. in Oregon have been invaluable to golfers, their clubs and to the supts. themselves. There has been wider hiring of good architects for new courses. Budgets are increasing for new method machines, replacement of worn and obsolete equipment and fertilization. Payment of bills is very good. We are watching with interest two course-home-

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site developments in Oregon. We have nine or 10 months of play.

F. J. D. Mackay, T. W. Wood & Sons, Richmond, Va. — Golf is very much on the upswing here. When I became secy. of the Virginia State Golf Assn. there were only six clubs in the organization and they represent almost all of the state's clubs. Now the VSGA membership is 80. Most of these clubs are becoming stronger financially and in membership each year. The Country Club of Virginia, which a group of us organized in 1958, now has a membership of some 4500 and a big waiting list, two 18-hole courses and a Par 3 course.

C. L. (Jim) Graham, Minnesota Milorganite Co., Long Lake, Minn. — Golf business is good. Courses and players are increasing. Maintenance standards are increasing and with this upgrading comes an increase in buying equipment and supplies. Quite a number of firms are competing for this business. Play in Twin Cities this year has been up to capacity at many courses. In smaller towns in Minnesota courses could handle more play. Turf conditions have been good.

J. E. B. Asbell, Producers Supply,

Palmetto, Fla. — Course construction and maintenance in Florida now is more carefully prepared than in previous years. There has been a tremendous increase in players and rounds played as a result of improved conditions. The number of courses constructed or being built in large subdivisions probably will provide room for a great number of new golfers.

M. D. Cline, C&C Distributors, Fort Wayne, Ind. — Business is good and play is up considerably. We feel that there is a big potential for 6-, 9- or 18-hole courses for employees of big plants.

R. B. Drake, Springfield, Ill. — Golf business is steady but not roaring. Inclement weather in this area cut down play. With excess rain there were more troubles that required more maintenance money and with less play the money wasn't there. But business in central Illinois generally is down from last year. Tremendous changes in agriculture and automation in industry are having effect.

Woodworth Bradley, Providence, R. I. — Business continues to be good. More dealers are competing for the increased volume. Turf conditions have been satisfactory. Credit situation is good.