

Pro Market Continues to Improve in Spite of Some Unfavorable Factors

Sales, Play Increases Satisfactory but Weather and Cut-Price Competition Cut Down on the Potential

By **HERB GRAFFIS**

You have to be careful with figures in golf, as men experienced in the business have learned. Figures on course construction and maintenance vary so much that they are misleading to those who aren't aware of the factors explaining all the variations.

Figures on amount of play and on pro shop business also have to be read in the light of varying conditions. The picture of the golf market for the year is obtained through the cooperation of hundreds of professionals at various types of clubs and in different parts of the country. Increased sales at pro shops generally were only moderate. Poor weather mainly accounted for some shop slumps from 1960 volume. However, a more than four per cent increase in number of courses and heavy play brought a substantial overall increase in pro shop sales.

This year there probably has been too little attention paid to Par 3 course business. We discovered this a little too late for digging deep into the figures on the market at the 431 Par 3 courses that were in operation as of Sept. 1. However, the querying we did do, disclosed that the short courses already are accounting for nearly 6 per cent of the rounds per year

that are played on the 6,185 standard size courses in the U. S.

According to professionals, golf business for 1961 will shape up about like this:

Rounds of play—up 11%;

Pro shop sales—up 12%;

Competing store business—up, generally;

Women's play—about 28% of total rounds;

Junior golfers' play—up 6%.

Spring in most districts was wet and cold and cut pro shop sales of balls and clubs quite drastically. At the majority of shops the slack hasn't been taken up on what pros think would be a normal year's growth. Yet the increase in ball business is estimated at about 11%. Pros figure that the increase in club sales over last year will be between 12% and 17%.

Trade-Ins Down Slightly

Club trade-ins averaged a little less in 1961 than in 1960. This year pros have been getting a bit tougher on trade-in allowances and have been increasing sales to women and other beginners. However, at a number of clubs, trade-ins figure in 90 per cent of sales. At a few clubs there are no trade-ins and at a small number of clubs only around 20 per cent of used

clubs are taken in payment on new sets.

The division of this year's pro shop sales revenue, according to the reports and estimates of the professionals, are:

Clubs	27%
Balls	38%
Apparel and shoes	35%

But "average" here constitutes a set of figures that has a relatively wide range. At some pro shops the revenue from club sales runs from 20 to 70 per cent, from ball sales the average is from 25 to 60 per cent and on apparel and shoes, from 15 to 55 per cent of total sales.

Car Operation Arrangement

For the first time in the yearly investigation of the market status, we asked the pro to try to get a closeup of golf car operation arrangements. The finding is based on golf cars in operation and shows the following figures:

Owned or leased by pros	42.5%
Owned or leased by clubs	46 %
Owned by individuals	11.5%

But, again, this is a compilation involving so many different conditions and such a wide range of types of clubs, pros and operating factors that it doesn't give a completely clear picture of the situation.

Factors That Helped Business

This year professionals were asked to list some of the factors that they feel were most favorable to their business. Here is a summary of comment:

TV golf shows get millions interested in the game;

Junior golf is getting stronger in school and public course programs;

More players, especially women, who now are beginning to believe that a woman's social status suffers if she doesn't play golf;

Improved calibre of young pros and assistants;

Good weather throughout summer months;

More space given local and major tournaments on sports pages;

More local sponsors (such as Schaefer beer in NY Met dist.) for tournaments;

Great improvement in pro shop layout and design;

"Housecleaning" in PGA tournament operation picture;

More courses;

Improved disposal of trade-ins;

Increased awareness of the value of properly fitted clubs;

Larger local tournament programs, running into November.



Lou Strong (l), PGA pres., and Frank Comisso (r), vp of the national group, recently joined with more than 200 people in giving Joe Garin a "day" in honor of his 25th year as head pro at Lake Shore Golf Center, Rochester, N. Y. There were special events throughout the day, capped by a banquet at which Joe got a sizeable check and other gifts.

Unfavorable Elements

Unfavorable elements in the year's business also were noted by the pro businessmen. These adverse points are:

Courses too crowded with "un-educated" golfers;

New golfers starting to play without instruction in playing and etiquette and without proper equipment;

Tournament players' names featured on cheap lines sold at outlets competing with pro shops;

The cold, wet spring;

Clubs that usually are poorly managed taking over some or all "concessions" in well managed pro departments;

"Close-outs" of clubs and bags in mid-season before pros got chance to sell at the full market prices;

False advertising of "discount" and other cut-price golf goods retailers that compete with pros;

Lack of variety in soft goods.

Slow play as seen in tournaments and on TV, reducing capacity of the courses and their enjoyment by golfers.

Kentucky Bluegrass Production

According to Seed World, production of Kentucky bluegrass in Kentucky and the North Central states will be lower this year. U.S.D.A. estimates production of 15,400,000 lbs. of cured seed or about 25 per cent of last year's crop. Recovery of clean seed will amount to less than 6,000,000 lbs., 20 per cent of what it was last year.