

## Don't Fold Up the Operation on Labor Day

Too many Northern pros are living in the past when play stopped in September, says this Elyria CC Shopmaster . . . But good selling days extend through October and beyond



Clark Black

. . . pull a check on the bag racks.

There is plenty of living space at the Elyria (O.) CC, and even though the clubhouse has been enlarged in recent years, Clark Black, the professional, still is doing business in what amounts to a storeroom atmosphere — and a small one at that. But Clark, who is pushing 35 years, first as Elyria's assistant and later head shopkeeper, isn't doing much grouching because he discovered long ago that sales ingenuity is a very good substitute for lack of space, and that golfers will buy in cramped surroundings as well as large, airy ones if given an incentive.

Black, whose father, Jack, was Elyria's head pro from 1917 until 1928 and then stayed at the club until 1946, is pretty much of a year-around merchandiser. Although Elyria, located only 15 minutes from Lake Erie, experiences its share of cold, uncomfortable weather, Black's shop is kept open from mid-March through mid-November, six days a week. For at least three weeks preceding Christmas, it is re-opened so that persons who have been influenced by "Christmas Shopping at Your Pro Shop," can place their gift orders. In addition, Clark has a unique setup in a downtown men's clothing store, operating a pro department there in space that he subleases. This, incidentally, disproves the old belief that the downtown merchant and the pro have to have any serious conflicts because of competitive reasons.

In this case, one of Black's members owns the store and apparently there is a good deal of harmony between the two outlets. Customers are sent back and forth between the two stores when one



Clark Black can't display as artfully as he'd like to due to lack of space in Elyria CC shop, but he tries to put as much as possible on the merchandise pitch without getting jammed up. Display in the inset at right is set up to face the men's locker-room. Walls here are of sandblasted white pine with leaded finish and carpeting is medium brown.



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## Display It with Class



There are some good and bad things about the way in which this jacket and shirt are displayed. The jacket at left is handled with professional style. The fact that there is a shirt underneath it, suggests that the golfer buy not ONE but TWO pieces of merchandise. This is where coordination and harmonizing of styles can lead to bonus sales. The shirt on the right should be gathered at the bottom so that the impression isn't created that it is dripping dry. The left sleeve also could be handled more enticingly. But there is one saving point here: The shirt is buttoned. If it had been left unbuttoned, you'd see the ribs or the spinal column of the hanger. Apparel is downgraded when the customer is allowed to see too much of the manikin. **Al Robbins**

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can't supply what the other may have available. This has been going on for several years and both the Elyria pro and the storeowner reason that if they didn't keep their customers channeled in this way, they'd be taking their business somewhere else.

The term, sales ingenuity, was mentioned previously in this article. Clark Black and his assistant, Earl Puckett, have a good deal of it. For example, they use it in selling trade-in clubs to the extent that the Elyria shop rarely is stuck with second-hand clubs. Their method: Whenever guests play at the club, or whenever outsiders come in for a golf day, Black or Puckett very carefully look over their equipment and if they see an opportunity to suggest the replacement of either a single club or a set of them, they make the most of it. The clubs that the Elyria shop take in on trades are so beautifully reconditioned that many guests find it hard to resist buying them. Black and Puckett have developed this phase of the business so well that it has been completely unnecessary for them to beat the

bushes at the end of the season in an effort to get rid of a used-club inventory.

Asked why if he can push trade-in clubs off on guests, he can't do the same with new clubs, Black has this to say: "There probably is no good reason why it can't be done. It's just that we have gotten in the habit of selling trade-ins to these players. We have been doing it long enough that many of them inquire about them even before we make an approach. If the clubs are properly cleaned up and re-varnished, you can sell them at a higher price to guests than to any other group of purchasers."

The Elyria pro and his assistant, incidentally, don't confine their club checks just to the playing guests. They constantly look over the racks in an effort to find out which members may need new clubs or bags, and when they feel that they have a chance to make a sale, they don't lose any time in approaching the prospective buyer.

"Ask him if he's in the market." is one of Black's favorite phrases. Clark  
(Continued on page 116)

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## Don't Stop on Labor Day

(Continued from page 30)

goes on to explain that probably too many pros are too timid in sounding out members on what they may need. "They say we have a captive market," Black points out, "and I want to keep it that way. It's only captive as long as I am able to sell it 100 per cent, and so it is up to me to keep looking around to find out where I can make sales."

The rack-check, incidentally, can lead to a good many sales of clubs and bags as gift items at Christmastime. It's a good idea, Black points out, to keep a record of what each member needs in these lines and to be able to suggest them immediately as possible gifts to either husband or wife when one or the other is shopping.

### Uses Outdoor Display

Another bit of ingenuity shown by Black is to set up complete displays of apparel and equipment each day outside the pro shop. These are located near the first tee and the sunlight, according to Clark, seems to add some sales glamor to them, especially the sportswear. Of course, one reason that merchandise is displayed on the outside of Elyria CC is that it can't always be shown to advantage to enough people in the rather small confines of the shop itself. At any

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rate, the outdoor display attracts many buyers who otherwise wouldn't see it.

Probably the biggest failing in pro merchandising in Northern shops, according to Clark Black, is that too many shopmasters give up after Labor Day. "Many golf salesmen," he says, "tell me that four out of five pros don't bother to place an order after the 5th or 6th of September. This is a throwback to the old days when people put their clubs away on Labor Day. Nowadays, they are playing another six or eight weeks longer. We have 450 playing members at our club and at least 25 or 30 per cent of them play on Wednesdays and weekends through the end of October if the weather is halfway decent.

"Who," asks Black, "sell them the equipment and apparel to keep going the last six weeks or so? A downtown sporting goods store? There's a good market for your regular merchandise and you can bring in clothing to help winterize your players. Last fall there was a big rush on Flip-It wool hats; those astrakhan numbers copied from the Russians sold well and so did wool sports shirts. The women bought heavy sweaters and knit caps to wear to football games. The pro who doesn't handle these things is cutting himself out of substantial potential profits."

Black also suggests that October is a good time for getting members conditioned to do part of their Christmas shopping at the pro shop.

### Novelty Stock

Besides carrying large stocks of so-called seasonal items, Black also sells some novelty merchandise, men's underwear, neckties and a complete line of toilet articles. Since the men's locker-room opens into the Elyria pro shop there is a surprisingly strong demand for the latter items. In recent years, Black has stocked a little more medium price merchandise than he cares to handle, but demand and competition have forced him to do so.

Black probably gambles a little more than the average pro in ordering merchandise and, as a result, he may run more sales than most. His average discount when he unloads his stock is about 20 per cent. He tries to get his shop cleaned out by January so that he can start with completely new lines the following March. A good deal of his year-end closeouts go

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to employees of the club, and one of his boasts is that he never has a piece of stock on hand that is more than two years old. The odds and ends that are slow in moving are cleared out at 50 per cent discounts.

About 300 bags are stored in the Elyria racks and since Black and his assistant have a pretty good idea of the condition of the clubs in all, these constitute a pretty good jumping-off source for the sale of new equipment. The charge for storage and cleaning at the Elyria shop is \$12.50 a year.

Black's books are handled by his wife and he has an auditor come in every three months to prepare financial statements and handle any tax matters that are hanging over. Billing is done through the shop.

#### Never Stop Trying

Clark Black's whole outlook, as already suggested, is based on the premise that the pro should never stop trying to sell and that he should always have a wide enough assortment of merchandise on hand to back up a strong sales effort. "We are inclined at times," says Clark, "to start sympathizing with ourselves be-

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cause competition seems to be getting a little tougher each year. We don't stop to think that maybe our competitors are saying the same thing. Pros have some advantages that should be exploited — they have as much or more purchasing power as the average small businessman; and practically all have a loyal market made up of from 200 to 400 people who are in position to spend more money than the average consumers. With these things working for us, we should do as well or better than the next guy if we are alert to the sales opportunities that surround us."

## Minnesota GCSA Officers

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