

Pro Is Potent Force in Golf Marketing . . .

but he doesn't know how to advertise or merchandise, says former retail buyer

By GEORGE MANNING

If the pro ever should lose his dominant position in the golf club market the loss would be a financial blow not only for pros but for all manufacturers of golf playing equipment!

Who says so? A retired buyer of a large department store chain who now is playing a lot of golf, looking into many pro shops at private and resort courses and talking with dozens of professionals each year. Recently he sat in the grill room at a Palm Springs course and told vacationing pro golfers how the pro business picture looks to a man who has sold a fortune in golf clubs, balls and bags through retail stores.

He says he has finished with buying and selling golf equipment. He simply wants to enjoy himself now.

He remarks that if it were not for the professionals establishing brand preferences for golf clubs and balls the U.S. golf market would be mainly a price-only operation with American manufacturers competing on narrow margins against each other and against Japanese golf goods makers with their low labor cost equipment taking a big part of the business. That has happened in the case of baseball gloves. The retired salesman believes that the chance of a similar dip occurring in the golf market is slim but only because of the pros' strong and unique position.

Brought Them Into Golf

The high rating of the pros' defensive value to buyers and sellers of quality golf equipment comes from a man who admits that he probably took plenty of club, ball and bag business away from pros by undercutting their prices. Still he thinks he helped, rather than hurt, the pros. "Many pros can thank me for cutting prices and bringing thousands of people into golf by advertising clubs at prices that encouraged

beginners to get started" he says. "The pro helps many get started in golf with free lessons but too often doesn't follow up. He just doesn't seem to know how to take full advantage of his position.

"Where does the pro miss chances to sell the beginners he brings into golf?" the store man was asked.

"Mainly by his advertising," was the answer. "Advertising isn't entirely the big displays of bargain prices and leading manufacturers' names that the stores put into their newspaper ads. The stores have to use a shotgun type of advertising. It is spread so thin it costs more per sale than it would cost the pro with the cleancut rifle shooting he can do. His customers are clear targets.

Advertise Value Above Price

"There are two things the pro should bear in mind in planning his advertising," the retired salesman continued. "The first is that he must get people to believe that nobody — yes, absolutely nobody — will give better value per club than the pro, regardless of what price is paid for it. The second thing is that his advertising must be closely tied into his own market and his own shop displays.

"It is difficult to explain price differences between golf clubs. Woods that retail for \$15 each look about the same to most people as those that retail for \$25. The pro knows what the difference is. But he has to show it to the man or woman buyer so that the price paid for the difference looks like a bargain.

"It's a good thing if a pro puts on an act when he sells clubs. He should use showmanship with his salesmanship. A set of woods or irons is a very personal thing. The clubs are as individual as one's own grip or swing. Really, if a customer

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past few years, to layouts composed of legitimate Par-3 holes. The addition of Par-4 holes adds further interest because this allows even the most proficient golfer to hit woods.

Exacting Course

At Alma there are three Par-4's measuring 300, 270, and 265 yards. The latter two are rather short, but still fall within the standards of a Par-4. However, make no mistake that Alma is an "easy" par-30. There's a 235-yard Par-3 along with a 200-yard one which require strong pokes with a wood or long iron. Several other holes are good tests.

It is being proved at Alma that the length of a golf hole is no barrier whatsoever to illuminating it for night play. The simple requirement is the need for a few more luminaires — an expense more than compensated for by increased play.

Will Light Standard Courses

In the not-too-distant future many regulation courses will be lighted and probably equipped with additional facilities. When the trend to this new idea takes hold, chances are it can be attributed in a large measure to the pioneering efforts and success of the Alma and several other lighted par-30 golf centers.

Pro Is Potent Force

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comes into a pro shop and quickly walks out with irons or woods and doesn't have the pro or a competent assistant give the purchaser the bonus of expert, friendly attention, the customer might as well have gone to a store and bought them.

Women Need Attention

"Women buyers ought to get a great deal of pro attention now. Women are price buyers. Most don't know golf club values yet. They see the store advertised sets of two woods and five irons being sold at prices they can afford. They don't need the 16-club sets that tournament pros are crying for. Chances are in the private or public course pro shop the potential woman club buyer visits, she won't see even a semblance of a display that demonstrates that the pro is very much interested in selling women's clubs.

"Unless there is quick progress in pro merchandising to women they may become the big buyers of the cheap Japanese clubs and balls when this merchandise floods in.

"The pro himself is the best advertising for his merchandise. What he says about it means more to his members than what

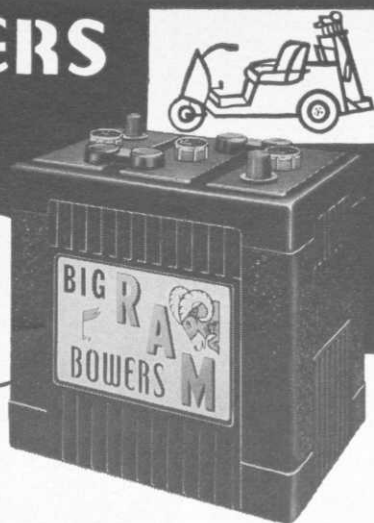
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anybody else says about it in print or talk. The pro has it over every other golf goods retailer on that account. Whatever a manufacturer of a club or a golf ball or a bag says about his merchandise becomes the gospel truth to the golfer when his own pro confirms the statement.

"It is time that the pro put some snap into his advertising. He may not realize that anything he says about golf merchandise is interesting news to his members. He probably would be surprised to learn that some of his members don't even know that he has to make a living out of what he sells in his shop. Many think he is paid a salary that supports him well.

"In failing to advertise as a businessman should, a pro probably is not doing his best job of serving his members and making money out of them, which they expect him to do when he takes care of their needs.

"The pro thinks he has trouble with price cutters. He doesn't know what that kind of trouble really is. He should be a sporting goods buyer for a store and suffer the experience of having his big ads on clubs he bought at a price to beat all

competition run in the same newspaper against competitive stores offering equally good clubs at much lower prices. A few shocks of this sort would show a pro what price headaches can be.

"If a good store could offer a golfer all that a pro has to sell his customer, the store, with its smart advertising, would take most of the golf business. I think the reason the stores enjoy as much golf business as they do is not only because of the great growth of the game among people who are on a limited budget and play public courses, but because only a few pros have discovered how to advertise."

Two Men Cited by CMAA

At the annual meeting of the Club Managers' Assn. in Chicago in February, Rex Calvert-Link, CC of Petersburg, Va. was given the Fred Crawford Memorial Award for the best article on the personnel situation in a CMAA contest. His winning entry was "Training and Motivating Personnel." Henry Barbour, new head of the hotel and restaurant school of Michigan State U., also was honored. He was given a life membership in the CMAA.