

Statistics Look Good But Sales Picture Is Spotty

The increase in pro shop sales and in rounds played, which have been steadily advancing at close to an annual 10 per cent rate for the last decade or so, again followed this well established trend in 1963. Whether this can be taken at full face value, especially in regard to sales, may be questioned when some of the pros' comments, which appear below, are examined.

The more than 60 pros who took part in GOLFDOM's annual roundup of golf business conditions reported that, as of Sept. 15, their sales were up approximately nine per cent. Added volume that will result from Christmas business undoubtedly will bring the increase for the year to 10 per cent, very close to what it was in 1962. (A sectional breakdown of the pro survey appears on page 46.) The aggregate increase in rounds played amounts to about nine per cent. This, of course, will increase somewhat between now and the end of the year, with the result that the percentage figure probably will be rounded off at 10.

A study of the sectional breakdown shows that from both the pro sales and play increase standpoints, the Midwest carried the country. The percentage of the sales increase in comparison with the increase in play was lower in all sections of the country except the West. In the footnote at the bottom of the sectional breakdown on page 46, it is significant that Western pros point out that cut-price competition doesn't make nearly such large inroads in their volume as professionals in other sections of the country say it does. The South-Southwest also is not nearly as hard hit by this kind of competition as are the East and Midwest.

In remarks appended to the survey

questionnaire, more pros than ever before point out that the real menace to their sales volume isn't the sporting goods stores and the discounters, but the cut-price practitioners within their own ranks. As one pro in the East puts it: "We are hurt most by a few fellows at public courses who sell playing equipment at heavy discount prices, depending on a big volume of sales to produce profits for them." This statement is echoed by several other eastern shop operators as well as a few in the Midwest.

One Midwestern pro, in his remarks, calls attention to the fact that even though his sales are up nearly 15 per cent for the year, he isn't sure this is going to be reflected in his profits. "Everyone," he says, "is too price conscious. Everyone is looking for deals. You have to listen to every proposition or you are going to lose customers. So, you have to cut into your markup or sales are going to be lost. This, combined with the constantly rising expenses of operating a shop, can't help but reduce your net."

Still another complaint comes from a professional who declares that quite a few national suppliers of many different types of products are offering such as golf ball premiums to their customers in an effort to get or keep their business. "This is fairly prevalent among medical and surgical supply houses," this shopmaster says. "We have quite a few doctors among our membership and so one of our prime sales sources is being quite effectively cut down."

Complaints Continue

The complaints go on. Catalog sales are hurting the pros to some extent, as they always have; Large companies that arrange for their employees to buy at discount prices continue to take their toll; The jumping of the gun on closeouts irks some professionals, and so does the fact that many new club members don't feel any responsibility to buy in the pro shop.

"There is always something new that has a disrupting effect on pro sales," observes a veteran southern shopmaster. "As far as I am concerned, 1963 hasn't been any worse in this respect than any other year. Our sales go up a little each year and our profits tag along with them. But what shouldn't be overlooked is that while many pros increase their net each year, there are many that aren't so lucky. The whole picture may look good, but that cer-

	New England & East	Midwest	South & Southwest	West
Percentage of Sales Increase (1963 over 1962)	6.0	12.6	7.3	10.8
Increase in Play (1963 over 1962) Per cent	7.5	15.0	7.0	7.25
Percentage of Increase in Lessons (1963 over 1962)	5.0	2.65	0.63	4.0
Average Number of Rounds per private club	21,200	23,850	29,622	23,900
Percentage of total rounds played by women	31.5	29.5	21.0	33.0
Increase in women golfers (Average number per club)	13	17	16	8
Per cent of lessons taken by women players	60	59	37.8	47.5
Percentage of total sales to women	27	34	20.7	44
Percentage of new club sales that involve trade-ins	34	74	69	67
Percentage of members who buy balls, bags, clubs outside shop	24	26.5	26	35
Percentage of sales in equipment in apparel	72	58.4	57	53.5
other	25	32.6	30	38.5
	3	9.0	13	8.0
Average number of active golfers at each club: New England & East — 236 men, 95 women; Midwest — 210 men, 90 women; South & Southwest — 341 men, 88 women; West — 230 men, 96 women.				
Average number of Juniors in pro classes and number who play regularly: New England & East — 42-35; Midwest — 65-47; South & Southwest — 63-55; West — 39-34.				
Percentage of pros who say cut-price competition hurts their sales: East — 90; Midwest 62; South & Southwest — 46.2; West — 29.				

tainly doesn't mean it applies to all the individual pros."

So, it can be concluded, that pro shop sales have their discouraging as well as encouraging aspects. As the breakdown shows, lesson business, thanks to the patronage of women players in all other sections of the country except the South-Southwest, picked up slightly in 1963 over 1962. But this is more than counteracted

by the fact that the percentage of members who buy equipment outside the shop increased from 20 to 27 per cent between 1962 and 1963.

The pro situation, as a whole, is good but spotty. The fact that more people continue to take up golf year after year undoubtedly has had most to do with the recording of uninterrupted increases in pro shop volume in the last decade.