

Reports on Pro Shop Business

THE RAINS CAME

Sales in the Eastern, Central and Western sections of the country were a washout—down as much as 25 per cent in one area.

On top of this, many golfers are holding off on golf club purchases until the 1970 lines come out

EAST

By William Day

NEW YORK—"Rain, rain, go away" . . . and don't come back for the rest of the season might well have been the common refrain of Eastern pro shop managers this summer. It has been one of the wettest July's on record and the pro shop has felt its effect.

Most shops were reporting a 5 to 20 per cent sales loss compared to this time last year. Rain wiped out two July weekends that normally would have had heavy sales.

The season started with a bang in the East. Spring sales were running ahead of last year. But the months of June and July slowed the boom down.

"I don't know if it's the weather or the stock market, but something sure took the wind out of our sails," laments the manager of a large metropolitan shop. Managers of some affluent club shops believe the slump is primarily due to the stock market. "You know, when a man has just dropped \$5,000 in the market, it's pretty hard for him to buy a pack of gum much less a set of clubs," another manager says wryly.

The aluminum club has had a mixed reception this summer. Some managers said they have had good sales with the club while others said they couldn't give it away. The general trend here however has been downward over the last several months.

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CENTRAL

By Joe Doan

CHICAGO—The worst spring and early summer weather in about a decade, according to many seasoned pros, did wonders for grass but not the cash box. Overall sales were down probably by 20 or 25 per cent for the area bounded by Waukegan on the north, St. Charles on the west and Joliet to the south. Golf ball sales alone dropped off at least 40 per cent; softwear volume was down an estimated 15 per cent; club sales lagged 15 or 20 per cent behind 1968 figures. Another significant casualty was lesson business.

Rainwear through May and June was selling like it had never sold before, but not enough of it was available to counteract the lost sales of other items. Normally, club sales don't suffer too much, regardless of the weather. Players want new sets and usually go ahead and buy them even if they won't get a chance to use them before mid-June. But this year, with talk of stainless steel shaft clubs slated to come on the market in the fall, many golfers are waiting to see what they are going to be like before committing themselves.

May in the Chicago area was wetter and colder than usual. That had a lot to do with sales getting off to a poor start. But June, especially the early part, which is supposed to redeem poor

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WEST

By Don Curlee

SAN FRANCISCO—Abnormally heavy and frequent rains in January and February caused some sales volume setbacks at most professional shops in the San Francisco and northern California area, and for most may result in a volume 8 to 10 per cent less than 1968.

However, many professionals agree that 1968 was a record year and they are not unduly disappointed about not exceeding it.

Spring and summer sales have been brisk for most shops in all departments, even ahead of 1968 in some cases, and there is no indication of a slowdown in sales because of a softening economy. Only one professional at a private club reported occasional hesitance among members to buy clubs in anticipation of new stainless steel shafts.

One professional, who operates professional shops at three public play courses, says volume is up at all three courses. For him clubs and equipment are holding steady and apparel sales are up.

A private club professional said his 1969 gross probably will be down 10 to 12 per cent from 1968, primarily because of reduced play during the rainy months. "Part of what we lost in car rentals and ball sales, and there's no way to recapture that volume, was due to the February washout."

Hard goods and apparel are

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EAST

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And although it has been talked about a great deal in pro shops most managers feel that golfers are not aware of the new stainless steel shafted clubs yet. How it will be received is still up in the air, especially since sales in general are off.

Ball sales were reported to be slightly lower than last year too—due primarily to the rain. Some noted that many golfers were opting for lower-priced balls because of the problem of water-logging on wet courses.

A brighter spot is the booming clothing sales. This increase could be directly traced to the wider variety of styles and colors in both men's and women's fashions. One manager happily notes, "Five years ago a man would not think of having more than one pair of golf shoes but today, with the different colors, it is not uncommon to have a pair of shoes to match every pair of pants." Sales in some shops are running over 20 per cent above last year—which is even more amazing when considering the slump in other areas of the business.

Some managers were so enthusiastic over the prospect of future clothes sales that they are giving much more floor space to clothes—especially the colored ones.

Novelty items and jewelry are also doing quite well now in many shops. As one manager puts it: "The only problem with novelties is we don't have enough of them. I could sell a lot more gimmicks if someone would invent them." Some shops reported that several indoor practice items were selling better than usual, especially on rainy days. Books have also had a brisk sale.

As the season goes on, many managers are looking for a dry fall to recoup some of the wet summer losses. Others, less optimistic, are stocking psychedelic fall clothes, especially raincoats.

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CENTRAL

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pro shop starts, was waterlogged and that hurt.

July started out to play the same theme as June—rain. About July 10th, however, the situation began to improve.

Northside Chicago clubs seem to have fared better during the trying days of May and June than those on the West or South sides. Ken Henry of Glen Flora in Waukegan says that his business in 1969 has been nearly as good as it was in 1968. The course is blessed with an excellent drainage system, for one thing. For another, the membership, which is composed of an equal number of young as well as old golfers, doesn't back off until it is literally blown or washed off the course.

Sam Bernardi of Indian Hill in Winnetka, who has suffered mainly from canceled lessons, states that at clubs where a high percentage of members live within a mile or two of the No. 1 tee, as they do at his club, the number of rounds doesn't drop off to any great extent, in spite of poor weather.

Many daily fee clubs in the Chicago area reportedly have been hard hit. Quite a few of these courses are heavily mortgaged and, according to rumor, have had trouble making loan payments in recent months. In most cases, however, banks have agreed to let the payments slide in anticipation of strong late summer and fall business.

Generally, three out of four pros feel that they'll salvage quite a few dollars through the sale of fall and Christmas merchandise, and possibly close the year with a gross that will be 85 per cent of what it was last year. One big thing that is going to help them is that the aluminum versus steel shaft club controversy, if it can be called that, is going to be resolved, and that will give the sale of clubs a big boost.

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WEST

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both up about 20 per cent for one municipal shop operator, who says he hasn't detected the slightest reluctance to buy on the part of his customers. Lessons, which he doesn't promote actively, are about the same as 1968, and his increased practice range business added to the overall increase.

Another municipal course operator admitted to a 15 per cent decrease in sales volume from 1968, but says, "Our business is always good." Several courses have opened in his area in the past two or three years, and the number of rounds played at his two 18-hole courses has decreased.

In his area a local aerospace firm has reduced its labor force from 22,000 to 7,000. "With this many people leaving the community it means money out of our pocket." Another neighboring course granted the professional shop concession to an aggressive and alert professional who has taken it from a \$40,000 annual operation to \$90,000. His members are staying home, buying at their own shop.

"But we're not a disaster area," he says. "When our volume drops we start working harder. We don't pressure our customers, but we don't let them get away, either. To the golfer his game is the most important thing in the world, so we talk to him about his game and we can usually find the way to his pocketbook."

One of the professionals cautioned about a possible backlash from the aluminum shafted club experience. Players are always looking for the cure-all for their own shortcomings, and some thought aluminum shafts were it. Others can be expected to develop the same outlook regarding stainless steel, and professionals can expect some disappointment on their part when the reality becomes clear—clubs do not a player make.

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