

# GOLFDOM SPEAKS OUT

## PROS BEWARE!

Last month, GOLFDOM sounded a warning to pros about the growth of retail store competition in the golf apparel market ("Pros Losing Out on Soft Goods," February, page 54a). These words of caution were not based on hearsay, but on a valid GOLF Magazine subscriber study. This study clearly showed that the "downtown" stores are capturing the lion's share of the apparel business.

Many pros reading the article may have rationalized, "But we still give them hell in equipment sales." In answer to this groundless optimism we offer the following report, headlined "Instant Education," which was published in the February issue of GOLF Magazine:

In an effort to promote increased sales of golf equipment in sporting goods and department stores, the National Sporting Goods Assn. has embarked on a program designed to create Golf Specialists to operate golf departments in stores all over the country. This is fine as far as it goes because more and more equipment is being sold downtown and in suburban shopping centers and there obviously is a need for qualified personnel to help guide the golfer in his selection. However, the present list of requirements for a Golf Specialist rating falls far short of the mark.

To get such a rating, a department must (1) have sales personnel read all articles in the series "How to Run a Golf Department," (2) carry a representative line of equipment from at least two reliable suppliers, (3) have the department manned by at least one salesman who knows and plays the game, (4) provide club repair service for all customers—although it can be jobbed out to local shops or manufacturers—and (5) carry a selection of compression ranges in balls, make available a ball personalizing service, carry at least three widths of shoes, establish a trade-in service, make available custom-fit alterations on apparel, visit trade shows,

display the Golf Specialist emblem.

The last thing we want to do is criticize the NSGA for trying to upgrade such departments, but a close look at the above requirements leaves us with the feeling that there is little improvement over what is already being offered in the stores. And conspicuously absent from the list is a requirement that there be a man on hand with several years' teaching experience, who can take a customer to the practice tee, watch him swing and tell him exactly what kind of clubs he needs.

Perhaps, at first glance, this program may seem inconsequential, but on closer examination it presents disturbing implications. As GOLF points out, the requirements for the title of Golf Specialist are not particularly rigid. However, the public will only see an emblem proclaiming "Golf Specialist" and will have no knowledge of how much—or how little—is required for such a title.

In addition, it should be emphasized that the present program is only an initial move by the association. If it proves successful, NSGA obviously will make a concerted effort to develop the concept into something bigger and better.

GOLFDOM would never argue against honest competition—it has been a major factor in the growth of our economy. And it is not our intention to make NSGA sound like a villain out to upset the present state of the golf equipment market. However, we want our pro readers to be aware that the future of their businesses may not be as secure as they think. The threat even extends to golf equipment manufacturers whose pro lines afford them the highest profit margins.

GOLFDOM hopes that pros will display a healthy competitive spirit and meet this competition in the best possible way, by becoming the most astute merchandisers possible, offering the finest customer service and continuously seeking to improve their pro shop operations. It will pay off handsomely in increased profits.