

Most professionals agree that the tight money situation has cooled forecasts of record sales in 1970. But in general, pro shop sales are at least holding their own and pros are optimistic about the future

professionals, the first half of 1970 showed promise of being "a good year, a little better than average, but not as profitable as some they had known through the 1960s." The main reason 1970 was outrunning 1969 was that from April through July 4th of the latter year, 15 consecutive weekends were either totally washed out or seriously dampened by rain. This year, rain slowed things down a little in May but then the weather took a turn for the better. What saved most professionals in 1969 was that all the enforced idleness in the early weeks of the season created such a pent-up demand among golfers that they swarmed over the courses when the weather finally straightened out.

The clubhouse picture through the first four months of the 1970 season came very close to reflecting that of the pro shop. Business was good even though everybody was talking gloomily about the stock market, tight money and the economic slowdown. Of the dozen club managers who were queried in the GOLFDOM survey, nine said that their waiting lists are as long as they have ever been.

Getting back to the pro picture, a summary of figures supplied by the 18 pros shows the following: Ball sales through July were up between 1 and 2 per cent; club sales were off by approximately the same percentage; and so was the sale of sportswear. Lesson business increased in 1970 by about 3 per cent over 1969. The estimated increase in rounds played was a little higher than for lessons.

More than one pro was disappointed that his club sales hadn't been better. Last year most professionals took a beating on their Christmas business in golf clubs because many golfers were awaiting the arrival of the new stainless

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## West

By Don Curlee

**SAN FRANCISCO**—Golf operators in northern and central California can't ignore the background music of tight money and nose-diving stocks, but some of them have found many ways to make the cash registers ring loud and often enough to drown it out.

Generally, the large public and municipal operations are weathering the economic downturn better than private clubs.

One of the larger municipal courses reported a business volume increase of 13 per cent for the first five months of 1970 over the same period in 1969. The professional believes that a major reason is an increase in green fees which has eliminated some of the "old guard" monthly tickets who tied up the course previously. He's getting a bigger turnover, "and more of them have dollars in their pockets," he says. The different clientele brings increased electric car use, and ironically, a 20 to 30 per cent increase in shoe sales.

One of San Francisco's oldest clubs is comfortably ahead of last year in every department of the pro shop. Unfortunately, expenses are up also but are under control. Net profit through April was more than three times the figure for the same rainy 1969 period. Gross revenue for four months this year is ahead of last year by about 11 per cent, aided by men's wear sales of \$23,000 and sales in two other categories—clubs and bags and golf balls—each over \$20,000.

The club manager at the same facility reports a waiting list of two years and says this is partly the result of a consistently low initiation fee (\$2,500), whereas many clubs in the area are much higher.

Another large municipal opera-

tion reports an increase in business of 10 per cent over 1969, "mainly due to weather," according to the professional. He says that he has undertaken a little more floor promotion also, but admits: "We go by sunlight," and sun has been in good supply this year. He feels that lightweight steel shafts will stimulate club sales for the next five years and has found it advisable to "stabilize" his shoe inventory in the \$18 to \$21 range.

Tight money and stock market reverses had a direct effect on the operation of another private club on the San Francisco Peninsula. "About 5 per cent of our members found themselves in a bind," the manager says, "and put their memberships up for sale." The going price is about \$4,300 currently, whereas a membership certificate purchased directly from the club is \$6,000. "Movement of membership certificates was much more active a year and a half to two years ago," the manager says, "before the big drop in the stock market."

The professional says his 1970 sales are down 20 per cent from 1969, with club sales lagging 40 per cent behind last year. "People are working more and playing golf less," he says. The failure of touring professionals, he feels, to play aluminum-shafted clubs has hurt sales and has resulted in confused club members whose reaction is to wait rather than buy. "They'll buy a sweater in the \$10 to \$30 range," he says, "but they back off when they consider spending \$400 to \$500 for new clubs." He adds that women's apparel sales are "way down," but he's optimistic about an increase in all departments in the fall, and is carrying a good inventory in preparation.

One professional in central California, where the predominantly  
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ing assessment. In the process it lost a lot of members. Many of them came over to us, and they're willing to spend what they consider their savings in the golf shop."

The same pro says he has his own way of beating the economic strain on his livelihood. "Our members are competitive," he says, "and this is my opening to keep sales humming. We have reached a point where 70 per cent of my sales come from tournament credits. In this way I keep my members happy and my cash register ringing. Otherwise, I'm afraid my sales would be dragging too."

Of all the public courses contacted, one—located in an area where industrial layoffs and labor strikes have poked their ugly heads into the picture—has all the makings of coming up empty at the end of the sales year.

Its pro is still hopeful for a rebound. "I'm not worried about the people playing the course," he reasons. "However, it's the ones not playing who are hurting my sales. Right now we are running 5,000 rounds behind last year. If it continues our play could be off 15 per cent."

The final yardstick for reviewing the revenue the golf professional hopes to realize this season comes down to the question of numbers—numbers in members.

Most haven't felt the pinch, except those middle-upper clubs whose hefty assessments have driven certain members to seek out less lofty facilities.

There is one notable example in this direction. It experienced a drastic cutdown when 60 members dropped out. Once again this occurred at the "stock broker type" of club. "They just up and left us," the club manager wails. "I can't explain it other than the fact that our membership is in deep trouble. And we are worrying."

The economic situation, then, is starting to gnaw away at the earning power of the golf professional. At this point the effect is drifting from minimal to conclusive stages. It certainly is not a healthy state, but neither are other avenues of income. □

## Central CONTINUED

steel shafts. With the exception of two manufacturers, the industry never made it to market with stainless-shafted clubs. But when manufacturers put new emphasis on lightweight steel shafts, it was hoped that the lost Christmas business would be made up. It wasn't. Spring sales were no better than normal, at best. On top of this, the truck strike caused some cancelled sales. But the real reason why there wasn't at least a small boom in club sales is that many golfers chose to ride out the mild economic storm by staying with their old clubs. Now, the professionals are hoping that this year's Christmas business will get everything straightened out.

There is a lot of fluctuation in the minus and plus figures for sportswear submitted by the shop operators. A few professionals report that men's and women's sales are up by as much as 15 or 20 per cent, but just as many say that their softwear sales have dropped by an equally large percentage. All in all, women's volume for 1970 is no better than it was in 1969. Men's sales have increased by an average of about 3 per cent. Most professionals note that women seem to be inclined to retrench more than men.

Male sportswear business probably would have suffered quite a sharp slump in 1970 if it hadn't been for the introduction of the polyester or dacron knit slacks that sell at \$35 or more a copy. The slacks have saved their season. Sales of these items alone have lifted sportswear sales of 80 per cent of the 18 professionals interviewed above last year's or at least enabled them to stay abreast of 1969 volume. Without the knits there is no doubt that the complaints of the shopmasters would have reverberated all the way back to the garment district.

John Marshall who is the professional at Medinah CC, which has one of the largest and best-stocked shops in the Midwest, if not the country, pronounces the knits "fantastic." But even with the boost they gave his early season sales, his men's volume was off 2 or 3 per cent at the end of July. So,

it is easy to see why he is so lavish in endorsing them. At Olympia Fields, where there are more than 450 golfers, sales of the slacks had exceeded 300 pairs by midsummer.

Eleven of 16 professionals who keep figures on lesson business reported that it was up for 1970. Play at 10 of the reporting clubs was higher through July than it was in 1969. At four clubs it was about the same as last year; four clubs reported a decline.

Manufacturers' sales figures coincide with those of the professionals. Four of the large club and ball suppliers report that their Midwest volume is the same or slightly better than it was in 1969. Sportswear suppliers think they may be breaking even on sales in 1970, as compared to 1969. But everyone agrees that due to the truck strike, which was drawn out for 85 days in the Chicago area, profits for 1970 won't be as large as they were in 1969. The experience of one equipment company, described by its sales manager, generally sums up the situation. "From a sales standpoint we were having a very good year," he says. "Volume for the first half was up 5 per cent; we had the best May sales on record. But when the distribution costs were totaled, we found that what was being taken in with the right hand was doled out with the left. So, for the first six months of 1970 we were happy to show a small net profit." □

## West CONTINUED

agricultural economy has taken lumps, reported "super" business—30 to 50 per cent ahead of 1969. However, he says other club professionals in the same area had indicated to him that their sales are down. Since moving up to head professional from assistant in April, he has added a "nicer line of ladies' dresses and a new men's shirt," which have given a boost to soft goods sales. He said weather has been ideal through the spring and early summer and added this observation: "The members here wanted me to have the professional job so badly, I think they 'saved up' their purchases and are buying heavier than normal now." Needless to say, he appreciates their support. □