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by Herb Graffis

SWINGING AROUND GOLF

Keeping the fiscal score

GOLFDOM's annual survey of golf business has information that professionals and manufacturers ought to know but don't and won't. At the Professional Golfers' Assn. Merchandise Show word got around that the survey shows almost \$46 million in pro shop golf ball sales revenue for 1970 and sales of men's and women's apparel add up to about \$43 million. Consider the turnover of the pro's investment in golf balls and the money made.

A smart and securely solvent professional told me at the show that he had figured he was getting only about half of his members' ball business. So he began displaying cheaper balls. What happened? His sale of quality balls slumped and over-all ball sales revenue dropped sadly.

It all depends on the pro and his place of business. Another pro at a public course in an active industrial area did a quarter of a million dollars in sales last year. His account with one manufacturer for 1970 was over \$65,000. He is an expert buyer and the stock gets extensive word-of-mouth as well as printed advertising. What a merchandiser he is! His shop isn't the world's prettiest although he's got fast-moving colorful stocks of clothing, bags and hats. But there aren't many shops that sell more.

GOLFDOM's survey, which is confirmed in several sectors by reports of the ball and club manufacturers' sales, indicates an income of home professionals in 1970 of

about \$300 million plus salaries and something from golf car operations. In about 74 per cent of the cash flow at those private and pay-play courses that have car fleets, pros get some percentage of car revenue. But pro shop operational expenses in 1970 were murderous. Only 26 per cent of professionals at all types of establishments were indicated as netting more than \$15,000 a year.

From club officials' and professionals' talk you'd think very few professionals made less than \$25,000 a year. What a dream! But what can you expect when so few in golf business really know the fiscal score.

So GOLFDOM's thanks are due to the professionals, superintendents and managers who collaborated in the survey. How tough it is to get people in the business end of a game based on keeping an accurate score to keep accurate scores in the business end of the game.

Some highlights of annual pro department revenue as indicated for 1970 were balls, about \$46 million; irons, about \$33 million; women's apparel, about \$22 million, and men's apparel, a little over \$21 million. A surprise is that gloves took in about \$11 million (except I think I have left a million dollar's worth of them in locker rooms myself). Same thing goes for hats and caps which figured in a \$10 million class including accessories.

Shoes brought in a substantial \$13.3 million. Lessons accounted for about \$12.4 million, and the ranges collected over \$19 million. Ball loss, which is another way of saying "stealing," had many pros amazed when they got in the black on range operation.

Cleaning and storage of clubs accounted for \$12.6 million of home pros' income (most of it at private clubs, of course). A little item that shows how big golf is was the 1970 figure on pro shop sales of headcovers. It was \$2.3 million. Bag sales were around \$10 million.

It all added up to show that any outfit that wants to make money selling to the golf market had better sell professionals first. They absolutely control the profitable quality market. That was shown during the PGA Civil War when club professionals chilled on pushing sales of famed tournament pros.

At the PGA show club manufacturers were talking about the im-

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provement in buying volume. "The jump this year shows pros must be very confident of a big 1971 after a couple of years that were disappointing," said the sales manager of a major company. "This show is too late for basic buying for an experienced pro at a solid, first-class club who knows his market. This is insurance buying."

Pros at pay-play courses said at the PGA show that they hadn't noticed enough store clubs at their courses last year to indicate that the store competition had enjoyed a banner year. Manufacturers commented that the profit margin in getting the forgings, shafts and grips for store clubs, slapping them together and giving them a shine was being forced so low by sharp chain store buyers, that the volume of the order only meant that the supplier would go broke quicker.

Consensus of pros and a few manufacturers at the PGA show was that high pressure mismanagement is backfiring so badly that when a younger champion's name appears on a golf club, so much royalty pay-

ment is involved that the club couldn't be of good value.

The case was cited of one star pro's name going on a line of clubs at an annual payment higher than that of the buying company's president. In a few years the organization parted company with its president and the pro headliner parted with his manager.

There's no substitute for the high quality of a name. Ben Hogan knows that. The company he started lost money for some years making clubs as good as Ben insisted they be made. But then it began scoring in black figures real pretty.

Walter Hagen had people in his own company—first in Florida, then in Michigan—and the Wilson people going almost balmy making clubs like Walter wanted them made. But those millions Hogan and Hagen spent for quality came back through pro shops. The Haig and Ben never could imagine there'd be a substitute for quality at any price.

Robert White, first president of the PGA, advised his contemporaries to learn all they could about the job of a superintendent so they could do better by themselves and their clubs. From the number of professional-

superintendents who now own golf clubs fully or in part, it appears that White's counsel continues to be heeded.

Paul Erath, veteran pro-superintendent is building another course. With this one his partner is **Stanley Kemp**, formerly Maple Leaf defense man, and after leaving hockey, head of a construction company. The new course, near Venango, Pa., will be called the Canadian-American GC and will be opened July 1st. Erath is also working on a new course with **Don Kruse** which is now being built at Fairview, Pa.

Larry Shute, who's been at Western Hills CC, Cincinnati, Ohio, as pro, in partnership with **Jerry Hall**, buys the 18-hole Walnut Hills GC at Bluffton in Northwest Ohio. The name has changed to Bluffton GC. Larry is Denny Shute's step-brother. **Gene Samborsky** succeeds Shute at Western Hills.

Lou Sharkoff is pro at the new Fort Carson (Colo.) GC. He came from the pro staff at the Air Force Academy Eisenhower course at Colorado Springs... **Gene Deeds** changed from pro at Farwell (Tex.) CC to become superintendent at Lubbock (Tex.) CC. □

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