

# the Season

MOST PRO SHOPS REPORT AN INCREASE IN THEIR SALES OVER LAST YEAR DUE MAINLY TO GOOD WEATHER. BUT NO SALES RECORDS WILL BE SET. HELPING BUSINESS WERE THE SURPRISING ENTHUSIASM OVER DOUBLEKNITS AND UNEXPECTED GOLF BAG SALES AS WELL AS THE GREAT TURN TO LIGHTWEIGHT STEEL SHAFTS

## West

By Don Curlee

per cent more on weekends.

Rather unaccountably, though, golf ball sales didn't keep pace with play. At private clubs, sales of top quality balls increased less than 5 per cent for the season. At the semi-privates, they barely made it into plus territory. The new non-cut ball, both the pro and cheaper lines, undoubtedly has had something to do with the lag. These pellets don't wear out; they have to be lost. One manufacturer of the new cutless brand couldn't come close to filling orders, even as late as July 15th. One out of three private club professionals declare that more and more of their members are buying 75 centers—elsewhere—and at least this many state that the retriever manufacturers must be doing a substantial volume because an increasing number of these telescopic instruments are found nestled in players' bags.

Besides the wonderful weather, polyester and Dacron doubleknit slacks have given the pros something to become effusive about. Available this year in large lots to more and more shops, they have provided a pickup where volume has tended to lag. Women are buying them as well as men. Then, too, doubleknit has been introduced for men's sports coats. Shops that have been able to get the coats haven't been able to keep them in stock. The professional and proprietor of perhaps the largest and best-stocked shop in the Midwest, couldn't catch up with his doubleknit sports coats orders until after July 1st. A year ago doubleknit slacks saved his sportswear season. This pro was caught in the middle of toting

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**SAN FRANCISCO**—Although some professionals in northern California are grumbling about extended "close-out" club sales by large volume shops, they generally agree that merchandise sales are good, but not destined to set any records in 1971.

The cooler economy was mentioned frequently, and in one case layoffs in the electronics industry stimulated play and counter sales, temporarily at least. Club sales fall off sharply, however, when layoffs occur, most professionals reported.

One owner-professional, who handles only a minimum inventory of close outs, says that his new pro shop is not handling the expected volume, especially in clubs. Play is heavy and increasing, however, car rental is above the projection and driving range business is brisk. He emphasizes personal service to his customers and insists that his assistants offer it generously. He likes to point out to his customers that he protects them with the merchandise he offers; they don't risk a price drop soon after they buy.

Favorable weather through most of the year has helped create golfing traffic. Winter rains came early and stopped suddenly. The head professional at a municipal course with five assistants called the weather "ideal" for golf. He says that his club sales are "excellent" and feels interest in clubs has been generated by the different shafts. He handles aluminum-shaft close outs, but has enjoyed heavy sales in lightweight steel shafts.

With 80,000 rounds expected this year he has noticed that sales of balls by the dozen have been higher. This

he attributes to a realization by golfers that pro shops consistently offer good buys in golf balls. He handles no soft goods other than hats and socks.

"It's better to have depth in the hard goods than to have a wide range of merchandise," he says. In emphasizing club sales he and his assistants try hard to give every customer a precise fit. "When the customer gains confidence in the professional and realizes that fitting clubs is his business he will buy," he says. "This confidence extends to other merchandise as well."

One of the largest volume private clubs in the San Francisco Bay area experienced sales 15 to 20 per cent lighter than last year during the first five months and gave only "tight money" as the reason. Business picked up sharply in June and July, however. Normally brisk shoe sales have fallen off and the blame was placed on the disappointing performance of some of the new materials.

At the same club a monthly men's guest day, which has been held for two or three years, is turning into a neat sales boost for the shop, which sells merchandise for door prizes and enjoys the added traffic. In spite of the over-all dip in business the professional says that more clubs are being sold. "Clubs and balls are where we make it," he says.

Good weather, more outside tournaments and a sizable increase in electric car rentals are putting another municipal course professional ahead of last year. "All merchandise across the board is moving well," he says. "Lightweight steel shafts have

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In a way this increase was an unexpected windfall. Because of economic conditions, most professionals felt at the start of the season that their players would go right on deferring their club purchases. Another rather unexpected windfall has also come from the sales of golf bags. Because these are deferrable when there is a pinch, the professionals generally thought they wouldn't move this year. But for reasons for which nobody can fully account, bag sales through mid-July were up a solid 5 per cent over 1970 and in several cases as much as 10 per cent.

As for the increase in lesson business, averaging around 8 or 10 per cent at most clubs, it is attributed to the good lesson-giving weather along with the increase in play.

If there has been a slightly disappointing facet to pro shop business this year it is in the sale of women's sportswear. In spite of the lift that has come from doubleknit slacks volume, it is no better than it was last year and in some places is dragging by a small percentage. One professional who had a poor year in 1970, ordered heavily for 1971 on the hunch that there would be a strong comeback. But it didn't work out that way. His conclusion: Women are more cognizant of the recession than men. To get rid of his overstock he pushed his annual women's sportswear sale up to July, the earliest he ever held it.

Although most professionals were happy and a few overjoyed with their sales records through mid-July, all aren't sure that they are going to show a bigger net when the profit and loss statement is drawn up for the year. The reason is that costs, mainly labor, have gone up, and not just inched up. At many shops the assistants have been around for several years and to keep them, rather substantial merit increases have to be paid them year after year. Eventually, longevity lifts them into a fairly high salary bracket. If there isn't a steady increase in sales volume and lesson revenue to take care of their increasing salary requirements, the professional has to dig deeply into what otherwise would be his net to pay them.

Here are some interesting sidelights to GOLFDOM's midwestern survey:

At one club where this year's business is up 25 per cent, a new ap-

proach to selling was introduced. Salesmanship is completely desensitized and an honest attempt is made to point out any flaws in the merchandise as well as its strong points.

About one out of four or five shops handles tennis sportswear for accommodation purposes. This is where clubs have courts, but no pros. About half of the sales are to persons other than members. Little attempt is made to sell tennis equipment.

Due to a \$1 million fire that last winter destroyed the clubhouse at one club, the pro shop is doubling as the clubhouse. Play is down because of lack of locker rooms and dining facilities and members' clubs are stored in trailers. However pro business is almost as good as in 1970. One reason is that sale of replacement golf shoes for those lost in the fire boomed early in the season. The professional reports that he hasn't been able to keep up with demands for one brand of top line ball even though the number of rounds has been considerably reduced.

In spite of the excellent weather, play at one affluent Northside club had been cut down by at least 5 per cent through mid-July. A fairly large percentage of the members are stockbrokers, and none are very optimistic about the economy making a definite recovery before next year.

According to most professionals, nobody is doing much talking any more about the recession—at least not in the pro shops. Last year it was a much discussed topic. The consensus is that either people are taking the recession for granted and aren't talking about it or most of the talk about it is carried on in the locker rooms, beyond the professional's hearing.

A professional who is at his club for the second year is riding a near 25 per cent increase in sales. He's convinced that it takes a year for members to warm up to a new man, and that a fellow just has to starve a little until he is accepted. And there is no way the breaking-in ordeal can be speeded up.

One of the brightest notes that a few professionals have detected: Expense accounts apparently are being restored and a new era of the big loose free spender shouldn't be too far around the corner. □

been popular," he adds.

In this operation only one of the two 18-hole layouts was permitted for tournament use last year, but both are being used now, which may account for part of the increased car rental where both courses are almost entirely on flat ground.

At another municipal course with a heavy trade in close-outs, business is up at least 20 per cent over last year. The professional there explained that some of the increase is the result of normal growth at a course that is only five years old.

Recently, sales stimulation has occurred, especially in club sales, from the installation of computer club fitting and swing analysis. Complete analysis is included with the purchase of clubs or sold separately to any golfer who's interested. Although club sales benefit most from the analysis, the increase in business applies to all departments of the shop. "We're learning more about our customers," the professional says, "we're giving them better service, a better selection and a bigger inventory."

Another municipal operator says that his shop volume is running about 8 per cent behind last year's and cites the increased competition from two other municipal courses which have opened recently. Also, he says, the economy in his area is pegged to the electronics industry, which has laid off substantial numbers during the year.

He is fighting back with a complete remodeling and rebuilding of his shop, which re-opened in May with an additional 1,500 square feet of floor space. Display and exposure of merchandise has been improved significantly. He has converted almost entirely to lightweight steel shafts and continues to feature specialized fittings as part of the superior service he offers to his customers. □

#### Nicklaus, Caponi win National Golf Day

Jack Nicklaus and Donna Caponi were the winners of the "Round of Champions" for **National Golf Day**. The tournament was held at Old Warson CC, St. Louis, Mo., and sponsored by Chevrolet.