

# ALL IS NOT PERFECT IN PARADISE

Think of the club professional located at a picture book golf course with a splendid ocean view, exotic blossoms of every hue and palm trees stirring in gentle trade winds. Add to this a year-round clientele made up of some regular club members, but predominantly an ever-changing brigade of tourist customers in a holiday spending mood. You are sure to say, "Man, he's got it made."

This side of the picture is accurate for most professionals working at the many semi-private and resort courses in the Hawaiian Islands. But let's take a look at the other side, which most people either don't know or don't think about. That same paradise golf facility is located some 2,500 miles off mainland United States and perhaps another 1,500 to 3,000 miles from some major wholesale marketplaces, as well as the manufacturing facilities that supply the pro shop with its wares. That continually revolving group of tourist golfers are indeed in a spending mood. But because many of them belong to clubs at home, they are not out to buy name brand merchandise that's available from their own professionals. Instead, they spend their money freely on the usual island fare—coral and jade jewelry, outlandish print shirts and muumuus and pseudo-Hawaiian art objects. Oh yes, and those ever-green fairways, exotic blooms and swaying palms need chemicals, fertilizers, maintenance equipment and irrigation systems to keep them healthy, even in paradise. Again, the original sources of supply for these items are several thousand miles away. This is the superintendent's problem, but the condition of the course has a direct influence on the professional. There are many courses to play in the islands and the tourists, *i.e.*, the potential pro shop customers, are going to select the best.

Like most pro shops in resort locations, apparel and small equipment make up the bulk of the sales volume in Hawaiian shops. How-



ever, Jerry Johnston, director of golf at Royal Kaaupali, on the island of Maui, notes that shipping charges make his costs higher than those of the mainland professional, but he still must sell apparel for the same price, because the tourist golfer is not going to pay more for merchandise that he can get at home. Johnston estimates that shipping charges come to "75 cents to one dollar per pair of slacks."

Delivery also becomes a headache, because the Hawaiian shops must be stocked with new merchandise by late fall in order to be prepared for Hawaii's peak season. This means Johnston must buy in August and September, and there always is anxiety about delivery being made in time for the season. For this reason, even if he wanted to expend the time and money to travel thousands of miles to the PGA Merchandise Show, the event is held too late to serve Johnston any useful purpose.

Next year, however, Johnston does plan to make a buying trip to the markets in Los Angeles, northern California and Dallas. The trip, he feels, will avoid his being solely dependent on local distributors and manufacturers' salesmen, and will enable him to find new lines for his shop.

Among the best sellers in Hawaiian pro shops are the course emblem items—hats, shirts and so on—according to Tom Bienek. He

is a pro shop staff member under professional Willie Figeira at Makaha CC, outside of Honolulu. These items to the tourists are souvenirs of where they've played during their Hawaiian holiday, and the shops can't seem to stock enough of them. They have become a mainstay of the pro shops, because this is one area in which each shop is without competition.

At Makaha, tennis is also a big sport, and Bienek says he would like to get into tennis apparel. Another possibility is after-golf apparel, but this would be a highly competitive area. There are scores of fine apparel shops in the major resort areas of Hawaii, many of which are conveniently located in shopping arcades at the hotels.

The mainland tourists are an important part of the pro shop clientele, but some of the best customers come from another island—Japan. Rodney Acia, pro shop staff member at Keauhou-Kona CC, on the big island of Hawaii, likes to recall the day a group of Japanese tourists came into the shop and virtually emptied its shelves.

It's well known that the Japanese are "golf nuts," and in their homeland it is a mark of status to wear American golf apparel and use American golf equipment, in part because of the quality and also because American merchandise, due to shipping costs and tariffs, is expensive. The Japanese tourist in Hawaii can get this "prestige" merchandise at, what are to him, bargain prices. Particularly prized by the Japanese golfer are American golf shoes, so it's not uncommon to see pro shops in Hawaii stocked with more than the normal amount of small sizes in wide widths.

Even with the problems involved in operating a pro shop in Hawaii, sales volumes seem to run from good to outstanding. And it would be hard to find a professional who would trade places with one of his colleagues in the other 49 states: Those palm trees, exotic blooms and ocean vistas can really become habit-forming.—VINCENT J. PASTENA