



EAST

by STEPHEN W. BYERS

NEW YORK—Recent changes in style and design of golf equipment have Eastern golf club professionals looking for bumper sales in '73'.

Even professionals with conservative memberships voiced great expectations on such subjects as investment casting, balls with new patterns and styles and tough new Surlyn covers, and the rising momentum in women's soft goods sales is not far from the tips of their tongues.

There are few exceptions to the general feeling among professionals that the new investment casted clubs are better for the average to high handicap player, and even professionals who don't agree are screaming that they can't keep them in stock.

One professional stressed that the new heel-to-toe weighted irons provided him with an incredible selling lever. He says, "To be able to show a member how I can tailor the weight on the clubhead to offset the affect of his hitting the ball with the heel or toe of the club has been a big advantage."

"Selling points have never been

so clear cut for me before," was the way another Mid-Atlantic professional summed up his enthusiasm for the new clubs, "but most of them are going south. I can't buy enough to really take advantage of the boom."

Some professionals attribute the cast head boom to the extensive manufacturers' advertising, which has educated the golfer better than ever before on the significance of clubhead weight distribution. One professional quips "They've almost made the phrase 'the sweet spot' a household expression."

A professional near Miami Beach feels the advertising, not only for golf clubs but for balls, has made golfers more quality conscious. He says, "Everybody seems to be going to the cast head. Members who used to buy clubs at three-year intervals now buy in two, and I sold three new sets of clubs this year to guys who just bought new clubs last year."

Many professionals are predicating their high hopes for golf ball sales on more than straight conjecture. They say they are even having good luck in

than casual about it. There apparently is no middle ground. With very few exceptions, nobody made any money on women's soft goods in 1972 and a few professionals say they took a bad beating on it. Generally, professionals who employ a woman to specialize in selling to women are quite enthusiastic about the profit potential in women's attire. But a large percentage maintain that the volume isn't there to justify hiring a woman to handle this end of the business.

More than one professional contends that women's golf attire is priced too high. Most women will pay from \$15 to \$20 for an outfit to wear while playing, but regardless of style or label, they won't go twice this high for playing apparel. At clubs where there are courts, tennis is siphoning off golf players, especially among the younger women. And, as more than one pro points out, women haven't yet forgotten the late recession. They aren't spending as freely as they did five years ago. Or, at least, they weren't in 1972.

On the men's side, doubleknits

continued on page 46

continued on page 46

WEST

wear and shoes for men, stocking blazers, sports coats and slacks for the first time.

For both street and course wear he sees men returning to a preference for solid colors, usually in shirts or slacks and sometimes in both. And he expects doubleknits to dominate the market. Because bermudas and pants are not allowed on the course, most of the women members will be buying culottes, perhaps slightly longer than the past year or two, with bright, but well-coordinated colors setting the pace.

A professional at a large inland public course expects irons to continue their strong sales performance, along with "any of the woods with wide sweet spots."

In balls he is expecting outstanding golfer interest in the new designs.

He also expects a preference for culottes among his women players, with bright colors, but closer coordination, and slightly longer hemlines. In men's wear he feels professionals are suffering from too much emphasis on "fancy tops and bottoms." Now, he predicts a return to solid colors for at least one half of the outfit.

Although he sees knits taking 90 per cent of the clothing sales, he plans to stock some cottons for the 100-degree plus summers.

At one of Northern California's resort-type courses, the professional expects the lost-wax casted clubs to attract most of the sales.

In apparel he expects the polyesters to continue to rule, with polyester-rayon blends and polyester-wool blends making new appeals. He sees no significant style changes, but a slight reversion to more conservative tastes. In other words, "Men's clothing will look more like men's clothing," he says.

He doesn't see much change in the order of the leaders in ball sales, but acknowledges the boost resulting from the new patterns, covers and construction.

Waterproof shoes account for 90 per cent of his shoe sales, and he finds little market for either men's or women's shoes in the \$50 range. Early morning dew and heavy irri-

continued on page 90

CENTRAL

haven't begun to diminish in appeal and popularity and will again carry the shop from the soft goods merchandising standpoint. Golfers who tend to be stout appreciate the wider waistband on the slacks. Another firm is bringing out a cotton and rayon slack that has great promise, and for hot, summer wear, the cotton shirt is going to be in great demand.

Generally, professionals don't foresee that their 1973 sales of men's wear will be much better than it was in 1972. Rain may have kept a lot of players off the course last year, but it didn't seriously curtail men's sales. In many cases, rainwear and umbrellas made up for discrepancies in the sales of slacks and shirts.

The big changes for 1972 are not so much in soft goods as in playing equipment. The latter is what the professionals are talking about. In many cases, their enthusiasm is restrained.

A quote concerning the new clubs from one professional reflects the tenor of many: "The idea of shifting the weight from the heel to the toe or redistributing it along the perimeter of the clubhead undoubtedly is good," he says. "So is opening up the sweet spot and, as one company is doing, reinforcing the back of the irons with a tungsten disk. We've discussed the changes among ourselves and most of us agree that the new clubhead should help the high handicap player. Some companies are also doing something about trying to counter the torque in the shaft. That's not going to hurt anyone. But we all agree that it still depends on how the player swings the club."

Continuing, this pro says, "From a sales standpoint, you have to look at it realistically. I sell X number of clubs a year, and for the 12 years I've been a head professional, my club sales have run in two-year cycles. I had a good year in 1972 and expect to have another in '73. When new club styles come out, some of my members switch brands because they want to try the new. There's no doubt they have been influenced by the advertising or what they've heard from oth-

continued on page 90

EAST

determining which brands will be the biggest sellers in '73 by sending out advanced preference request cards to be filled out by members who want personalized balls.

A majority of professionals interviewed indicated strong member preference for the new balls with the seemingly indestructible Surlyn cover. This is not to say there were no differences of opinion among pros about which ball is superior. One swears by the wound centers, another is partial to solid centers, as long as there is still enough compression to get the ball airborne quickly—and so it goes, but about one point there is unanimity: Members are not as bargain conscious in buying balls as last year. Quality is a must and cheap balls that smile after 18 holes are out. This trend, say several professionals, should carry even more weight in '73 because of heavy consumer advertising.

Culottes and doubleknits are still the big noise in the soft goods department, with little style changes evidenced, other than an ever-so-slightly lower hemline.

Colors remain relentlessly bright, manifold and daring, with color coordinated prints and checks, with red, white and blue as the preference leaders.

One professional says he has noticed a trend toward a general active sportswear look as opposed to a strict golf look. This had been exploited in the Long Island area with great success. Several astute professionals expanded their women's soft goods inventory by 50 per cent, stocking many non-golfing items, and sold store merchandise at discount prices to members. Others noticed that women were buying, in the pro shop, clothes they wear on the tennis court, such as freedom giving culottes, and were shying away from the more restrictive pants, both on the tennis court and golf course.

Another professional found he was swamped with member requests for the tic-tac-toe embroidered shirts and pants in polyester and cotton lyle.

In the South, the cotton lyle shirts

continued on page 90

WEST

from page 46

gation make the waterproofs economically practical.

The professional at one Bay Area, 36-hole complex sees soft goods and shoes as the exciting producers of increased profit in his two shops.

His stock of apparel includes street wear, even dress shirts and ties, an outgrowth of fashion consciousness among his members. However, they are showing a preference for solid colors, especially in slacks.

Shoes, which for him includes street shoes, are expected to be dominated by the square-toe styles, with leathers making a strong comeback and permanent-spiked models in good demand.

At one of the Bay Area's major municipal courses, the professional sees the popularity of the casted irons as a substantial sales booster. "Many players have become interested in the irons and when they buy, they order woods to match," he says.

In his market he must compete with at least two downtown discount operations, and he has found the interchangeable weights in one line of clubs gives him a customizing service he can advertise. He also offers several lengths and types of shafts in various flexibilities.

He mentioned one other counter item he expects to move well again in '73, the golf glove with the Velcro fastener.

At one of the smaller private clubs in the Bay Area, the professional has a more conservative attitude. In clubs, for example, he says, "I look for the big sellers in the traditional clubs to stay around; I think the exotics will lose some of their appeal."

He believes the soft goods merchandise will continue to reflect a preference for color, in both men's and women's wear.

For women, he is predicting a comeback by skirts, slightly longer than before, especially for older players. His members are confirmed in their preference for wash-and-wear golf fabrics, but, he adds, "They must be of good quality." □

CENTRAL

from page 46

er players. So, one year I sell Brand A in preference to Brand B. But I don't necessarily sell more than my X quota. As I see it, the introduction of new styles doesn't help my immediate business. Over the long run it probably does. A player who might be inclined to keep a set of clubs for three years may trade every two years because he is influenced by the manufacturers' advertising. I profit there. But pros who have been around for a few years don't get overly excited when new style clubs are introduced. They see it as something that promotes a certain amount of brand hopping. It's a kind of a battle among the clubmakers."

This professional makes it plain that he is not disavowing the changes or refinements that are made in clubs every year. Neither do the others. All recognize that manufacturers have to continue their research, continuously strive to come up with new club-making wrinkles or the whole club industry is going to stagnate. The cumulative effect of improvements over a period of several years is considerable. Even the most cynical professional doesn't want to go back to irons and woods that were being manufactured a decade ago.

The same applies to golf balls. New cores, covers, windings and, as has happened this year, larger and fewer dimples, have to be introduced or there is never going to be any improvement in the manufacture of balls. The professional may refuse to get excited by the innovations because usually from year to year they are very subtle, but once again he knows that in the long run the golf ball of this decade is far superior to the golf ball of the last.

Regardless of the degree of enthusiasm with which a professional assesses the merchandise he handles, he can be reasonably sure that if he buys from reputable manufacturers and stocks their top or near-top quality lines, he is going to have something substantial to sell to his customers. Competi-

tion among suppliers assures this.

As for 1973, there isn't a professional in the Chicago district who doesn't feel that it has all the potential for an extraordinarily good season, possibly the best that most professionals ever have experienced. Things are back to what they were five years ago, there is a lot of money afoot around the country clubs and, after last year, there should be a huge playing backlog that golfers want to get out of their systems. If the weatherman will go along, things should be about as good as any professional could hope for. □

EAST

from page 46

seem to have replaced the ever popular knits, because they are substantially cooler in 80-degree-plus temperatures. However, in the North, cotton lyle has been totally replaced by doubleknits in some pro shops. One professional says that doubleknit sales amounted to 98 per cent of his gross sales for soft goods.

There is a slight trend toward solid colors at clubs with more conservative memberships. "My members will seize any opportunity to buy toned down colors," says a Long Island professional.

Many professionals predict a record year in '73 for women's soft goods. Some have hired women buyers to do nothing but buy for women and one has expanded his shop with a trailer annex to house women's inventory. Professionals have increased women's merchandise by an average of 25 per cent over buying last year.

Waterproof shoes are big sellers in heavily irrigated regions and share popularity with stylish new rain gear, which was a top seller in northern and central Florida this year.

There is considerable weather variation from Miami Beach to Bangor, Maine, and if a professional had a bad year he is certain to be from up north where the climate can be disastrous. Professionals in the Mid-Atlantic states were not unscathed by a 15-month rain pattern, but they seem to have weathered the storm. □