

What Is the Competition Buying?

Golf industry people and golf club professionals in particular have always been curious about the buying tactics of the "downtown" competition, but this curiosity has seldom prompted them to make their investigations just before and during the buying season when "downtown" buying revelations would be the most help.

After the buying is done and during the new selling season it's too late to capitalize on many of the good buying ideas and fashion trend predictions of the career buyers for the big stores.

In an effort to give professionals a head start on their '74 buying research and to provide them with expert insight into fashion trends for '74, GOLFDOM has interviewed buyers of golf related merchandise for the big department stores and has discussed predicted fashion leaders with active sportswear experts, such as Peter Carlsen, fashion editor of *Menswear Magazine*, and other recognized industry fashion prognosticators.

GOLFDOM's research shows that this kind of information is more important to the golf professional this year than ever before in the area of soft goods, in view of the golfer's recent tendency to be unpredictable about what he wears on the golf course. In a study by *Menswear Magazine*, a fashion trade publication, on style trends in four sporting areas—tennis, jogging, cycling and golf—it was found that the fashion appetites of today's golfer were the most capricious.

The copious array of colors, which have recently infiltrated the domain of white, the formerly dominant color in tennis fashion tradition and a leading color in golf apparel, has made these sports the subject of much buyer speculation; and style preferences that are still an enigma to many department store sporting goods buyers are being thoroughly researched by these stores in the area of tennis, because of that sport's burgeoning numbers of participants.

In any field, knowledge of the competition is the first step toward beating it.

Subscribing to this belief, GOLFDOM presents a rundown on the 1974 buying tactics of the "downtown" stores

by STEPHEN W. BYERS

INTEREST DIVERSIFICATION = CHANGE IN GOLFERS' APPAREL NEEDS

The reaction of the big store buyers in specialized sporting goods departments to the golfer's recent refusal to be second guessed on his golf course wardrobe, has been to lump golf and tennis merchandise together with the emphasis on tennis. Buyers find that today's golfer is not a one sport participant, but plays tennis, hand ball, squash and other sports as well and likes to buy clothes that will be equally appropriate for his other activities besides golf.

In the sporting goods department of one of New York's leading department stores, the buyer confesses that because he has 40 tennis customers to every golf customer, he has allowed his golf stock (and will continue to do this in '74) to diminish to four dozen ladies' skirts and five dozen ladies' shirts and two dozen men's slacks. He has also discontinued carrying golf clubs and balls, a trend most stores are following.

GOLFER BECOMES ACTIVE SPORTSWEAR ENTHUSIAST

Another buyer, who has permitted a drastic depletion of golf stock in apparel and clubs, states, "This does not mean golfers are not buying soft goods, but that they are buying active sportswear instead of what has been known exclusively as golfing attire.

Also, I don't think this has happened overnight—but we are certainly feeling the effects of its peaking as a trend now. When the golfer comes to this store to buy a golf shirt, he doesn't come to my sporting goods department anymore, he goes upstairs to active sportswear where the fashion changes are better reflected."

Many soft goods buyers disagree on what trends will most affect this year's buying climate and many confessed they have not yet found time to completely formulate views on what to stock for '74, so the following buying pointers will be limited to those on which most buyers concur, although some may disagree:

GOLF APPAREL BUYING TIPS

1. Most buyers this year concur that there will be a heavy emphasis on color. Strong, primary colors, such as yellow, red, blue and white (in the predicted big-selling cardigan sweaters), will be heavily represented.
2. The traditional knit shirt with collar and button placket that was the rage of the late '50s will enjoy a resurgence and lead the trend toward classic simplicity. "They will be slightly different now with elasticized sleeves and a more fitted cut to provide freedom of movement and style at the same time," says one enthusiastic buyer.
3. Buyers are strongly committed to the natural look in fabrics with the stress on cottons and organic materials and with pants tending toward the natural madras in solid beige and oyster colors. (This, in spite of escalating costs of natural fibers.)
4. But there are still many buyers reluctant to stock only cotton for fear of alienating the older golfers who have worn and been happy with the polyester knits. Though the buyer consensus is that the younger golfer will be more interested in the comfort of the new cottons, particularly when prompted by the manifold color options in which they will be offered, most said they will stock a supply of

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PENSION PLANS from page 73

One of the most despicable acts that can be perpetrated by any employer is forcing a man to leave the job prior to retirement, thus saving the investment built up for his benefit. Another is the misuse of benefit pension funds, which results in total depletion just when retirement is imminent. These and other facets of pension reform have been placed before the Congress of the United States, through appropriate committees. It is hoped that the Pension Reform Hearings will end happily. The proposals are financially sound and are in the best interests of the over-all economy.

One straight-thinking superintendent has raised more questions about pensions than answers:

- 1) Will the program be adequately funded?
- 2) Will the funds be set aside in trust?
- 3) Will the employee be guaranteed benefits after a specified term of service?
- 4) Will early retirement be spelled out?
- 5) Can the employee contribute?
- 6) What about benefits under joint

survivorship with the superintendent's wife?

7) When occupying a house on club property, how long may the widow be allowed to remain? In some cases, the request to move has been made during the funeral.

It is encouraging that Congress is formulating plans to safeguard the pensions of millions of American workers. Too many forfeit all benefits if an individual leaves or loses his job, regardless of tenure. Most reserves are insufficient to pay promised pensions. These are shocking and deplorable conditions.

Golf clubs must wake up to the 20th century and devise practical and workable plans for their employees. Not working out some kind of plan will most likely result in pressure from outside groups, possible Federal intervention and most assuredly, national censure.

Golf course superintendents must realize that their survival depends on action. They must believe they can change the present inadequate system. □

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shirts and pants for those golfers interested in functional non-wrinkling traditional lines in the synthetics (though not as much as last year). Buyers were quick to admit that a piece of their fashion dollar will seek to appease the older golfer. "We will try not to alienate this group," says one buyer, "but they are going to have to get into the natural fiber swing sooner or later." 5. Buyers are ordering natural cotton raincoats with matching umbrellas while shying away from synthetics.

HARD GOODS COMPETITION

It would seem that the golf club professional can expect little competition from the big "downtown" stores in the area of hard goods. (As stated earlier, many stores are discontinuing hard goods altogether and those that still carry clubs and balls cannot carry the investment cast clubs because most are pro only.)

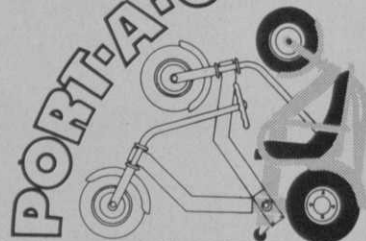
One big store is getting into graphite shafts on a custom made order basis. These big stores generally will be stocking top-of-the-line clubs and balls because they can no longer compete

with the discount stores' reduction practices on the cheaper lines.

DISCOUNT SPORTING GOODS PRACTICES GOLFDOM noted that one of New York's biggest discount sporting goods stores showed a surprising lack of feel for consumer trends in soft goods compared to the large department stores, but in hard goods they fared head and shoulders over the others. Crowds continuously milling around the golf club racks waiting for service justifies the growing concern of the golf professional about the debilitating effect discount store competition is having on his club and ball sales.

The golf professional's best weapon for combating the discount sporting goods stores is still his arsenal of services, with expert fitting of club specifications to the individual being the most important. These services were sadly lacking in the discount stores GOLFDOM visited. Those long lines at the discount club rack mentioned earlier included many clearly unhappy customers who were there to complain about misfitting. These are likely to be one time customers for the discount store grab bag sales technique. □

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