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Weekly Store Sales

Store sales reports covering the third of five retail-December weeks continue broadly on track with expectations, with projections for the full month unaltered.

Still, results over the explosive next two weeks will actually determine the health of the full holiday-shopping season. So far, there are no indications of significant new consumer caution or of unexpected exuberance--and, in the current environment, broadly on-track results are reassuring.

Relatively little color is supplied by the surveys this week. Redbook does mention some unplanned, apparently opportunistic, marking-down of winter items--though active consumer response to the lower prices suggests that no serious problems are in play.

The current, critical, pre-Christmas week has an additional shopping day relative to last year--encouraging gift-buyer procrastination--so retailers are expecting relatively dramatic sales gains. The impact on full-month forecasts of the results reported next week will be a very important early indicator of the success of the season.

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