

WHICH?

Patrick Smartt

BESET daily as we are by accounts of shows of hands, secret ballots and heated arguments, I have wondered, if such goings-on came to pass in a club, on which particular point members would concentrate?

We shall exclude annual general meetings, at which arguments are not unknown. The few who start these are not on the committee and regard the occasion as an opportunity to play Aunt Sally. The aftermath of these meetings is rather amusing and euphemistic. When the meeting has been contentious, the committee will tell you that it is a good sign: members displaying interest in their club. If all goes smoothly and the meeting is over quickly, then it shows how satisfied members are. That this last could be attributed to lethargy is never mentioned.

Looking at the many facets of a golf club, it is unlikely that more than 50 per cent would choose the same item. Let us list the main headings. The course, clubhouse amenities, catering.

Much will depend on the current captain and his priorities. Also on his committee. The most vociferous members usually find their way on to the committee in the end, and very often assume a pomposity and pseudo-knowledge that is out of all proportion to their ability. Others regard themselves as representatives of members' interests, though they cannot avoid entirely their personal inclinations.

As an old "square", I shall choose the course first. In the reasonable notion that a golf club is there for the purpose of playing golf and the ancillaries of indoor comfort and the food are of secondary importance. A view that will be hotly disputed; I remain unrepentant.

Golfers hold varying ideas about the most desirable aspect of a course. There are proud courses, and carelessly tended courses; each reflecting on the secretary and the head greenkeeper. It is probable that my estimate of 50 per cent would be wrong where greens are concerned. These are the first thing a player will complain about — particularly when he

is putting badly. Good greens are the first thing I look for when visiting other courses. Well-kept teeing-grounds — not easy — are a shop window and therefore desirable.

The biggest bones of contention — in addition to the craze for lengthening courses — will be the width of the fairways and the depth of the rough. The rough, alas, we can dispose of quickly. Overcrowding on courses in the present era means that so far as possible any delay in searching for a ball should be eliminated. That is the reason given to me for cropping the rough, leaving little advantage to the man who is down the middle. So much for that. Times change.

Friends ask me how wide a fairway should be; that is for club members, not the stars. It is a question I can answer only from the first category. I should have asked our editor. It must be governed to a certain extent on the terrain, the length and nature of the design of the hole. No one should want an uninspiring polo ground to drive into. But committees change, and with them the width of the fairways. I am no expert in these things, but the answer has been 35 to 40 yards. That does seem unduly tight to me, especially when the rough is less luxuriant than some of the younger players' hair.

I have paced a fairway as being 70 yards wide, which detracted from a semi-dog leg because the player could get on the green from anywhere. At the opposite extreme, I have paced fairways on a course over which no professional tournaments are played, and found them to be under 30 yards. Not satisfied with this, the ruling body so shaped them that there was a waist round about the 200-yard mark — the area in which we may expect the average player to finish. Beyond that they expanded again, thus giving the longer and better player more room.

No longer an active player, I cannot be accused of bias. Surely this portrays

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slopes permit oblique climbs with less effort.

Soil / Vegetation. — Type, depth: arable, grass, trees, heath, scrub, woodland.

Drainage. — =Extra cost, especially on flat sites.

Boundaries.—Roads, houses = extra safety margins.

Pools, Streams, Rivers. — Flooding? Possible use for course water supply?

Access/Clubhouse position/Services/Car park space/Practice area nearby.

Footpaths.—Much used? May attract more people when golf course is made.

Water Supply.—Minimum 3in. main desirable. Fire precautions for clubhouse.

Buildings.—Suitability for machinery, storage, staff houses.

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a lack of common sense, and no consideration for the majority of members whose subscriptions keep a club going. It is acceptable that a fairway should taper inwards as it nears the green, the striker is playing a shorter shot and, therefore, a more controllable club. But from the tee, it is the good player who should be tested, not the inept or the elderly. A consideration which not all committees keep in mind.

At this stage we should properly turn to the other items, the clubhouse and the catering. However, they are outside the province of this journal, and so the protagonists of the "gin palace" and those who prefer simplicity must be left to fight it out for themselves.

I shall conclude with a little story told by Bobby Jones, and therefore true. The right hand side of a fairway he was playing in a tournament was guarded by a field of tall wheat! He cut his drive into it. To hasten the time in looking for the ball, his caddie grounded the bag of clubs. They found the ball, and took a considerably longer time in finding the clubs.

In the days when I played, not too ineptly, straight driving was my best stroke. This came about because I learned on a tight course, and was not "state-aided" in the matter of golf balls by my father.

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