Daily fee facilities deserve level playing field

An apple fell on my head during Golf Summit '92, hosted last fall by the National Golf Foundation in Orlando. During a panel discussion on alternative facilities, Bob Barrett — director of golf at Sunbelt Golf Corp. — described how his firm has successfully financed a "multi-course golf trail" in Alabama using state pension funds.

This wasn't news to me. "Golf Course News" had already published stories on the Jones Trail, so called because all the projects were designed by Robert Trent Jones, Inc.

However, when Barrett had finished, our table was asked to discuss various aspects of the Jones Trail project. My view was unwaveringly clear: What a great idea! Alabama ranks 48th in public golf availability. Affordable greens fees prevail. The state helps fund the project with an eye on tourism dollars down the road. And local builders are put to work.

Most everyone at my table agreed — everyone, that is, except the Zimmermans, a married couple from Wisconsin who own and operate Kettle Hills Golf Course in Richfield. The Zimmermans are tired of competing with "government-funded" (read: municipal) golf facilities in the greater Milwaukee area. The Jones Trail — with its innovative albeit socialist financing mechanism — was the last straw.

"I wonder how the private daily-fee operators in Alabama feel about this project," Mr. Zimmerman, politely but with some irritation.

And you know, he has a good point. Because most of them weren't created to make money, municipal courses are often subsidized by city budgets — and they don't pay property taxes. The result? Artificially microscopic greens fees.

Mr. Zimmerman's argument was driven home at Public Golf '92, a conference sponsored by "Golf Course News" in November. Private operators of daily fee golf courses agreed with Mr. Zimmerman: They simply cannot charge municipal-level greens fees and turn a profit.

There's another problem here, totally unrelated to the golf course industry. The Reagan-Bush years saw a sizable decrease in federal funding of mandated programs, including, in turn, passed on these cuts to municipalities.

Federal education funds, for example, are at an all-time low.

Perhaps we can kill a few birds with one measly stone. Cities and towns are beginning to realize their golf courses can be money-makers. If dressed up a bit, these facilities could charge more for greens fees, and thus augment municipal budgets. Maybe the golf profits could be earmarked for something specific, like schools or trash pickup.

Among other things, Public Golf '92 taught us that, when it comes to renovations and/or start-up developments, municipalities currently have multiple finance options.

If municipal courses raise their greens fees and offer commensurate value, isn't everyone better served? The private daily-fee operator gets fair competition. Municipal governments can sustain needed programs. While the taxpayer/golfer pays more for municipal golf, he or she also gets a better municipal facility.

Private daily-fee operators don't want municipal facilities to close their doors. They just want to compete on a level playing field.

With added ingenuity, cities and towns can make the competition more fair, and some of their own problems could be solved at the same time.

From the State-of-the-Game prologue by Rick Norton to a dynamic presentation on television and radio to market your golf course by National Golf Course Owners Association President Vince Alfonso Jr., many lessons were taught at Public Golf '92. "Golf Course News' first conference on the profitability of public golf was jam-packed with helpful information from some masters of the industry. Information and suggestions were many and varied. My favorite came from Steve Lesnik, president of Kemper/Lesnik. "Preserving the condition of the golf course is managing for profit. Otherwise, it's like selling a soiled basement," Lesnik said.

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Public Golf '92 was chock full of lessons for learning

Letters

MORE SHAPERS OF NOTE

To the editor:

I enjoyed reading "The shape of things to come" by Mark Leslie. A good shaper is invaluable, as it is their work that makes the difference between an average course and a good or great one.

All the shapers mentioned are exceptional and deserving of the accolades, but I believe you missed two. Their names are Harold Dulin and Bill Grisham.

Harold started shaping in 1945 with Perry Maxwell and continued on with Press after Perry's death. Bill, who works for Harold, started somewhere around 1955 and is still working.

It would be hard to list all the courses they worked on, I doubt if they even remember, but here are a few where they left their mark.

Cherry Hills C.C. (Denver), Hiwan (Evergreen, CO)

Prairie Dunes (Hutchinson, KS), Pecan Valley (San Antonio)

Kissing Camels (Colorado Springs), Fairfield Bay (Clinton, AR)

(Some of this work is remodeled as well as original construction) Both men live south of Spring-
Former GCSAA president speaks out on proposed bylaw changes

There was some thought, on my part, to just let the new bylaws slide by without expressing my opinion. However, after hearing from a number of my friends from around the country, I have decided to express my thoughts on this matter.

As many of you know, during my presidency of the Georgia Course Superintendents Association of America, proposed bylaws were brought to the membership and were overridden. This could well be the case again this month. The membership should question any and all changes, especially changes that are announced in Golf Course Management magazine, which seems to be very one-sided.

Do you really believe they (staff or the board of directors) could not find at least one member who would question these proposed bylaws? Those of you who read the article in this magazine understand how they have tried to mesmerize us.

If the association is able to put out information that will do this, then one wonders what our voice will be in the future. A number of times Bob Williams— the enterprising president of the GCSAA in the late 1950s— has said to me, "Is this the tail wagging the dog?"

During my term as president, we tried to change the bylaws to give the board the power to set the fee for dues. That bylaw proposal was defeated, with only a small percentage of delegates in favor of the change. The bylaw change did not occur, and probably was for the better.

Even if you trust people running the association at present, what about future directors? The more power you give a governing body, the less power we have in our own hands. We support the association with our dues, which is only a small percentage of our budget. Must we realize this already.

The golf courses with the most purchasing power are the main support of the association. Just think of that statement for a moment. We, the superintendents of these golf courses, are the ones the association needs to make the whole organization work. We need to come together to tell our delegates and explain their futuristic ideas. Then give the delegates the opportunity to give their ideas in return. This might be the key to accountability. Will you know what is going on with your one vote? NOT! Just maybe the next statement will be, "Read my lips— no more increases in dues."

The one vote is another issue. We have that one vote in our local chapters. This, you might say, is our electoral college. The chapter delegates are typically your most interested people in your local chapter, usually responsible and dedicated. Have they failed us in the past? My opinion is, they have done a fine job.

Are they telling us that the directors on the board are incompetent? Some of us might question the directors' thinking, but we also realize they are doing a good job. Remember, they are part-time administrators. The delegate method of voting has worked in the past and probably would continue to work in the future.

Since the fiber of our association again I repeat, "Our Association"— is the camaraderie that has developed between delegates. This is what makes an association something you want to be a member of, now and hopefully in the future.

The GCSAA Golf Tournament is another good example of "association fiber." Reflect back and remember the conferences that the membership involved with. I remember the only ones that you had the best time at, and enjoyed the most. The hospitality rooms are also another piece of fiber. Will all this be eliminated by the new election process? These fibers are all part of the "association fabric" that we currently enjoy.

It is important, we all know that keep the two-thirds vote to amend the bylaws, and let directors do their job selling their ideas to the membership, instead of mandating them.

The delegates should start meeting at the conference to discuss the future of the association and make suggestions in the form of motions to the GCSAA board. This was done in the past, and should be considered again. The Past Presidents Council (that was started by Bob Williams and others as an advisory group) was recently dissolved by the board of directors. The council still exists but meets merely as a social group. The delegates and the Past Presidents Council should also be included in the decision-making process.

Remember: Bill Roberts said, "Any feat of decision-making being concentrated in the hands of too few is unfeudal. The membership retains final authority over direction of association affairs through the election process."

In your dreams!!!

The purpose for which the association was formed was "to provide for and promote the recognition of the golf course superintendent as a professional." As professionals, we need to take a close look at the proposed bylaws, make a considered decision, and then proceed with caution.

In spite of some difficult problems over the years, the association has had many accomplishments. If you would like to discuss any of this, give me a call at (708) 358-7030 and let's talk. Otherwise, see you all in Anaheim.

Mike Barrier, CGCS, is head superintendent at Inverness Club, Palatine, Ill. He is past president of the GCSAA. The following columns have been reprinted with permission of the author. It originally appeared in Heart of America newsletter.

Letters

ANOTHER BYLAW OPINION

Editor's note: The following letter has been reprinted with permission from the author. It originally appeared in Through the Green, published by the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association.

To the editor:

I recently wrote to President Roberts and requested a copy of the by-law changes to be presented at Anaheim or a copy of the by-law changes put to a vote by the members. In both instances I did not receive either document, but did receive a "Future Directions" pamphlet. As I review the pamphlet, I have further questions.

On the vote of members. The changes would only take away Delegate Vote, but also Proxy Vote. If most people vote by mail there would be no chance for discussing the issues as we now have at the GCSAA. That is the tail wagging the dog?

On classification — If changed, not only will the Board set new classifications, but will have the right to add requirements for entrance and changes that were needed can't be communicated well enough to get two-thirds of the members to know it is a better way, then it might not be the right way. I feel some changes in classification of memberships are needed and necessary, but should come through the approval of present members.

On the election of directors. The Nominating and Election Committee — Who knows what the procedure will be? Usually if a change is proposed, the new way of doing things is presented for inspection and review, not just doing away with the old.

On the Field Staffing Program — I continue to believe a trial period is better than an all new program, especially when, according to the pamphlet, this Field Staffing Program will require a $40 to $50 PER YEAR dues increase. No wonder the Board wants the right to set dues. Wouldn't it be nice if we superintendents could develop our budget and then tell the members of the club what their dues will be for the year?

• And about the subject of cost — Why pay $7 for a copy of Conference Proceedings and $20 for an Employee Manual? What has happened to SERVICE to the members.

As a member of Naeunique I see the headquarters building is being expanded. Less than a year ago at the dedication, we were told the new building would be good for four to five years. It seems like a tremendous cost to the Association and what is the status of the old H.Q. building? What success would a field staff person have at getting new members at a dues figure of $350 to $400 per year and increasing at a $50 to $50 per rate per year?

As I urge all GCSAA members, I say again — Ask any question, study the announcement, and talk with your directors on the subject. Keep the two-thirds vote to amend the bylaws, and let the directors do their job selling their ideas to the membership, instead of mandating them.

1. Voting Procedures

I am personally opposed to this change. I am counter opposed to the bylaw proposals that set membership requirements in the GCSAA Golf Tournament. The proposal was defeated, with only a small percentage of members participating. A one-person, one-vote system would almost certainly see that number diminish significantly.

2. Dues Approval Procedures

I am undecided on this issue. It does occur to me that I cannot recall a time when a proposed dues increase was voted down. In the past, the Board of Directors has done a very good job of justifying their proposals for dues increases, and I think the membership has responded by following the Board's direction in approving increases. One area that I would be concerned about is giving the Board the ability to increase dues is that we could suddenly see our dues increased to cover the cost of "special projects."

One bone of contention that I, and apparently many others, have is that the headquarters building, which supposedly was built to serve our associations needs well into the future has already been expanded. This is not a slant, my memory was kept very low key and the justification for it also escaped me. I would be concerned about these types of projects becoming a normal occurrence if we had a Board of Directors that felt free to fund projects by increasing dues.

3. Authority to Set Membership Requirements

I will not argue that there are probable changes that need to be made in both membership requirements and classification. However, I would like to see a program for these changes proposed by the Board of Directors for approval by the membership.

I am not against the idea of opening the association to other individuals, but I don't want to see the makeup of our association's identity. We are the Golf Course Superintendent's Association of America, not the golf course mechanic's, golf course spray technician's, or golf course equipment or chemical supplier's association of America.

4. Change in Votes Required for By-Law Changes

Of all the proposed changes this is the one that I can unequivocally say that I oppose. I do not believe that it serves the best interest of the membership to change the present two-thirds requirement in voting to a simple majority. This, particularly in conjunction with the proposed changes in voting procedures, would put the future of the association in relatively few hands.

Our by-laws are, in effect, the constitution of this organization. I believe that if it has served us well for over 60 years then it is meritor to the idea that a simple majority should not change that for the sake of expediency.

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EXPANDING ON FREAM’S COMMENT

To the editor:

I read with interest the commentary by Ronald Fream on the state of European golf development (November, 1992). I agree with Mr. Fream’s conclusions and too have experienced first-hand the follies of developers both in Europe and in Asia. However, I would like to expand on his comments. Mr. Fream politely declined to point out that many projects are conceived by ego-driven individuals hell bent on creating a monument to themselves. These projects are often times perpetuated by the expert golf architects and golf consultants from the U.S. The naive don’t hold the monopoly. As mentioned by Mr. Fream, projects are created and controlled often times by someone who totally ignores the economic realities of the project. They enter a fantasy world that borders on lunacy. What is common among many golf consultants, project managers, and architects is a lack of concern at the time to do anything about it. After all, the money flows in projects like these. The famous phrase “we have found the enemy and it is us” should be relevant in retrospect.

The immediate future of European and Asian golf development is dependent on building more low end daily fee projects. Architects and consultants need to steer clear of the “monuments of ignorance” of tomorrow. We need to recognize that in the U.S. standard projects are not many golfs on the European or Asian continent. There are just too expensive public golf facilities available elsewhere in the world. Because there are so few, there is a very weak “feeder system” of experienced golfers willing to upgrade into higher quality public facilities and private clubs. Upscale markets don’t exist in many areas.

Unfortunately, land costs remain an obstacle, but the development of lower end daily fee facilities is very difficult to achieve an acceptable return on projects of this caliber. The primary concern of many are to make a profit. There is a current debate going on in the Uruguay round of the GATT talks (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) concerning farm subsidies. Basically the problem is the amount of land in production— principally in France and Germany —are due to their respective governments price supports of this industry. Farming is a lucrative business for the French and German farmers. The price supports given Europe allow these farmers to produce more production which in turn lowers world prices. This hurts U.S. farmers. The U.S. has recently threatened the European retaliations if the European community does not reduce these subsidies (i.e., 20% tariffs on white wine, et al.). These threats have moved the discussion along and at this writing it appears that a compromise is likely. European farmers and community leaders are aware and under- stably will not accede without a fight. Our opportunity as golf architects and consultants would be to prove the value and economic justification for maintaining an alternative use of farm land. Cognitive arguments exist when the benefits to a community are outlined in terms of the economic contributions that a golf course will bring. Factor in the offsetting costs of reduced or removed farm subsidies and all of sudden there could be a reasonable expectation by state or municipal officials that a golf course is a common person at affordable prices makes sense.

Promotion and awareness will be the key to success in this area. We have a lot of work to do. Presently, the follies of the aforementioned golems around the world have hurt our overall chances for growth. A course official who has tried to deal with growing grass on lousy profiles. The golf course pays big bucks to get itself out of the mess, golfers are frustrated, superintendents are frustrated, and too often the superintendent pays his job.

Bylaw changes? If it ain’t broke...

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5. Field Staffing

I must admit that I am somewhat at a loss as to the justification for implementing this bylaw. While I realize that there are many individuals maintaining golf courses in the United States who have not been members of our association, I would not consider the majority of these people golf course superintendents. The idea that these field staff personnel could be partially funded by the recruiting of new members seems to be a very flippant proposition at best. Additionally, I am more concerned the superintendents, members in our association than I am with increasing our membership and dues base.

The setting up of seminars, workshops, conferences, training seminars and speaking engagements around the country already has been accomplished through the efforts of local chapters and our existing GCSAA staff. I don’t see how a field staff person will significantly add to the already excellent programs available to our members.

In conclusion, I do not doubt for one second that the proposals as they are in the hands of the Board of Directors of GCSAA, in golf facility would bring. Factor in the offsetting costs of reduced or removed farm subsidies and all of sudden there could be a reasonable expectation by state or municipal officials that a golf course is a common person at affordable prices makes sense.

Promotion and awareness will be the key to success in this area. We have a lot of work to do. Presently, the follies of the aforementioned golems around the world have hurt our overall chances for growth. A course construction will affect the long-term maintenance of the turf on their courses.

This is absolutely in the realm of Green Section expertise. Based upon the tremendous favorable response we received about the TRACS program, it seems that superintendents and course officials agree.

However, to reach more people than could possibly be reached with a TRACS program, we have decided to write an expanded version of Building Golf Holes for Good Turf Management. It will be our intention to use this purpose in-tend to help golf courses enjoy the best possible turf for the dollars they spend on construction.

Many golf course architects and builders are dedicated to doing their best for their clients. We would welcome their input, including their comments on how we could better our manual of tips for construction success.

James T. Snow National President United States Golf Association Green Section

THREE CHEERS FOR HURDZAN

To the editor:

Three cheers for Michael Hurdzan taking a direct stand on the U.S.G.A. and the TRACS program.

The key elements golf superintendents and green committees miss when they deal with the U.S.G.A. are:

1. The expense and exposure of accepting the “trenches” knowledge mentioned by Hurdzan is non-existent.

2. The U.S.G.A. is simply a money-raising group that attracts donations from a naive American public.

The victims are the young inexperienced superintendent who is risking a career by listening to unproven opinion.

I might be going out on a limb, but I feel that the junior golf members who have gone through some of these installations, have much more of a grasp on green construction methods and the upkeep of those greens than the U.S.G.A.

What the U.S.G.A. wants the public to believe is that qualified design and construction techniques are non-existent. What they should really do before they embarrass themselves any further is check upon the tremendous favorable response we received about the TRACS program, it seems that superintendents and course officials agree.

However, to reach more people than could possibly be reached with a TRACS program, we have decided to write an expanded version of Building Golf Holes for Good Turf Management. It will be our intention to use this purpose in-tend to help golf courses enjoy the best possible turf for the dollars they spend on construction.

Many golf course architects and builders are dedicated to doing their best for their clients. We would welcome their input, including their comments on how we could better our manual of tips for construction success.

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Bylaw changes? If it ain’t broke...