Leslie study, not exactly scientific, refutes 'Golf-is-sinking' mentality

Can I make a case here? While the folks at Forbes magazine and the National Golf Foundation duke it out (opposite page), I did a little microcosmic study of my high school classmates and unearthed a startling fact. If replicated countrywide, this fact would send investors and entrepreneurs scurrying to dump their dough into golf projects. A whopping 40 percent of the men in my Class of 1966 are golfers. That is, when asked about their "hobbies and interests," they independently wrote down "golf.

That was with no arm-twisting from me or old golfing bud Barry Hobart. No one was whispering in their ears, offering free subscriptions to Golf Course News or discounts rounds of golf at Sugarloaf. No one urged them on with Johnny Carson-like chip-shot swings.

I realize this is anecdotal evidence, but 40 percent is twice as many as the NGF reports in its latest participation survey of males aged 40-49. An anomaly? Perhaps. But the figure could be higher, still, than 40 percent, because many of the jocks in my class did not respond to the survey.

I called my old pal Jeff Waring, now a stockbroker in Bangor, Maine, and asked about this. Jeff actually attended Williams College and Academy his last three years, but he was our sumertime buddy and our class claimed him as ours (something like Chappaquiddick claiming Teddy Kennedy). Anyhow, Jeff explained: "Our class was different from other classes. Most of the athletes were in the top academic division and were active in everything. Usually a lot of athletes came from the lower division. That same group is playing golf. Also, a lot of them are professional people and they, as a whole, are the ones playing golf.

Jeff's explanation would, indeed, belie my findings as having less clout that I thought. But Jeff, I think, is like a lot of guys my age. He quit golf for a number of years — through college and his early work years — then took it up when he reached his 40s. When did he resume the game? "When my father gave me some lessons last August and he liked it."

Listen, my research may be anecdotal. But if nothing else, Mr.

The well-known Grand Army pun, each honorably ancient, were born at the Turn. In the old days, beyond recall, the halfway house was always located there, not because it happened to be the geographical center of the course, but because it was without a doubt the best place to dispense stimulants, for at the ninth-and-a-half hole, then took it up when he reached his 40s. When did he resume the game? "When my father gave me some lessons last August and he liked it."

Listen, my research may be anecdotal. But if nothing else, Mr.

Tillie study, not exactly scientific, refutes "Golf-is-sinking" mentality.
Phillips comment

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And lest we forget the marketing and plain o’ cultural clout wielded by noted golfaholic Michael Jordan, whose shoe manufacturer has taken to Tiger Woods in a big way (I wonder when he’ll sign his first “design” deal). Many credit Woods with golf’s emerging popularity with “the kids.” However, at this stage of the game, only the golf community hails Tiger as the greatest thing since sliced bread. The public-at-large, and more specifically, the minorities over whom Woods is supposed to hold sway, haven’t had time to be impressed. I believe Tiger’s impact won’t be felt for some time.

It’s Nike’s influence that is becoming more evident every day. Where Nike goes, so go the fashion lemmings: Golf lines have already been introduced by Armani, Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren, and Italian designer Mossimo Giannulli plans to come out with a golf accessory line. Of course, Woods will have his own line of clothing (stripes, perhaps?).

More substantively, golf appears to have made real headway with its elitist image. Public-access golf has carried the day in development circles for some time. Seventy percent of the nation’s golf facilities are now open to the public, and nine of every 10 courses under construction can make the same claim.

The icing on the cake is the recent announcement from the U.S. Golf Association that the 2002 U.S. Open will be held at Bethpage State Park on Long Island, marking the first time the championship will be held at a publicly owned course in the century-long history of the event (see story page 3).

Healthy signs, all.

Now, if we can only get the NBC affiliate here in Portland, Maine, to stop blacking out the U.S. Amateur to show “Cannonball Run II” or “Francis the Talking Mule”...

NGF to Forbes

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and and cashed out. Frequently those sellers go on to build another course in another location.

The Prospects for Growth

Anyone knowledgeable about the golf business comes away from reading your article wondering how (and why) you could paint such an unrealistically negative picture of the current state of, and future prospects for, the game and business of golf.

Consider the fact that as golfers get older they tend to play more and spend more ... significantly more. The first baby boomer golfers turned 50 this year. They represent the leading edge of an 18-year-long population bubble that will swell the ranks of over 50-year-old golfers. This demographic trend will undoubtedly create a rising tide for golf. And what about after that?

These 78 million baby boomers had 72 million children who, as the last of their parents pass 50, will be passing through their 20s and 30s, which our research shows are the prime years during which most people take up golf. Again, a demographic trend with very positive implications for the golf industry.

Golf, already very accessible, is becoming even more so. At present, 70 percent of America’s 15,000-plus golf courses are open to the public... and these numbers are growing.

Almost 90 percent of all new facilities being built today are accessible to any and all golfers. Add to this the progress that has been made by the golf industry in creating a more open environment in the game for women, minorities and those with physical disabilities, as well as the great number of golf learning and family centers that have opened in recent years, and the elements are in place to facilitate the entry into the game of many, many new participants in the years ahead.

In closing, and on behalf of all those who have been equally disturbed by the distorted picture painted by your article, let me say that, in the future, I sincerely hope that anyone at Forbes doing a story on the business of golf will take the time to obtain all the facts and thereby present a better informed view of golf’s overall health and growth potential.

Sincerely, Joe Beditz