

Golf short-changed in U.K. sports funding

Less than 1 percent of Lotto pot goes to golf

By TREVOR LEDGER

MARKET DRAYTON, Shropshire, England — The United Kingdom National Lottery was designed to benefit "worth causes" in the fields of the arts,

sport and national heritage. In the three years since it's inception, however, the lottery has paid out a mere 4.4 million pounds to golf projects of all descriptions across the entire nation — a figure split among 30 applicants.

Golf awards so far have amounted to less than 0.7 of one

percent of the total sports grants awarded to date. Compare this with netball — 1.4 percent, rowing — 2.13 percent, gymnastics — 1.55 percent.

While 4.4 million pounds is not to be sneezed at, the fuller picture is at least confusing, if not downright disturbing for the game of golf.

Since golf is the second largest participatory sport in the country, it would stand to reason that that golf should be at least in the top half of the awards table.

The medical opinion of golf is encouraging. It offers good, low impact exercise which is suitable for all but the seriously infirm. As already stated, the sport is astonishingly popular with demand for golf courses outstrip-



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ping supply steadily. So where is the problem?

One of the lucky 30 who managed to extract money from the Lottery is the Horsehay Village Golf Complex. The very ethos of this centre is to promote Golf to all of society and maybe this is the crucial factor.

Faye Westrop of the Sports Council Lottery Helpdesk confirms that to attract Lottery Funding a project must, "... be open to everybody and actively encourage increased participation in the sport."

Given that Golf is a booming industry in the U.K., it would be a poor project indeed that failed to increase participation. However the crux of the matter lies elsewhere, the motives of the project proposer. In order to qualify for funding the project must be non-profit making. Therefore the likes of Horsehay Village are at least in the running for a lottery grant due to the fact that they are public courses designed as a civic amenity rather than as an exclusive club.

This would appear therefore to be yet another very good reason for an expansion of public golf course construction in Britain. Provided that they are of a "high standard," which is another of the criteria explained by Faye Westrop. On the face of it this is great news for the growing band of newcomers to golf—good, affordable golf courses funded by a body dedicated to "Sport for All", the Sports Council. Yet it hasn't happened.

It is possible that the extremely complex application process has been responsible for some failures of funding but this is unlikely given the Local Authority Structure which thrives on paperwork etiquette. The only possible answer then must be that Local Authorities are simply not applying for funding.

A spokesman from the British Institute of Golf Course Architects (BIGCA) confirms and explains this curious inactivity. "In order to qualify for Sports Council funding, the project must come up with at least 35 percent of the capital required." This appears to be a major stumbling block for hard pressed local authorities who are cutting back on essential services and will

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Hurdzan on builders

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No architect would disagree with me when I say that a great builder can make your work look outstandingly good, and a poor contractor can butcher the greatest design in the world. Some builders have taken bad golf course plans and made enough field adjustments to fashion a good golf course, only to have the designer get all the credit.

These are good times for golf course builders, for many courses are being built. However, not so long ago when the country was facing high inflation, the interest rates and rising wages made it difficult to make a profit, or even stay in business. This affected every golfer who appreciates a fine golf course. Each time we lost one of these artisans, the evolution of course design was set back for we lost the subtleties of interpretation so necessary to produce a great golf course.



An analogy would be if a gifted composer wrote an imaginative and inspired piece of music, but if the only musicians around to play it were a street corner band, you can imagine the result. This is humorous perhaps, but the same results might be expected if you gave a terrific golf course plan to a road builder.

Thank goodness our country's economy has improved and golf course building is at an all-time high rate. Now the problem is trying to find contractors or train crews in the subtleties of course construction. Provided the industry is successful, which it seems to be, the best golf courses ever are yet to come. Better designs and better construction, supported by better maintenance, guarantee great golf.

Now, I am not so naive as to think that human nature will change and we will acknowledge all of our unsung heroes. But next time you are impressed by a great golf course, don't just think of the designer. Remember the golf course builder.

UK lottery

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struggle to justify expenditure on golf course construction.

Once more, the perceived image of golf is causing problems. "Golf has the wrong image, it is seen as being exclusive, elitist and discriminatory. If we are to provide for a wider base of golfers we must overcome this," said the BIGCA spokesperson.

Another way forward is for existing private clubs to open its doors to the general

public on a pay as you play basis with no discrimination against non-members.

Prime Minister Tony Blair made clear before the general election in May that he wanted the lottery to be run in the spirit of public good.

If golf is able to evolve into a truly "people's game" then convergence with the Lottery Funds would be all the more likely. At the moment, however, an awful lot of people would like the opportunity to play golf but the funds are not forthcoming to allow them to do so.

MacCurrach honored

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GCSAA Foundation, is open to undergraduate turf students. Each applicant is judged on academic excellence, appropriate career preparation and potential to make an outstanding professional contribution. Applications are distributed in December and January to all colleges and universities that offer degrees in turfgrass management. Applications are also available on the GCSAA Web site (www.gcsaa.org). The application deadline is June 1, with the judging process to be completed by July 15.

Internationally recognized for his expertise in the turf management field, MacCurrach began his career as golf course superintendent at Valley Coun-

try Club in Warwick, R.I., in 1962. In 1972, he became the 45th person to receive the title of Certified Golf Course Superintendent from the GCSAA. MacCurrach became the PGA Tour's first agronomist in 1974, then was named senior agronomist in 1988. In 1994, he received the GCSAA's Distinguished Service Award.

"Allan's contributions to the PGA Tour specifically, and the turfgrass industry in general, were invaluable," PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem said. "As senior agronomist, he played a leading role in establishing the standard of excellence for course conditioning at Tour events. The scholarship is an appropriate way of honoring Allan's years of dedication to the PGA Tour and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America."

Mastroleo wins Distinguished Service

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manage Fox Hills Golf Course in 1959. Eleven years later, he became superintendent at Hillcrest Country Club, where he has been for nearly 30 years.

"Dave Mastroleo is the epitome of what golf course superintendents are all about," said Bruce R. Williams, certified golf course superintendent at Los Angeles Country Club and GCSAA immediate past president. "He has spent a long career giving and sharing while asking for nothing in return. Dave is a shining example of the spirit of volunteerism, with over 40 years of contributing his time and talents to various GCSAA chapters and allied turfgrass organizations."

Mastroleo has been a GCSAA member since 1954, and is a member and past director and president of both the California Golf Course Superintendents Association (GCSA) and the GCSA of Southern California. He also is past president of the California Turfgrass Council.

"As a mentor, Dave has a long list of successful superintendents who benefited from this tutelage. The respect that those former trainees have for Dave is immeasurable, and many of them pinpoint Dave Mastroleo as the primary factor for their success," Williams said.

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Fream: Golf in Asia

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five return on investment.

Since it takes two years or longer to plan, build and open a golf course, having inventory on stream as the local economy revives and pent-up economic demand expands, puts upward pressure on membership and greens-fee prices.

Daily-fee courses can manage current situations by greens fee adjustments and smart marketing of existing facilities. As player demand expands again, and it surely will, daily-fee operators or semi-private clubs with excess capacity, can attract new players. As demand increases again, there will be upward pressure on greens fees. For the in-place existing operator, this pressure of increased play and higher greens fees will clearly add to the profit margin. Membership values will increase as player demand increases.

Tourism golf will be a beneficiary as the various Asian economies recover. Tourism is here to stay. It is the single largest industry in the world. A couple of years of staying "home for the holiday" will surely rekindle the desire to play elsewhere when the confidence in the income stream and local economy has returned.

Existing resort courses or those now in construction that are open as the tourist demand returns, will benefit.

Since Southeast Asia has many of the world's most attractive seaside-sunshine

locations, tourist arrivals from elsewhere, primarily North America and Europe, will see business now and in the future. There are some bargains at hand where recent currency devaluations have made local prices more attractive. Smartly managed tourist resort courses can see direct benefit from increased international tourist travel.

Regional tourism will also benefit as Japan finally gets their economy back in equilibrium. Traveling Japanese golfers, because they cannot afford to play golf at home, constitute a considerable percentage of the 15 million or so Japanese players and the approximately 5,000 driving ranges that continue to produce more players. In the future, the Japanese golfer will be even more important. Cost factors, politics and environmental issues will prevent Japan from ever again building huge numbers of courses as happened in the 1980's. This means ever more Japanese will be seeking out other locations to play their golf. Korea, Guam, Saipan and the Philippines can be the earliest beneficiaries. China also can accommodate the Japanese golfer conveniently.

The Chinese are observers, not avid participants in the current Chinese golf market. Expatriate and speculative buyers drove much of the recent Chinese market demand. A large number of new courses across China is unlikely due to limited land availability, water availability problems, population pressures and

other economic and political concerns. Chinese travelers will increase in number geometrically in the coming years. Golfers will be among those travelers.

Existing and new courses around the Pacific Basin will benefit from the Japanese and Chinese tourist golfer. Korea and Taiwan can benefit most easily. The Philippines can certainly gain tourism golf visitors from China, Japan, Korea and elsewhere. More tourist quality destinations for eager golfers must be provided, however.

Those who can develop new courses in China in the next few years will clearly benefit, so long as the site selected for the new course is a solid one in a good location with adequate market analysis and with experienced planning and design. Excessive development costs are the last thing a smart golf developer will want. The correct location is vital. Mediocre design and construction results will not be financially successful.

It has become apparent in viewing the overall Asian golf market for more than 25 years, that these recent and ongoing economic readjustments will have considerable benefit, in spite of near-term hardship. The desire to play golf will overcome financial concerns.

Overbuilding of courses using ill-sited locations, grandiose design schemes and

eccentric clubhouse goals, will cause bankruptcy and distress for some. Overly expensive courses built more at the whim and ego of a signature player, or optimistic owner, rather than clearly focused on financial reality, will decline.

If future golf courses are master planned and designed in logical locations, with a clear understanding of the specific market target, with reasonable construction costs, with modest, yet comfortable, functional clubhouse facilities, golf

can be offered that will accommodate the vast majority of present and future players.

It must be recognized that Asia is diverse in very many ways. The effects of the current economic turmoil will impact each country differently while the timing of the impact, the duration of the downturn as well as the severity, will vary and may rotate. The emergence from adjustment and correction actions will surely vary. Politics and strength of conviction on the part of the various national leaders will have direct bearing on the timing and rate of recovery.

The ongoing dip in golf play and golf development activity will be viewed in the new millennium as but a pothole in an otherwise profitable and expanding industry. There will be more than 60 million golfers around the world by 2001. That is a major market to target.

