PGATTA selects board members

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — The PGA TOUR Tournaments Association (PGATTA) recently elected new officers. Formerly known as American Golf Sponsors, PGATTA is an organization for all PGA TOUR tournaments, with tournament directors the primary members.

Elected to two-year terms were Dwight Drinkard, FedEx St. Jude Classic as president; Peter Callahan, Phoenix Open as incoming vice president; and Tony Piazzi, LaCantera Texas Open as secretary/treasurer. Assuming board positions are Ms. Johnnie Bender, Michelob Championship at Kingsmill; Bill Paul, Bell Canadian Open; Kym Hougham, Quail City Classic; Tom Strong, Greater Milwaukee Open; Lou Russo, ATT Pebble Beach National Pro-Am; and Jim Wiser, The Memorial; Immediate Past President Tommy Wulff, Freeport-McDermott Classic.

Assumption of risk

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The court agreed with the plaintiff, determining the operator owed a duty of care to the plaintiff in the design and maintenance of its golf course and should have removed the tree. (One wonders how the court would have ruled had the golf ball hit a branch of the diseased tree, causing it to fall on the plaintiff.) In its ruling, the appellate court differentiated between the duty of a golfer, which is to not intentionally injure another player or engage in reckless conduct totally outside the range of the ordinary activity involved in golf, and the duty of a golf course operator. The court found that the operator must provide a reasonably safe course, and minimize the risk that players will be hit by golf balls, for example, by the way the various tees, fairways and greens are aligned or separated.

Fortunately, such judgments against operators are rare. The courts usually hold that liability for unintended accidents must be eliminated to ensure that the fervor of athletic competition will not be chilled by the constant threat of litigation.

We see this doctrine applied in a 1996 superior court decision involving a rock-climbing accident in which the plaintiff’s husband was killed during a rock-climbing class. The complaint alleged that the decedent’s fall was the result of the instructor’s negligence in placing four rope anchors into a single-crack system resulting in the release of the climbing rope holding him. The court found that “inherent in the sport of rock climbing is the fact a fall can occur at any time, regardless of the negligence of one’s co-participants.”

As the law in California stands, co-participants in sporting activities — golfers, for example — are largely found not to be liable for causing sporting accidents, even if the golfer does not yell “fore,” unless their conduct was reckless or intentional. In the operator or instructor-student setting, liability is generally not found unless the instructor acts recklessly or with intent to injure, or in controlling the sporting “playing field,” the operator or instructor fails to provide a “safe environment.” It is important to remember, however, that when the risk causing the accident is not inherent in the particular sports activity, the chance of operator liability increases.

Cobblestone

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Cobblestone Golf Group, Inc. and Cobblestone Holdings, Inc. recently extended their tender offers for all of the outstanding 11.5-percent Senior Notes due 2003 of Cobblestone Golf Group, Inc. and all outstanding 13.5-percent Senior Zero-Coupon Notes due 2004 of Cobblestone Holdings, Inc. until 5 p.m., New York City time, on March 6. The tender offers were being extended to coincide with the expected consummation of the merger with Meditrust.

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