

# LICENSING

## Will It Help or Hinder the Pro?

There is a movement among Florida pros — complete with a lobbyist and a bill introduced in the state legislature — that could have a great effect on the hiring of pros in that state and possibly across the country.

The issue is licensing of pros by the state. Simply, it would require every golf course to hire only licensed pros. Licensing would be handled by a state board that tested the pros. A bill was introduced in the legislature earlier this year and is now in committee. Pros advocating the bill say it will protect the golfer and the qualified pro, solidify the Professional Golfers' Association and provide licensing similar to that of lawyers and doctors.

Licensing opponents say the program would be more akin to that of barbers and truck drivers, that it would create another unneeded state agency that would muddle in the affairs of the pro, and that any program of this nature would undermine the PGA. At the moment, the national PGA has a guarded opinion of the plan. And an interesting

footnote is that even the Teamsters have taken an interest in the Florida pros.

"It is not really a new idea," according to Dave Hull, 43-year-old pro at Naval Station Mayport Golf Club in Florida. "Most recently in this state though I guess it is mostly my brainchild. The idea is for a professional license, not an occupational license, to provide for the state something similar to the American Medical Association or the American Bar Association. The idea behind it is to protect the health, safety and welfare of the golfing public."

Hull feels licensing would put a measure of control back into the hands of the pro. He said in Florida there are many instances where a pro at many courses may be intelligent and a good golfer, yet for the consumer, he is just not qualified. This type of "pro" might improperly manage the program at his course, not be able to manage tournaments that are so important to a club, and might not know when to do things like close a course during inclement weather.

"This type of situation devalues the course, and if it is a development, it devalues the investment the

people has in it," Hull said. He said licensing would mean that all clubs would almost have to come to the PGA for prospective licensed pros when they were shopping around to hire. He said last year 23 clubs opened in Florida and only two came to the PGA for resumes.

"This would not be the prime purpose, but licensing would also require certification of PGA pros from outside the state when they came to take a job in Florida," he said. "The certification of outside pros would have to be done within 90 days. We would not be trying to keep a man out, but just would want to make sure he would be qualified."

Hull said licensing would give the pro protection. "We would pay a fee out of our pocket, and with this fee would be buying an enforcement agency. If a complaint was lodged, the state would step in."

Hull said it would help to solidify the PGA in Florida, and across the country if other sections would institute licensing in their states. "I love the PGA, but it is too loose to have much power at all, and we need something like this."

State Senator Jon Thomas of Miami proposed the bill earlier this year, but for various reasons the Florida legislature was very inoperative passing only a small percentage of bills this sitting. The bill is now in committee, and will be brought up again in the next session.

"Our profession is slipping in the eyes of the public," Hull told GOLFDOM, "and something like this is a way to make our importance felt." He said he feels the majority of pros in the state are sold on the idea of licensing, including the apprentices. At the section's annual meeting in July in Orlando, Hull gave a report on the subject. There were some dissenting views, but no

**Capitol building:** Where Florida state legislature may vote on the bill for licensing of golf pros in that state.



motions against it, Hull said. He said several members said to spend any amount of money necessary to get the bill passed. He said the section is going to put out brochures explaining the program totally to its 1200 members.

The executive committee of the section has already hired a lobbying firm to promote the bill to members of the state legislature. The firm is Lew Ritter & Associates, and works out of Jacksonville. Ritter is no stranger to Florida politics, being a



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former mayor of Jacksonville, and a veteran of 30 years on the state political scene. The firm drafted the bill, and is organizing support in the legislature for the bill, according to Hull.

One interesting sidelight is the fact that Hull was contacted early last month by an official of the Teamsters. The official was feeling out the possibility that perhaps the pros would be interested in affiliating with the Teamsters. Hull said that if the pros agreed to let the Teamsters represent the pros, that the Teamster official said he could guarantee passage of the bill by the legislature. Hull said he does not feel the pros would want to be unionized.

Hull said his section checked with national PGA offices for financial aid in getting the licensing program off the ground. He said the national said it could not back any state plan with money, because it would be unfair to other sections.

Hull also said that about 12 years ago the PGA looked into the possibility of national licensing of pros but scrapped it at the time because any licensing programs have to be carried out by the state. Hull said the national privately wished the Florida section luck, and would like to see it passed.

Chuck Brasington, pro at Gainesville Golf and Country Club, is president of the Florida PGA Section. He says he is not as "hot" for the subject as some of the other pros in his section and on the executive board.

"I do think it would do the golfing public some good," Brasington told GOLFDOM, "and it would certainly upgrade the caliber of the pros." Brasington said he can see where many owners would not like the licensing program if it went into effect, but cannot see any harm to the pro by it. He said it would aid the job security of the pro and would cut down on the number of unqualified pros in the state. He said many of the pros in the state do not yet understand how the plan would work. "I think chances of getting the law passed are small," he said. "I don't think the state legislature thinks they have enough time to deal with our little old problems." Brasington also made the point that the licensing bill does not say a club has to hire a PGA pro, just that the pro be licensed.

Ron Polane is pro at Boca Raton Hotel and Country Club, and is vice president of the Southeast Chapter of the section. He said most pros in his chapter are in favor of the pro-

**Carey:** "It's a thoroughly bad idea."



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gram because it would give the pro more control over his profession.

"Florida is notorious for opening up clubs with unqualified pros, being unsatisfied and not getting the business they deserve," Polane told GOLFDOM. "I think licensing would improve the pro's image because we would not then have unqualified pros in the state. If handled properly, I think it would be very good for the pro. The way I understand it, we would have control of the licensing board, and would pay for it with our licensing fees."

Punta Gorda Country Club pro Don Williams has mixed emotions about licensing because he is not sure what will happen when the state gets fully involved. The vice president of the Southwest Chapter makes a good point when he says it is unfair to club companies to have an unqualified person selling and fitting their clubs. He makes another good point when he says:

"Most new course developers make a mistake when they hire an unqualified person for the job of pro. Many members and guests at these resorts and developments are affluent persons who belong to or belonged to prestigious private clubs in the north, and they know what it is like to have a first-class operation, including a qualified pro. They know how a course should be run."

to page 53

## LICENSING from page 17

Williams said there is bound to be some job protection for the pro if the licensing bill is passed, and that it should benefit the PGA because owners will be looking to the PGA to provide most licensed pros. He said nobody can say there would never be red tape from the state, but if run correctly, the state would simply be authorizing testing. If later the state would decide it wanted more control of the procedures, Williams admits there could be problems. He said he has not yet talked extensively with most of the pros in his chapter about the program but feels most would be for it.

John LaPonzina is pro at Pembroke Lakes Country Club in Pembroke Pines, and is vice president of the Southern Chapter. He has received mixed comments from members of his chapter and personally thinks licensing is a step in the right direction for the pro. He said it would give more credibility to the profession and would assure that a better quality pro would be at clubs in the state.

"Some of the fellows think that state control would hinder our profession, but I feel we would set the guidelines and standards and would not be dictated to by the state," LaPonzina told GOLFDOM. "I think this would make for every club in the country to have a qualified man as pro at its club."

Bob Keller, vice president of the West Central Chapter, until this month was pro at Sarasota Lakes Country Club in Sarasota. He said the general consensus in his chapter is that the PGA should be strong enough to handle its own affairs. He said he was not at the meeting where the executive committee voted and does not know all the fine points of the licensing program. But he knows that he does not like the idea of government being able to tell the pros how to run their profession. And he also brings up the point that a pro would not have to be a PGA member to be licensed, and that this seems somewhat at odds with the aims of the PGA and job security. He thinks the PGA is getting stronger every year and that the section should be strengthened from within, not with an outside

licensing agency. But he admits that if run correctly, it could be beneficial to the pro.

National PGA President Henry C. Poe said he has not really heard that much about the program to have formed an opinion about it. He did say that he questions if pros in the state are going to be interested. He attended the annual Florida section meeting and said he heard many comments against the plan.

Bill Carey, executive director of the Florida State Golf Association said licensing is a "thoroughly bad idea."

"I thought it was ridiculous," Carey told GOLFDOM. "I see nothing wrong with the PGA licensing its pros, but for the section to get a lobbyist to work on creating another government bureaucracy is ridiculous. We have more government now than we need."

"And if the pros are naive enough to think they would have control over a licensing board, if they think they are going to dominate it, it is just not so. I heard they want a seven-man board with five pros. It will never happen. Let the PGA institute a licensing formula and administer it. All the pros would be doing with state licensing is creating another hack state agency."

Opponents, or at least persons not in favor, of the bill say the licenses issued pros would not be similar to those of doctors and lawyers but more along the lines of those issued barbers, electricians and truck drivers. They say pros cannot expect the government to identify who the qualified pros are if the PGA cannot do it with the Class A rating. They say PGA membership should identify the capable pros, and that getting the government involved in the procedure only undermines the PGA and what it is trying to do. And they say it will not sweep the country, whether it passes in Florida or not.

Others like Charley Stine, editor of FLORIDA GOLF WEEK, say they see loss of control by the pro and loss of importance to the PGA as an organization if the licensing bill goes through. Stine says the PGA has been in a monopoly situation for a long time and that licensing could be the catalysts for a rival organization. He said that over a period of time the state examining

board could become more powerful in the state than the PGA.

The licensing bill will not come before the legislature until next year at the earliest if it gets out of committee. While the bill remains in the legislature, the Florida PGA Section will be doing all it can to get the information out to its members about the benefits of the plan. It is for sure that the pros in the state will make their feelings known to their chapter and section officers. □

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