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SWINGING AROUND GOLF

USGA's Look At Harsh Reality:

When the USGA took a look at its 1974 figures in money and members and compared them with 1973 figures it was certain that in 1975 the canny businessmen who work free as USGA officers would be studying the hard facts of life today.

Despite a slight increase in membership for the 30th consecutive year and a boost in the tournament broadcasting income to \$420,156 in 1974 the expenses of the most efficiently and helpfully operated organization in amateur sports — maybe in all sports — the USGA in 1974 wound up around \$50,000 in the red. The 1973 excess of income over expenses was \$55,655. That approximate \$105,000 difference jolted the USGA Executive committee into taking a new look at the changed conditions in golf as a business as well as a game.

I don't know what previous explosion of realism brought a beneficial revolution to the USGA Executive Committee. That change of life for the USGA and world-wide golf came July 14, 1922, at the Skokie Country Club in north suburban Chicago when National Open championship gallery fee was charged for the first time.

The facts most pressing for a change in the foundation of the USGA's sound business are that there now is too much dependency on the National Open revenue from the show business phase of golf and a big gap between the USGA and the large number of players; the pay-play golfers the USGA serves usefully in the pursuit of happiness, as it does the private club members.

Golf is fundamentally a player's game rather than a spectator's pastime. Golf happens to be the most popular of participant sports in the U.S. It also is the sport with by far

the biggest effect on the economy and ecology of this country. Golf began suburban development and continues to have immense effect on the nation's real estate business. Golf began the development of light weight fabrics; first as golf wear, then as a new comfortable smart style of living. Golf is played on grass. The Green Section of the USGA in its pioneering work and in coordination with national and state agricultural research has had and is having immense benefit to the beauty and ecology of the country.

As a maker of the golf rules the USGA definitely has preserved the game. The USGA and a few far-sighted pros halted an effort by bubbleheaded tournament players to make the money game easier and different from the game played by the amateurs who pay to play golf.

Membership connection between the USGA and all golfers has been needing modernizing for years. The old idea of golf being principally of, by and for private clubs and their members long ago was turned obsolete. USGA operations show that. But with the membership requirements not paying much attention to the fee courses and their players, about 7,000 of the nation's 11,000 courses weren't part of the golf family.

The former qualifications of private and fee courses memberships in the USGA are being continued. The modernizing addition is of annual single members at \$12, husband and wife memberships at \$16, and junior membership at \$8.

At first these new memberships undoubtedly will be pretty much prestige items bought by and for those who know the most about golf and feel a responsibility to share in the progress and protection of the game. □