

MAKING THE OPEN PAY

by REG MOORE

THE Open Golf Tournament should be the major attraction of our golfing season. As a sacred event, it is an institution worth preserving and improving. It is as British as Trooping the Colour or cricket at Lord's. It deserves a better fate than just another tournament!

As the one British golf tournament every year that can stir the public imagination, it still takes second place to exhibition matches on television by the giant Americans and Gary Player.

The Open suffers from our balance of payments problem. Income from recent tournaments has cleared £20,000 in admission charges and £2,500 in entry fees. Parking fees bring in £16,000 a year, with programme sales, advertising, film rights, television screening and sundries.

Losses

But far from providing British golf with a healthy balance in the kitty, the Hoylake Open recently lost £1,500 and Muirfield slightly more. Meantime, more spectators must be attracted to the event each year while the R. and A. endeavour to make good the arrears.

Television might help repay some of the fees, but obviously this cannot last for ever. Fees have to remain modest to attract the promising field youngsters.

Cash awards will surely increase, for the day has long since passed when golfers qualified for the Open mainly for

its prestige value. The appeal of the Open is universal, but will only remain so as long as overseas stars are attracted to the event. The top professionals in America are ranked by the amount of money they earn.

The champions of the world may think long and hard about taking in the Open on their itinerary if prize money doesn't match the top Open events on the other side of the Atlantic.

More Money

Unfortunately, the R. and A. cannot afford to keep up the present standard of promotion and prize money. Only by raising the entrance fee, or getting more from the television rights and advertising, will the Championship officials bridge the gap.

But the event is so popular throughout the world, that voluntary appeals should be made and golfers could contribute into a Championship Fund. The events leading up to it are merely the prelude to this one great event on the British golfing calendar. As the symbol of British golf, the Open deserves support from every golfer.

Footnote

Total "Open" prize money this year will be £30,335, the winner getting £4,250, an increase of £1,250 over last year.