

# GREENSIDE COMMENT

**W**ith all the attention that "banning" has received through the Karsten Manufacturing case, not many people will have noticed that another ban also came into force on the 1st January. The small 1.62" golf ball is no longer legal in competitions. Those with only medium length memories will recall the huge fuss this issue caused in the late sixties, before the decision to adopt the "American 1.68" ball by first the playing professionals and ultimately in the mid seventies by the R & A for the Open Championship. It is of course, pure speculation as to what would have happened to European golf if the big ball had not been accepted. Striking would not have improved, our Champions would not have been able to compete on equal terms with their counterparts from across the Atlantic, and there would have been no Ryder Cup triumphs, let alone Curtis Cup and Walker Cup victories. What stimulus have these had on the present boom in European golf?

The decision to adopt the "1.68" ball could have been taken by the R & A immediately after the war, they had set up a small working group to look into the size of the ball, chaired by a distinguished former Amateur champion Roger Wethered. Wethered's group quickly came to the conclusion that the American ball should be adopted. What happened next is not absolutely clear, suffice to say that the British golf ball manufacturers exerted pressure and Wethered's recommendation was not accepted.

The R & A have made certain that future golf course development and course maintenance will not suffer a similar fate when they published "The Demand for Golf" and "The Way Forward". Already both documents have received considerable coverage in "the Golf Course" through the articles of Jim Arthur, "Golf World" and in more depth in "Golf Monthly". The author of

"The Demand for Golf", Graham Hurst has responded on page ... and Keith Wright, Secretary of the English Golf Union has also put an official viewpoint.

However the reaction of many private clubs has been, perhaps, somewhat different from that which the R & A might have envisaged. Both documents have brought to the attention of many committee men and club golfers just what a false position their clubs are in. They have suddenly recognised that the many societies and green fee visitors that play over their courses are using up the annual finite playing life of their course. There has to be a limit to the number of rounds that any course can cope with in a year if it is to be maintained at an acceptable standard. Coupled with the over-play produced by non-member golfers is the substantial income they generate not only in green fees but in keeping bar and catering staff fully employed. This outside income has now come under the scrutiny of the Inland Revenue who have in one or two cases assessed clubs for substantial tax demands.

In effect many clubs have been using the boom in golf and the resultant increase in the numbers taking up the game to subsidise their own annual club subscription. Several clubs have now reacted to these trends and have acted to protect their greatest asset, the course, by severely restricting societies and visitors not introduced by a member. At the same time they are raising their subscriptions to a more realistic level to compensate for the loss of income and to avoid the possible attention of the Inland Revenue.

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