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## Greenkeeper

The official monthly magazine of the British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association

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Circulation is by subscription. Subscription rate: UK £47 per year, Europe and Eire £60. The magazine is also distributed to BIGGA members, golf clubs, local authorities, the turf industry, libraries and central government.

ISSN: 0961-6977

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# Welcome



## Golf's Time Bomb

An excellent three part report in Scotland's Herald newspaper, written by Douglas Lowe, highlights a growing problem in Scottish golf clubs, which is just as pertinent to the rest of the country.

Headlined "Time bomb" the piece examines the long established culture of 65 and overs receiving subsidised golf, or free, golf.

Douglas admitted that until recently it was a set-up that worked reasonably well with few objecting to supporting the poor pensioners, but that the dynamics were changing fast.

"The baby-boomers, the ones born in immediate post World War II, are due to hit 65 in unprecedented numbers. Anecdotal it is reckoned that this tsunami

of seniors could form as much as a third of golf club membership in five years time. It is a demographic time bomb."

Douglas goes on.

"The trouble is that the system is self-perpetuating. At annual or extraordinary general meetings, where subscriptions and membership policies can be altered, seniors aren't likely to vote to increase their own subscriptions. Moreover, they are the ones with time of their hands to turn up at such meetings en masse to preserve the status quo.

"Beleaguered committees will find it increasingly difficult to balance the books and the first casualties will be the course and the clubhouse - the very assets that need to be in tip-top order to attract new members."

Douglas added that seniors justified their right for subsidised golf because they have supported the club by paying full subscriptions while they were working and unable to play golf much more than once a week and view subsidies as "payback time".

However, from the perspective of the younger working man or woman "the idea of playing an entry fee and a full subscription to subsidise the 'Last of the Summer Wine' brigade is abhorrent. The sums don't make sense to them especially when the seniors are the ones who are playing the most golf by far."

Those of you at members' clubs will probably recognise the above and have similar fears, particularly for the impact it will have on the golf course.

One of the answers is to run clubs on much more business grounds with management teams rather than committees taking decisions for the good of the business rather than self-interest. Many clubs have already gone down this route but there are still many stuck in the old fashioned one member one vote systems.

Another answer would be for members to be issued with tokens at the start of each season and use them to "pay" for each round - 10 tokens for a Saturday morning and seven for a mid week game, for example. If vouchers run out - by seniors playing four times a week - more can be purchased from the club, perhaps at a subsidised rate, while if they are not all used up they can be exchanged for goods in the Pro Shop.

It's an idea which I know works at some clubs in the country and which may help to resolve a problem which is weighting golf very heavily in favour of the elderly and, more worryingly, against the younger golfer coming through.

It is potentially a huge problem for the game and it is well for golf clubs to take action even if that action is not to everyone's taste.

Scott MacCallum  
Editor