

## Nicklaus: Public-access now driving the market, as golf comes full circle

By JACK NICKLAUS

Public golf. Somewhere along the 500-year history of our sport someone came up with that term to differentiate the game being played by the masses from that being enjoyed by the gentry. When you think about it, it's kind of a silly term, almost redundant.

After all, when the Scots invented the game they didn't do so behind the heavy oak doors of a private clubhouse. They did it on park land like St. Andrews which was public at the time of golf's birth and remains so today.

But somehow the glorious public golf of the 15th century, which we still celebrate in stately prints and paintings, was replaced by the public golf of the 20th century. Somewhere we traded in public golf for municipal golf which, when I was coming up, was a watered down version of the private game.

But as the 20th century has worn on several things have happened to enhance the public golf course market. First, private club membership has

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grown too expensive for many young families. And even if they did have the money, few young parents are willing or able to sacrifice the time required to get the maximum from a \$50,000 entrance fee, provided they are admitted in the first place. Subsequently, as the financial boom of the 1980s waned,

club applications declined, revenues dipped and banks became reluctant to lend money to private golf club projects.

Ironically, in the early 1990s — at about the same time banks were losing interest in expansive, extravagant private clubs — Americans happened

to be taking up the game in record numbers. This golf rush exposed a void between the upscale private clubs with their manicured fairways and hefty entrance fees and their ragged public counterparts charging \$8 a round.

The solution: Why not provide a higher-quality public golf experience at a proportionately higher daily-fee price?

That's exactly what's happening in public golf today. Now it's almost as though the public golf philosophy of the 15th century Scots has returned.

Today, as designers or developers, we're able to do golf courses which go beyond the \$6 and \$8 Dark Ages of

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Jack Nicklaus

## Passing dual-membership bylaw may overburden certain chapters

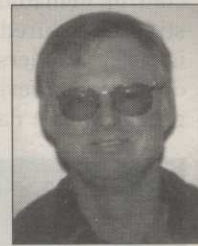
By MARK RUFF

The new affiliation agreement between the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) and the individual affiliate chapters could present a dilemma for some of the small-in-member-numbers-but-geographically-large-in-area affiliates. Individual sections of the agreement may be difficult to achieve without placing a financial burden on a small chapter. Provisions requiring class A and B members to serve as officers could also place a manpower burden on the affiliates with smaller memberships.

The requirement that affiliate bylaws must be consistent with, but need not be limited to, the bylaws of GCSAA should not be difficult for the affiliates to conform with. But the financial impact of changing bylaws may cause dues increases for some affiliates.

The requirement that all officers

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Mark Ruff

be class A or B members may also be harder to attain for affiliates with fewer members. For example, my chapter has two appointed officers who serve as Secretary and Treasurer. They are both commercial members who donate their time to help serve the chapter. Neither has the right to vote on Board of

Director decisions. This is not a problem that cannot be overcome, but it may take time to find class A or B members willing to commit the time to do the job properly.

The requirements to incorporate and be tax exempt are logical and necessary to any business entity working

as the affiliates do. The requirements of submitting annual financial reports with copies of tax returns will also have some financial impact on the affiliates and may cause dues increases for some chapters. In addition to the financial impact, there was some concern at the chapter relations meeting in September that total disclosure of affiliate finances may be of concern for some affiliates.

The requirement for carrying insurance coverage for an affiliate's operation, activities and conduct to include but not be limited to premises, operations, property, personal injury, special events and directors and

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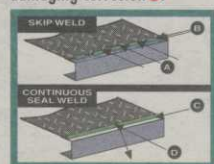


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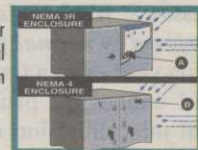


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## Nicklaus sees opportunity in public golf

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public golf.

Money's still as tight as it ever was. But we've learned that, as they do with most expenditures, public course golfers are insisting on value. Today's players will pay \$25, even \$200, to play a quality golf course — but only a quality golf course. For the less-frequent golfer, that adds up to a good deal. Even at \$200 a round, a golfer who plays 10 times a year only spends two thousand bucks compared to

the \$50,000 entry fee being charged across town.

This concept of bringing real value back to public golf means there's finally enough margin in the green fee to make public golf a financially viable business. That's why I now have more public golf course projects under development than at any time in my career.

This fall and rise of public golf has been a symbiotic boon to both course designers like myself and golf-starved players around the world. As design-

ers, we now have the freedom to do our very best work. Back in the days when the most a public-access course could charge was 8 bucks, developers and designers were handcuffed. The "muni courses" of back then could be identified by their bland, bunkerless lack of character.

Today a developer's *pro forma* figures in significantly more revenue per round. That translates into bigger design budgets, which result in more creative layouts which, in turn, result in more pleasing and profitable experiences — not

only for those of us in the golf course business but, more important, for our customers.

However, in order to maintain this win-win situation it's important to remember that, as terrific as the daily-fee or public golf course market has become, it's not private golf. It's a separate business with its own unique parameters.

No question, with the money available today we can build public golf courses as grand and as extravagant as most any private club. But we in the industry always have to be

mindful of who will play the course. It's tempting, with the popularity of public golf, to build public courses with all the accouterments of a private championship golf course, but we must keep in mind the public course player has different needs and interests from the private club member. It's the end user's expectations which should determine the final product. Who's going to play it?

Essentially these courses are going to be hosting a diverse talent pool and one which, by its presence at your course, has expressed its aversion to 6-hour rounds and exorbitant costs. We have to remember that these courses, while offering a challenge, should be a little easier to get around on and a little easier and cheaper to maintain. We're not putting in all the bells and whistles of an expensive golf course, but we are putting in good, solid, fun golf for people who are increasingly willing to pay a little bit more for it.

That's a good market to be in.

## Huff comment

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officers liability, is a sound business practice. But, once again, it could place some affiliate chapters in a financial bind to pay for the premium. This could once again cause a dues increase.

Having a delegate attend the annual chapter relations meeting is an important step in keeping the affiliates in touch with the parent chapter. Any cost to the chapter is already a relatively small expense for the affiliate and is considered a reasonable cost.

The proposed bylaw change for GCSAA requiring dual membership in GCSAA and an affiliate chapter beginning in July 1997 does not affect any current membership unless a current affiliate drops its affiliation or a member changes job locations. If a current affiliate does drop its affiliation, current members would continue as GCSAA members, but would probably seek out a new affiliate to join. With the vast expanse geographically of the western U.S. it would be difficult to attend most meetings. Forming a new affiliate would be an option, but would be costly.

The new affiliation agreement has caused much discussion in our chapter board meetings. We have concluded that it is beneficial and we will apply to continue to be an affiliate chapter. Other affiliates may feel that circumstances dictate that they choose to drop their affiliation. The decision ultimately lies with the membership of the affiliate chapters.

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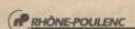
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