



**Tim Moraghan**, principal, ASPIRE Golf (tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com). Follow Tim's blog, Golf Course Confidential at <http://www.aspire-golf.com/buzz.html> or on Twitter @TimMoraghan

## THE ICEMEN COMETH

**H**ockey is my second favorite sport. I grew up playing it and remain a rabid fan. I know quite a few NHL players, and therefore know that since it's now their off-season, they can be found involved in their second favorite pastime – golf.

I read almost as many books about hockey as I do about golf, and one of my favorites is Ken Dryden's classic, "The Game." In it, the savvy and cerebral Dryden made some observations about hockey that have strong parallels to golf. I mention them here not just to note Dryden's prescience, but to encourage golf's organizing bodies to get on the stick and work on these issues so we're not still discussing them 30 years from now. I'm either quoting or paraphrasing from the book. Regardless, you'll get the idea.

**"A game we treat as ours isn't ours. It is part of our national heritage, and pride, part of us; but we can't control it."**

Golf is part of Britain's national fabric. Not so in the U.S. And although many Americans love the game, we're not nearly as passionate. The intricacies, history and traditions aren't as readily recognized, or appreciated, by American audiences as by the British. As a result, we have a harder time getting new golfers into the game or "lapsed" golfers to return. We need to show the audience that golf fits over here almost as easily as it does over there.

**"If the pattern of gratuitous violence were eliminated, what then? Who would watch?"**

I'm not suggesting golfers start crashing one another into the turf. But at the same time, we have to let these great athletes and shot-makers do what they do best. If the governing bodies succeed in rolling back the ball

and otherwise manipulating equipment, Bubba Watson couldn't hit the ball as far or make it dance – then who would watch? In every sport, the pros exist to let us dream about reaching the high bar that they set. Take their skills out and we'll get bored and find something else to do. Equipment regulations might be a good way to keep old courses in play, but that's a long-term recipe for golf's demise.

**How many of our so-called leaders have actual hands-on experience doing much of anything in golf?**

**"And, it can only happen if the NHL makes international hockey the climax to its season, in world championships..."**

Some of the greatest assets golf has are its international competitions. They generate interest around the world. They also create big revenue. But do they translate into increased participation? I certainly haven't heard that Wales is seeing a big jump in traveling golfers after the Ryder Cup. Everything we do needs to expose the game to potential players.

**"In America, hockey is a game most of whose fans were never players... and it seems that they never will be."**

Here is one area in which golf has an advantage over other sports: Many fans are already golfers, and those who don't play can be. It's hard to say that about almost any other spectator sport. What we need to do is get non-players to understand what it feels like to hit a golf ball. Watching Phil Mickelson and being Phil Mickelson are two different things. However,

only in golf can you approximate what it's like to be Phil Mickelson, whether it's holing a long putt, hitting a great drive, or just playing on the same course. That unique association between watching and participating is golf's greatest attraction.

**"If we were to do something, who would decide what is right and wrong for a game? Who decides what is in a game's best interest? Who is the keeper of the game?"**

If we want to do something to improve golf – make it more enjoyable, make it last, get more people to play the game – then who do we trust to make that happen? The governing bodies? Are they really looking out for "our game," or are they looking out for their own best interests? Within the industry, who are they to tell us what to do with our own operations? Are they really that familiar with the intricacies of golf course maintenance? How many of our so-called leaders have actual hands-on experience doing much of anything in golf?

**"We let a game follow its intuitive path, pretending to be powerless, then simply live with its results."**

Have we lost golf's "intuitive path?" The object is still getting the ball in the hole in the fewest possible strokes. But we, as an industry, have become wrapped up in the outside agencies. These concerns include achieving perfect conditioning year-round regardless of budgets, equipment, staffing, and weather; initiatives designed to get more people playing just the sake of playing rather than for a love of the game; and environmental issues, forgetting that golf courses are the original examples of sustainability.

Our game is being overtaken by their rules. Both in hockey and in golf, I'm very concerned. **GC**