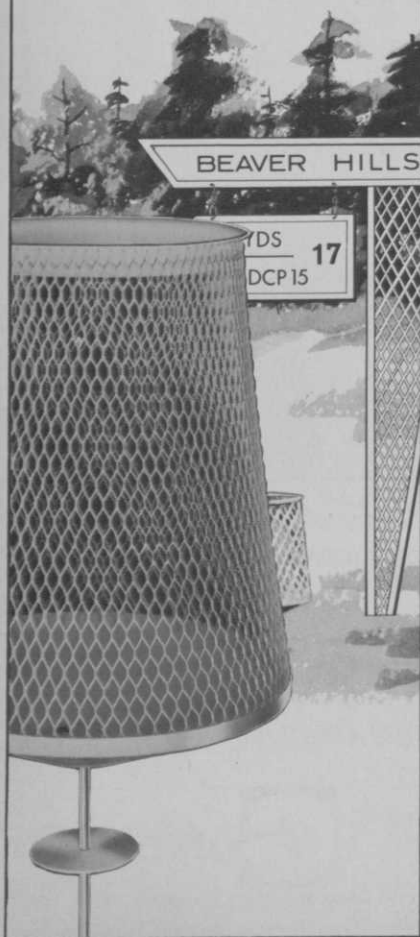


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GOLFDOM Speaks out

Golf is never without its problems, even in the best of times, and some of them—like the slice and the shank—are omnipresent. One of these is the old argument about the 14-club limit. Should it be raised? Lowered? There seems to be little practical thinking on the subject. Manufacturers and club professionals would like to see it raised, for obvious reasons. Purists, historians and other reactionaries would like to see it lowered, or unchanged. And the guy who really counts—the long-suffering golfer—will settle for anything that gives him a lower score.

The promise of a lower score is the core of the manufacturers' argument. They would have the duffer believe that raising the limit to 15 or 16 clubs will automatically chop off excess strokes and simultaneously enable him to break a hundred and eliminate all that mental anguish. The fact that it would also sell more clubs and increase revenue apparently is only incidental.

The purists, on the other hand, are quick to point out that Chick Evans or Mary Queen of Scots, or somebody, once won the Open while carrying only seven or eight sticks. That, they say, was when it took *real* skill to play the game. Naturally, they object strenuously to adding so many clubs that there becomes one for every type of shot. They would have the duffer learn to hit several kinds of shots with each club.

The touring pros, who play so well they shouldn't really figure into the discussion, would like to have more clubs in the bag. Nothing would please them more than to have a special club for every conceivable situation on the course. This, of course, was what caused the 14-club limit to be imposed in the first place.

Now let's get down to the important thing, namely, whether raising the limit would really help the average golfer. Those favoring the change say the addition of a No. 5 or No. 6 wood, a 1-iron, another wedge, a "chipper" or whatever, would enable the duffer to play a few shots per round better and perhaps give him two or three pars he wouldn't normally get, all of which would increase his enjoyment of the game. Our contention is that it wouldn't help him a bit. Most sets of woods already contain a 5-wood, since the brassie has become virtually obsolete; the duffer can't hit a 1-iron and probably should give up his 2-iron in favor of a 6-wood; the wedge already is the hardest club for the duffer to play, so he hardly needs another one, and the "chipper" is nothing that he can't duplicate by taking a medium or long iron and choking down on the grip.

As for reducing the limit, the idea is ridiculous. Nobody would stand for it. Suffice it to say that if the duffer can't hit a straight-away 5-iron shot now, he certainly isn't likely to learn how to play three or four different shots with it.

Golf Magazine recently presented the 14-club question to its readers in the form of "pro" and "con" articles and the reaction was about 50-50, which indicates there is no great groundswell of opinion favoring a change.

Golf is a fairly easy game for some and quite difficult for others, the degree of skill varying in direct proportion to the amount of practice one devotes to it. We don't think changing the club limit would have any appreciable effect, one way or another, and our studies show that the most important guy to consider—the duffer—doesn't think so either. □

Ross Goodner Editor