

How to get the tour to come to your course

by Scott Scredon, assistant editor

The televised image of Jack Nicklaus chipping his ball to the cup on the final hole and the ensuing cheers from spectators reveling in their own form of born-again religion excite any golf course manager interested in the game. Watching Nicklaus walk up the fairway, the caddie carrying a bag that causes his shoulders to slope at an angle uneven with the ground, and a teenaged boy, eyes squinting under a visor but hold a leader board upright, completes the setting. A latent desire of the manager is rekindled, the possibility that his course could host a tournament on the pro tour.

The tour's aura has been so enhanced by television that some club officials may feel their golf course is not "good enough" to host a tour event. The quality of the golf course, however, is only one of many factors considered by the Professional Golfers' Association of America and its counterpart, the Ladies Professional Golf Association.

But there are problems and the first one is finding an open date. The PGA has no openings through next year and doesn't anticipate one until at least 1981. "We have proposals coming into our office all the time," says Labron Harris of the Tournament

Players' Division in Washington, D.C. "We go on year-to-year contracts and don't expect any dropping off."

But there is some room on the ladies' circuit, especially during the winter months. LPGA spokesmen said there will be two new tournaments and seven new golf courses in 1978 and openings in January and February for 1979.

The key to holding tour events is finding a sponsor who will put up the prize money and provide operating costs for the tournament, which can sometimes total more than \$200,000. The sponsors are often large corporations which sometimes have selected the golf course. The LPGA will usually go along with the sponsor's recommendation unless a number of requirements don't meet their wishes. But a club can propose a tournament to the LPGA by getting a local civic organization to raise money to pay for the tournament. Sponsors will sometimes also listen to proposals from golf course officials who believe they can provide a better course or facilities than another local course which held the tournament the previous year. Finally, there is a chance that the players won't like a course and their complaints will force a switch in location.

LPGA course guidelines

When a sponsor asks the LPGA to select a golf course, the organization says it looks for more than a place to prop up its television towers. Craig Perna, LPGA director of marketing, does much of the legwork for course selection, many times visiting each course before making his choice. He prefers a course that measures from 6,300 to 6,400 yards. There should be facilities that can provide parking space for thousands of spectators, an adequate number of nearby hotel rooms for the players, and a clubhouse that can hold up to 500 persons for the numerous social events that will occur during the tournament week. The course should also be accessible to major roads and/or mass transit.

All of these elements could be meaningless, though, if club members really don't want anyone on their course. "We want the membership to wholeheartedly want us," says Perna.

"It's a primary ingredient." The members provide much of the volunteer work — including keeping score, parking cars, selling tickets, and monitoring the press room. "Things won't get done if they aren't enthusiastic," says LPGA public relations spokesman Chip Campbell. Perna claims the attitude of members at the North Hills Country Club in Manhasset, Long Island, helped them gain the selection for the 1978 Western Union International Classic. The assistant pro at one Detroit club turned down in a bid to host the Ladies Stroh's Open next year laments that his membership "didn't want it that bad."

The players have no power concerning course selection, but their gripes can force a switch if they feel the course does not reward their good golf shots.

"There was one glaring time this year when it was just not enjoyable,"



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says Shelley Hamlin, a touring pro for 6 years and vice president of the LPGA Players Council. "All factors of luck came into play. The way the ball would kick off the green, one foot could make the difference between shooting for a birdie and shooting out from under a tree. We won't be playing there next year."

The women like to "work the ball," she says. "We want to be able to fade the ball on some holes, to gamble



where a good shot will give you a chance for a birdie." The women also enjoy a variety of holes, using power to score on some and finesse on others. Many players, however, don't like large greens. "They want courses that bring a lot of different shots into play," says Hamlin.

The most important factor for players off the course is the quality of balls used on the driving range. Hamlin says her counterparts like to use new balls so they can better evaluate the distance each shot travels and the amount of hook or fade from those hit with irons. She says many clubs that host tournaments give the women the same balls that are used by club members.

Clubs should initiate action

The probability of obtaining a tour event increases if the club initiates a proposal since the LPGA will likely

evaluate your course and facilities without comparing them to other clubs in the area.

The Newport Golf and Yacht Club in Houston was searching recently for a tournament to help promote its residential/recreation community. Club pro Drew Gross came upon the Women Golf Charities, a local group of about 800 women that raises money for needy persons. "We had the golf course and they had the volunteers," Gross said. The Exchange Club of Houston, another civic-oriented group, agreed to raise the money for prizes and operating costs by selling "sponsorships" to individuals and charging \$250 for each person who played in the pro-am tournament the day preceding the 4-day pro tournament.

"Basically, we told the LPGA what we had in mind, what we wanted to do," says Gross. "We went back to the

Underground cable to relay scores and towers for television cameras are set up at Bay Tree Golf Plantation.

LPGA and had no trouble getting the date we wanted."

The course selection in this instance sounds almost too simple. Consider, however, how the Wykagyl Country Club in New Rochelle, N.Y., about 20 miles from New York City, became host of the Girl Talk Classic in 1975.

"An acquaintance of mine had lunch one day with LPGA Commissioner Ray Volpe, who said the LPGA was looking for a course in the New York City area," said Marty Connelly, club golf chairman and member at Wykagyl. "My friend got back to me and set it up with Volpe.

"You could say we were in the right place at the right time. We didn't

do anything unusual. Their field representative (an LPGA staff member who checks out the proposed golf course) didn't come out until the week of the tournament."

Close proximity to a metropolitan area aided Wykagyl since the tournament had been staged the previous year near Poughkeepsie, N.Y., nearly 2 hours from midtown Manhattan. The advantage of drawing more persons to see the tournament outweighed other factors since Wykagyl didn't have adequate facilities for the pro-am party or enough parking space. Again, enthusiastic club members pleased the LPGA hierarchy since Wykagyl was chosen to host another tournament this year following *Girl Talk Magazine's* abdication as a sponsor.

The Bay Tree Golf Plantation in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., provides a third example of officials obtaining a major tournament by approaching the LPGA. Head pro Sam Timms asked for a tournament during the 1976 season after getting Piedmont Airlines to pay for all expenses. There were no openings then, but the LPGA called Timms a few months later to see if he would be interested in hosting the LPGA Championship in 1977, even though the course measured about 7,200 yards for men and only 5,200 for women. The course length was rectified when five new tees were built and four fairway bunkers removed.

Club officials who believe they have a championship course face a dilemma if a tour event is already playing at another local course. They can approach the sponsor and present their case, but must deal with the prospect of ill feeling with officials and members of the other club. There is, however, the possibility that two or more clubs may find it beneficial to alternate their courses. The San Antonio Golf Association selects new courses in its area at regular intervals to host the Texas Open on the PGA circuit.

Profits and expenses

Although each tournament gives part of its proceeds to charitable institutions, the obvious benefits are prestige, publicity, and money. A number of clubs and golf courses contacted by GOLF BUSINESS would not reveal their total earnings, but Wykagyl's

... and how pros make money on the

Club pros assume either the role of corporate executive or the midnight-shift janitor if their golf course hosts a tournament on either professional tour. The resort pro often directs the entire operation during tournament week, simply because many times there is no one else to do the work. "Basically all I did for six months was prepare for the tournament," says Houston's Drew Gross. The pros at private clubs often concern themselves with "insignificant" duties," said Ed Nicholson, former head pro at Wykagyl Country Club. "My job was to keep the driving range full of good, clean balls and put the clubs in a safe place," he said. Corporations that sponsor the tournaments will often hire a tournament director who assigns specific duties to each manager, leaving the pro at any kind of golf course with minimal responsibility.

Club pros at almost all facilities operate and profit from the driving range and pro shop. Nicholson and Gross charged the 85 touring women \$12 each for use of the range and balls, earning about \$1,000. Bay Tree Plantation's Sam Timms bought 400 dozen new balls for range use at \$5

per dozen, rented them to the tour pros, then sold them in glass jars to his members after the tournament at about \$7 per dozen.

Timms also proved that pro shop merchandise could earn profits during tournament week. An estimated 45,000 persons attending the tournament bought items valued at about \$30,000 from an outdoor shop set up in a kiosk and from the regular pro shop. Persons from the gallery, especially women, bought a large amount of T-shirts and visors. "Men are not apt to go around wearing a visor with LPGA printed on it; but the women love it," said Timms.

Although spectators were allowed in the pro shop, the outdoor stand sold about three times more goods than the regular pro shop. Timms said persons shied away from the indoor shop and clubhouse, fearing they were not allowed in either facility.

Timms made certain he had enough stock to sell by asking his major suppliers to ship an inventory of goods just prior to the tournament. He sent back the items that weren't sold and paid postage costs.

Gross and Nicholson, however, did not attempt to make heavy sales on



our without playing

pro shop items. The LPGA has a boutique on the course during the four days of the pro tournament, and neither man believed he would sell enough merchandise to earn a significant profit. "I don't think there's that much in it unless your talking about the U.S. Open," says Gross. Marty Connely, golf chairman at Wykagyl, agreed. "I would say if any person wanted to buy a souvenir, they'd get it from the LPGA." Still, Gross said he sold about 240 windbreakers while Nicholson cashed in on rainwear sales on poor weather days.

The resort pros were more concerned with the tournament's overall operation. Each started preparing by visiting other tour stops; Timms in the Carolinas and Gross in Texas. Timms received valuable information about ticket-selling from managers at courses that host the Greater Greensboro and Kemper Open tournaments on the PGA circuit. He also set up joint agreements with clubs to use some of the same equipment, such as leader boards, stakes, and ropes.

The pros also organized club members and residents in their communities into committees to oversee scorekeeping, transportation, and a score of other service needs. Timms supervised installation of a portable press room in the golf car building, 120 new lockers, cable lines, and television towers. He walked the course each morning of the tournament with LPGA field staff personnel and arranged a buffet dinner inside the clubhouse following each day's round. He also rented tents to sell hot dogs, hamburgers, beer, and soft drinks. Two were placed on each nine and one near the clubhouse.

The gallery ate plenty of hamburgers and hot dogs, but another tent also attracted heavy crowds, surprising Timms. "A guy approached me about renting a tent to sell cups of yogurt, so I did. They sold like hot cakes."

People attending the LPGA Championship flooded the concession stands near the Bay Tree clubhouse.



Marty Connely said his club was paid \$15,000 each year by the LPGA for providing its course for Girl Talk Classic the last 3 years. He said the club also earned between \$6,000 and \$7,000 from food and beverage sales this year. The LPGA's Perna could not reveal the financial arrangements with clubs and golf course, only saying "it varies."

Houston's Newport Golf and Yacht Club did not receive any money for providing their course, but instead signed a 3-year contract for the Houston Exchange Club Classic. Pro Drew Gross decided he valued the exposure his fledgling recreational community would receive more than immediate money. "We're looking for the intangible dollars. We want people to buy property," he said. The costs of operating a tournament without a corporate backer is paid many times by persons who want to participate in the pro-am festivities. The Houston club charged \$250 each to 150 amateurs who played in the pro-am tournament, but offered several amenities. Each person received two free tickets for a cocktail party following the pro-am tournament where they

were given free drinks and hors d'oeuvres. The club also presented them with a handmade putter from St. Andrews, Scotland; a leather serving tray inscribed with the club logo; five tickets for the pro tournament and free parking. The club spent about \$60 for each person who made the \$250 investment.

The club must expect extra expenses during the tournament week, but the investment is needed to help earn a profit from food and beverage sales. Temporary persons must be hired in the dining area and club managers may also want security personnel to guard the clubhouse, locker rooms, and parking areas. Oak Hill Country Club in San Antonio said five additional employees were hired in its comptroller's office to help print ticket books so persons in the gallery could buy food and soft drinks. The tickets were necessary since clubs cannot accept cash from nonmembers, a spokesman said. Most clubs said their course maintenance crews worked overtime during tournament week, especially since the course must be mowed each day. None, however, said they needed to hire extra workers. □