

Taking the Industry's Temperature

When we decided last year to devote an issue of *Golfdom* to examining the state of the industry, we knew we should do some research to back it up.

But rather than asking a

bunch of questions about what kind of mowers you buy or how often you fertilize, we decided to take the oral temperature of the industry through a telephone survey.

So we hired an outside re-

search company to call more than 100 superintendents around the country to ask them about issues ranging from job security to electronic commerce. We also did an independent survey of the Pro-

PDI

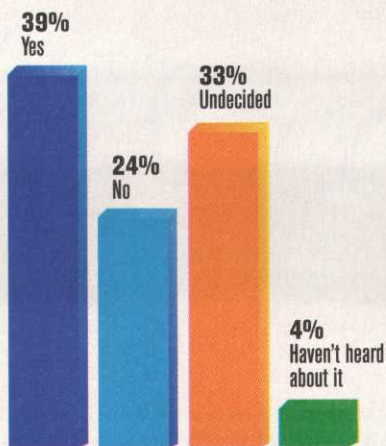
Is Half a Mandate Better Than None?

Calling the proposed Professional Development Initiative "a little controversial" is like calling Tiger Woods "kinda good." It has been the most hotly discussed political issue in the recent history of GCSAA and the profession.

In a nutshell, PDI would increase the standards required for Class A membership in the association through a combination of experience and educational requirements. The association's leadership believes that owners will respond to the higher standards and be more likely to seek out, hire and better compensate "branded" Class A members. An underlying theme is a general concern that without tougher barriers in place, job security and salaries may erode.

Opponents have decried the proposal as elitist and not in sync with the realities of a job where real-life experience and the ability to deliver results matter more than a degree. This type of criticism led the Membership Standards Resource Group, the body leading the development of the proposal, to relax the initial proposal to allow those without degrees to achieve Class A. Current Class A members would retain their standing under a grandfathering clause.

Do you support the final version of the proposed GCSAA Professional Development Initiative - or PDI?



The topic has dominated the "Talking it Over" online forum on the association's site, and postings from both sides have occasionally been nasty and personal. In an industry that prides itself on its sense of fraternity, the divisiveness has been painful to see.

Some supporters of the proposal have maintained that the opposition was a small but vocal group of boo birds who weren't reflective of the mainstream membership. In response, opponents have asked the association to survey the membership on the issue. To our knowledge, no survey results have been released by the association. Therefore, *Golfdom* included two questions about the proposal in its Superintendent State of the Industry Survey.

When asked if they support the final version of the proposal, 39 percent said "yes" while about a quarter said "no." A third said they were still undecided when the survey was done in October.

Several non-members and one Class A member (4 percent) had heard nothing about PDI. When non-members and non-voting members (Class B and C) are removed from the sample, the percentage of support goes up slightly (42 percent) while opposition decreases slightly (22 percent).

It's important to note here that mem-

fessional Development Initiative, something many superintendents asked us to do.

In this special report, you'll see more information about the 107 18-hole superintendents interviewed by the researchers. Should we have

included 9-hole superintendents or others in the study? Maybe. But for purposes of this first *Golfdom Report*, we wanted to focus on the core of the profession — and most perceive that to be 18-hole courses. Is this relatively

small survey statistically significant? We're told that's it's accurate to within +/- 10 percent. It's not perfect, but it's a good indicator of how people feel.

What is perhaps most interesting about the survey is

the lack of "shocking" results. Like most Americans, superintendents are generally comfortable with the way things are going. There were, however, a few surprises, as you'll discover when reading the report.

bers do not vote on PDI. First, the question on the ballot relates only to the changes in membership classification — not PDI itself. Any change in membership classification requires a two-thirds majority to amend the bylaws. Second, chapter delegates will cast the vast majority of votes on behalf of local members based on straw polls taken at meetings held this winter.

In short, *Golfdom's* survey can only give a sense of how members feel about the proposal, not how they would necessarily vote if they could vote.

The question raised by these results is whether support from less than half of those surveyed gives the association the "membership mandate" it has striven for since the leadership changes of the mid-1990s.

One of PDI's strongest proponents, Steve Cadenelli, CGCS at Cape Cod National GC in Brewster, Mass., agreed that it wasn't a landslide, but suggests that a change of this magnitude rarely has unanimous support. "Certainly we'd like to have a mandate, but I think 40 percent to 50 percent is a pretty good start," he says.

Cadenelli also wasn't surprised by the level of opposition. "We're asking people to meet a standard they've never had to reach before," he says.

Jim Black, a Class A member at Twin Shields GC in Dunkirk, Md., probably reflects the sentiments of many who oppose the initiative.

"I'm not so much specifically concerned with PDI, but I'm just generally dissatisfied with GCSAA," he says. "They focus too much attention on the big-budget certified guys at private clubs and not enough on the average guys at public courses like mine."

Black adds that he's concerned about the association's "obsession" with the image of the superintendent.

"I don't need someone in Kansas worrying about my

image," he says. "I work hard, and I'm proud of what I do. As far as I'm concerned, my image is the person I am 24 hours a day, not just when I'm on the job."

One respondent who originally said he opposed PDI has changed his mind since the survey — sort of. Craig Conner of Summit Chase CC in Snellville, Ga., decided to vote with his Georgia GCSA chapter in support of the proposal.

"I've learned some more about it and found out how much easier they've made it to get educational points," he says. "It's always been so difficult to get into the classes you needed (at the national conference). Now, I'd get five hours for the chapter meeting I just attended."

Conner may be among many who, once they finally learn full details of the final proposal, decide to give it their support. He doubts, however, that it will have the desired effect of bringing owners over to "our side."

"I don't think owners will ever really recognize us for what we are," he says.

"We're still pretty much viewed as hired help and the expectations keep growing. That's something I'd like to see GCSAA do something about."

Is it likely that the large number (one-third) of undecided will suddenly make up their minds to oppose the proposal? No one we talked to seems to believe so.

Nor had (at press time) any chapters confirmed that they planned to vote against the bylaw changes, while several individuals told us that their chapters had voted in favor.

So is this the "done deal" that some have suggested?

"The only thing that's a done deal is that our education programs are being reformatted to better meet member needs," Cadenelli says. "Everything else is up to the delegates in February." ■

— Pat Jones

If PDI passes, will it be good or bad for the profession?

