

CLUB RESPONSIBILITIES

By JOHN G. ANDERSON

WHAT are the duties and responsibilities of a golf club belonging to a state association? Granting that the latter body has not the slightest control over the business or other affairs of club management, has it any right, let us say for the sake of example, to demand that a club hold a championship on certain prescribed dates, regardless of the wishes of the members? Does membership in the parent body carry with it obligations which at any time may be imposed?

Let me say at the very beginning that these questions are not imaginary; they are real, and an answer to them may prove of actual value. Moreover, the above mentioned condition to my knowledge has on more than one occasion confronted state executive committees and associations in New England and elsewhere. I have talked with many golfers on this subject and from them could only quote what would be called prejudiced authority, for, rather unluckily, I have only struck those who could see but one side to the question, and who also felt that the arguing of the point was a sad waste of time. To me it was a strong lesson on the necessity of approaching such matters with a calm and open mind. Which I shall attempt to do.

Golf clubs are banded together into an association in order to advance the interests of the game, to avoid conflicts in tournament play, to provide for the honors won in the championships, to appoint responsible committees which shall attend to the handicapping, to formulate rules of local procedure, and other bits of necessary detail; in other words, to centralize a certain authority quite essential in all matters conducted on such a broad scale. Clubs not belonging to such state or district associations are generally looked upon as outcasts, and their members are not permitted to play in either local or national tournaments. There may be the usual exception which will prove the rule. Organization is regarded as essential.

But when and where does this bond of union between club and state association, seemingly composed of the strongest silken bands, change into an elastic cord which stretches to such an extent that it permits elements of discord to enter, and presents such radical differences of opinion that they affect the growth and the proper development of golf? When clubs take no active part in the district affairs, when they let it be known that they do not want a championship to be played over their course, when they do not back up the efforts of the state officials, then those clubs are lacking in a broader vision not only towards the game itself but in respect to their duty. A club cannot act as did the golfer who persisted in teeing

his ball a foot or so in front of the discs, and then, when, at the very last moment, his opponent remonstrated, he took a good look at the line of the discs and said, "By Jove, you're right. That disc is at least two feet back of this one. Here caddy, move that white thing up on the line." The club like the golfer must play the game.

There are many minor details in which the different committees of a club may materially aid the state or district associations. There never yet has been a year when the handicaps of the club members have been handed in anywhere near on time. Nor has there been a single instance where no mistakes have been made either in the spelling of the members' names or in legibility of figures. Yet these seemingly unimportant sins of commission or omission hold up the handicap lists for weeks, cause confusion during an open tournament, to those who are assigned to see to the welfare of the player, and often make the player himself an unwelcome degree of trouble. Take for instance one or two cases which have come to the notice of the state handicappers in Massachusetts. Out of every thirty names sent in at least two will be illegible in some way or another. The handicap figure might be either thirteen or eighteen, the man's name might be Brown or Browne, Burnes or Barnes, the initials of some of the Smiths might defy recognition; and yet what worse mistakes could be made? Similar mistakes as these presented themselves this year to the committee and it is a wonder that the list has been brought to such a degree of perfection. What is more, a certain amount of care should be taken in the preparation of the preliminary lists. More than one man goes to his office and having been entrusted with the preparation of the names to be sent to the state officials he sits down in his easy chair and virtuously dictates to his stenographer the handicaps of his club members. When all is over he gives the young lady the address and with never a further look, off the list goes to the proper authorities, with a number of mistakes in it which could easily have been avoided if a little extra time had been put on the work. I already have the confession of one man who said that he resorted to this scheme once and only once. He was hounded for a year because he sent in a certain golfer's handicap as twenty-four when it had been reduced to twenty-two! Then comes the worst offender of them all. The man or the committee who write out in long hand the names and the ratings of their members. I was present at several deciphering parties this spring and I know how trying it is to have to spend five, ten, or even fifteen minutes in trying to make out whether it is Mr. Hale or Mr.

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Hall, and whether his handicap is seven or four. I think that the very least the club can do is to see that their representatives send the official documents on typewritten sheets, and that there is the most careful scrutiny just before mailing. What a welcome relief it would be to the official handicapper! What a sign that the club recognized the necessity of cooperating with the parent body and was willing to do its share! The growing importance of golf makes these matters of minor importance loom up as never before, for one of the first requisites of a golfer is to be able to keep his score accurately, and in like manner and measure one of the first and most important duties of a club is to furnish accurate information about their members. The failure to do this shows a laxness in club management, a shiftlessness that is to be deplored, and an injustice to many.

The presence of a few delegates at the annual association banquet is where the clubs can quite easily fulfill an obligation. Take the situation as it stands today in Massachusetts. At the annual dinner we have from eighty to a hundred guests. We have in all about fifty clubs which are members of the state body and if this eighty odd were composed of one or two from each club there could be no cause for complaint. But at the banquet held last January the Commonwealth Country Club had twenty-four of its members present, which, considering their membership, was a splendid showing. Other clubs sent in more than their share to represent them, but at least half of the clubs belonging to the association were not represented at all. That was a shirking of a duty pure and simple. I believe that the different clubs should each year appoint two delegates with alternates to act for them at this annual meeting. I would go a step further and say that the money for the banquet tickets should be appropriated from the club treasury. This is not advised from a mercenary point of view by any means, but simply to show that the club is actively interested in the organization. Then we would have not only numbers and enthusiasm but a thoroughly representative assembly. New legislation would not provoke unjust criticism, for the members who attend could and should report to the proper officials the whys and wherefores. The newspapers, it is true, give the salient points but there are some important facts which often pass unmentioned.

In this connection it might be well to speak about the best time for holding the club's annual meeting. Our big state affair always comes early in January and I would think it wise for the club to have its meeting after that of the parent body, for the report of the golfers who had been present at the larger affair, would, perhaps, lead to the presence of still greater numbers the following year.

There is one other point which I would like to bring to mind. Throughout the different golfing districts conditions are such that there is necessity

for local rules which at times, to say the least, are far removed from the spirit of the game. A ball driven into a brook 135 yards from the tee should not be dropped back without penalty, yet that is a rule at one club that I know of, the reason being that the members in general are not good players. Their condition is not a bit different from the low handicap man who has to carry a ditch 175 yards or else plan to play short or go round as the case may be. The local rules should be made to bring out the best that the course affords, and the fewer of them the better. My point is that the Golf Committees of clubs which are in any doubt about what constitute the proper rules should send a statement of local conditions to the officials of the state body who would, I am quite sure, be only too glad to help out to the best of their ability. This condition applies almost wholly to the smaller and comparatively unknown clubs, but it is just as important for them to be up-to-date as it is for the larger. Then the visitor will not go away with the idea that golf rules are sufficient unto the members thereof, nor will he be filled with that scorn which one golfer had for a poorly run course which he happened to visit one summer. At the conclusion of his round the genial secretary came out to him and said, "Well, how did you find our greens today?" "Oh, it wasn't so very difficult," was the reply, "they had flags on them."

Lastly, there should be no selfish attitude when it comes to the question of accepting a championship date. There is a hardship imposed upon the members, it is true, but that is for only a few days, and a little figuring ought to prove to each one that it is for their own best interest to foster these championships. There would be very few people at the baseball games if there were no competition among the cities; there would be no forty thousand spectators at the big football contests, and there would be far less interest in the game of golf if it were not for these championships. The winning of the open last year by Mr. Ouimet brought converts to the sport by the hundreds, and a visit to these shores by great golfers always produces like results. So it ought to be a source of pleasure to the club members to have their course chosen for one of these events. The system in vogue across the water, where there are certain clubs which take the championships in a definite order, is most excellent, and the state organizations ought to have the same method. This would allow the clubs to look forward and plan with regularity and then the feeling, which has sometimes been displayed, because it has been thought that discrimination had been made in favor of certain clubs, would have no chance for expression.

Why not give this method a trial? It is needed in a number of districts. And remember that the further advancement of the game of golf depends largely upon the allegiance which a club has in its relation to the parent body.