

inside SocialGolf

Australia's Number One Golf Publication

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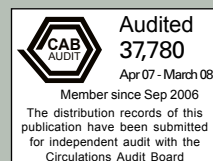
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Leave the Olympic bandwagon outside...

I'm not interested



Golf is up against smaller sports like Karate for inclusion in the 2016 games

nically without each other since thank you very much. The same cannot always be said for the 28, often minority, sports which are currently included in the Olympic programme who, to a large extent, have come to rely on the profile and financial support provided by the Olympics every four years for their survival.

It seems the push for golf in the Olympics is on once again. Statements by the Commissioner of the USPGA Tour, Tim Finchem, in recent weeks, have resurrected the regular, four yearly bandwagon of support for the game to be included on the programme for the Summer Olympics. Quite frankly I fail to understand why.

Golf was last played at the Olympics in 1904 - when it appeared for just the second occasion - and it appears both the game and the Olympics have survived very

It is true that golf is one of the most popular sports in the world given that it is played in over 100 countries but I'm not sure that is the prerequisite for it to become an Olympic sport. In a bygone era when the game did not enjoy the profile it now carries then a case could well have been argued for it to be accepted as an Olympic sport. But given the popularity it has earned, does it really need to be?

This weekend (May 10th) I will have the luxury of sitting at home in front

of a large screen watching the Players Championship from Florida, the USLPGA Michelob Ultra Open from Virginia and the Italian Open from Milan. Each week we have similar coverage of events worldwide - now essentially the minimum level of coverage of tournament golf and, as a result, the game benefits by being beamed into homes not only here in Australia but in millions of homes across every continent.

Each year, the game we all love and care for so much gets the opportunity to test the best against the best in events such as the four majors for both men and women, the World Cup of Golf, three men's World Golf Championships, one Women's World Golf Championship, the biennial Ryder and Presidents Cups, the Solheim Trophy and, for the amateurs, the Espirito and Eisenhower Trophies. These events offer ample opportunity for our game to be showcased to a worldwide stage on at least an annual basis and often more regularly. Why then is there this growing push for the inclusion of the game at the Olympic level?

Call me dumb, call me stupid, but this whole drive has a stigma of greed and arrogance about it. Recently the Augusta National Chairman Billy Payne was quoted as saying that he was a great advocate of golf being part of the Olympics and that he thought it belonged there. It was his next line that



brought most concern. "Once a sport is accepted into the Olympic program, it becomes entitled to distribution, through their committees, to some of the proceeds of finance generated by the Olympics," he added.

No-one can deny that Payne's heart is in the right place in terms of what he sees as the expansion of the game. The concerning factor amongst all of this however is that if golf were to gain a place in the 2016 Olympics then another minority sport which does not have the luxury of the exposure and popularity that golf enjoys would be lost to not only the Olympics but might indeed die a natural death as a result. Also, the funding that sport receives as a result of being included is a lifeline to a sport that might otherwise struggle to fund itself.

Some might ask just who is Billy Payne to argue the case for golf's

inclusion? That is a fair question but, to be fair, other than his role at Augusta, Payne's claim to fame is his significant involvement in the successful staging of the Olympics in Atlanta in the mid 1990's.

That may provide him the credentials to have his say but to my mind it does not strengthen or alter the facts. Tim Finchem's argument was in part that although the four major championships have long been considered golf's holy grail, the sport also has a place within the Olympic structure.

"Adding golf to the Olympics would provide another dimension to our competitive landscape," he said on a blog on the PGA Tour website recently. "I do not believe Olympic golf would have any effect on the stature or prestige of these other events but rather would provide another, complementary opportunity for our players to compete and demonstrate their skills on a global stage."

Tim, I need to ask you how many such stages do you want and at what cost to other sports? Sure Olympic golf may not effect the other prestigious events in the game but what about the impact it would have on other sports? The list of golf's global events, highlighted above, indicates the game's opportunity to do promote itself on a far more regular basis than every four

"It is true that golf is one of the most popular sports in the world given that it is played in over 100 countries but I'm not sure that is the prerequisite for it to become an Olympic sport"

years at the Summer Olympics. As each Olympics Games get underway, I sit back and watch sports such as volleyball, cycling, shooting, archery, equestrian and the like and enjoy the opportunity



Bruce Young Teeing Off

regular contributor

to have those sports explained in a manner that helps me understand their nuances and subtleties in a way that I seldom get otherwise.

It is one of the great ideals of the Olympics - namely that minority sports get their chance, in the main without competition from profile sports, to showcase to the world the intrigue of their own discipline. They then also, as mentioned earlier, gain even further benefit from their involvement via the monetary grants from funds raised during the Olympics.

The moral view aside, there also exists the logistics involved with golf being incorporated. Given that there are so many key events being staged in the time period in and around the Summer Olympics, how would

it be possible to schedule in a week in what is already a hectic mid summer schedule for the game? How many of the game's leading players would seriously make themselves available? They may say now that they would but without prizemoney and with demanding schedules to accommodate, it might be a different story. Mind you that is another argument completely.

It might be that there exists an argument for the amateur game to have a place on the Olympic programme but I for one feel that game and the Olympics would be better served by golf staying where it is and leaving the Olympic stage to those who deserve their '15 days of fame' every four years.

US Tour commissioner Tim Finchem (above) and Augusta Chairman Billy Payne both think golf should be in the Olympic fold



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