

THE RULE ABOUT EXPENSES FOR AMATEURS IN GOLF

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Why would it be wrong for an amateur to accept money for expenses entailed in going to a tournament?"

This is the essential question in a suggestion for a change in golf's amateur code made by the Women's National Amateur Champion, Mrs. Jay D. Decker, of Seattle, Wash., to the United States Golf Association.

In replying, the USGA has pointed out that:

1. The rule prohibiting expenses is at the heart of amateurism in golf. If a player receives money for playing golf, he cannot be considered an amateur in any true sense.

2. A change in the expense rule would inevitably create "a class of player who would spend his time going from tournament to tournament on 'expense' money supplied by others."

3. Only the better players would then be able to obtain expense money from outside sources, and this would be unfair to other amateurs.

Mrs. Decker, the former Anne Quast, is known as a scrupulous amateur and is a member of the USGA Girls' Junior Committee. Last year she played in only three tournaments and won two, the National and the Western Amateur, each for the second time.

Mrs. Decker's Letter

Her concern for the game prompted her to write the USGA in part as follows:

"To me, an amateur is one who plays golf for fun of it or for the joy and satisfaction of competition. Monetary remuneration for one's ability is the basic thing denied. This is the 'heart' of the amateur code.

"However, given the precise stipulations of that code, it seems to me that the USGA has created a policy which they cannot and do not enforce. It unwittingly adds an additional requirement for being an amateur: substantial means

to use to pay for the pleasure of playing in tournaments. Should the possession of money be a requirement of an amateur for competing in tournaments?

"There are, as I am sure you must be aware ways of 'getting around' the Rules, but to me the violation of the spirit of any set of rules is as important as the violation of the letter of them . . .

"This is written out of two primary concerns: (1) the many young golfers with ability who are denied major competition through lack of means, or who are forced to violate the established Rules in order to do so; (2) the USGA itself. It is the one real criticism voiced by many of the USGA."

The USGA Position

The USGA Executive Committee continues to believe that the rule prohibiting expenses (with a few limited exceptions) is sound, for the following reasons:

Fundamentally, as Mrs. Decker says, an amateur is one who plays golf for the fun of it and for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from competition. Necessarily, he puts the game in proper relation to things more important in his life; he does not devote most of his time to attaining proficiency in golf.

But those considerations cannot be made the basis of a workable code of amateur status. A definition of amateurism to be enforceable must be more specific. Thus, the fundamental principle of the Rules of Amateur Status is stated in terms of money, and provides that an amateur golfer is one who plays the game solely as a non-remunerative or non-profit-making sport.

Fair Competition

What is the purpose of attempting to have a workable, objective definition of an amateur, when, in the last analysis, the true test of amateurism is really one of the heart and spirit; i.e. subjective?

The purpose is to try to assure, as far as possible, fair competition for those who approach the game as amateurs, not only among themselves but against the professionals.

It is the firm conviction of the USGA Executive Committee that fair competition will not be assured if amateurs are permitted to accept expense money to engage in tournaments or exhibitions, or for personal appearances as a golfer.

Reasons Are Given

The reasons for this conviction are:

(a) A class of player would inevitably come into existence who would spend his time going from tournament to tournament on "expense" money supplied by others. Such players would make golf their primary interest—practically a vocation. As such, they should compete against professionals, not against those for whom golf is a secondary interest, played solely for pleasure.

(b) It is sometimes said that a number of "amateurs" now violate the existing rule on expenses. If this is true (and the USGA has no facts to establish that it is true), the same players might well continue to cheat if "expenses" were permitted; in fact, they would find it easier to cheat. For example, it would be a simple matter to accept money for first-class travel but use cheaper facilities.

(c) To define and to limit "expenses" effectively, fairly and uniformly would be an impossibility. Logically, "expenses" could include not only money for travel, board and lodging, but expenditures for golf clubs, balls, clothing, etc.; the terms might even be stretched to apply to income lost through absence from work, and this could get into imaginary areas. Even if "expenses" were limited to travel, board and lodging, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to fix the amount.

(d) In the long run, only the better amateur players would be able to obtain expense money from outside sources. This would be unfair to other amateurs of less proficiency. The latter group would soon tire of competing against the former and might well create a special class of amateurism all their own.

The soundness of the foregoing reasons is demonstrated by what has happened

in other sports where so-called amateurs are permitted to accept expense money. Not only have the evils anticipated by the USGA actually developed in those sports but the very character of the amateur group in those sports has changed over the years, and one evil cannot be cured by creating another.

The Natural Order

What it comes down to is really this: Most if not all of us are unable to do some things we'd like to do for want of funds with which to do them. That is the natural order. To distort the natural order in such an activity as golf is to distort both the activity and those who participate in it.

One final point. The Executive Committee is sometimes asked if it is really blind to "all that goes on" in the matter of financing of individuals' golf expenses. The USGA is not and does not attempt to be a policing organization. It has neither the desire nor the means to play detective on players holding themselves out as amateurs. The same principle applies to the Rules of Golf, which must be enforced primarily by the player himself. The USGA does not expect any player consciously to violate the Rules of Golf; neither does it expect any player to violate the Rules of Amateur Status. The game's code of personal honesty applies both on the course and off the course. The Executive Committee periodically hears rumors that unspecified players are violating the expense rule, but the Committee can act only on concrete facts. The Committee welcomes such facts and is prepared at all times to take appropriate action on them, as it has done in the past. Beyond that, the Committee cannot go.

Best Interests of Golf

The Executive Committee believes that amateur golfers can and should be proud of the standing of amateur golf in the eyes of the public, and of the consistent, firm policy of the USGA on which that standing is based. The Executive Committee hopes that all amateur golfers, upon reflection, will agree that the policy so long advocated by the USGA is in the best interests of golf and of both amateur and professional golfers.