



Hotly Contested

The issues that truly divide our country clubs

You can't watch the news these days without hearing about how divided America is. Don't worry, we're not here to talk politics. We concern ourselves with more important things, like how golf tournaments should be run. To get a sense of the landscape, we conducted a national survey of head professionals to learn how they conduct their club championships and member-guests. The following four questions were the most polarizing. There are no wrong answers; every club is different. In the spirit of tolerance, we simply want golfers to understand the other side. Because, hey, can't we all just get along? —MAX ADLER

HOW DO MEMBERS QUALIFY FOR THE CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP?

57% All flights sorted by handicap

26% 18 holes, stroke play

17% 36 holes, stroke play

► Sometimes it's a struggle to get enough people to bother entering. But when a lot want to win, there will be an uproar over how the bracket is set. At Kennett Square Golf & Country Club near Philadelphia, the 36-hole qualifier also crowns the year's stroke-play champ. Says head pro Ryan Nuechterlein: "We've debated shortening it to soften the commitment, but the belief is that over the course of two rounds, the best players will rise."

ARE JUNIORS ALLOWED TO PLAY IN THE CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP?

60% Yes

34% No

6% We play the tournament when most kids are away at school

► You bust your butt commuting and taking care of business, then you get knocked out by the 16-year-old who doesn't pay dues but plays 54 holes every day. The ruling on the issue has flip-flopped several times at Country Club of Darien in Connecticut, but the current regime is inclusive. Says head pro Cory Muller: "We want our championships decided on the golf course, not in the boardroom."

IS THE CHAMPIONSHIP FLIGHT OF THE MEMBER-GUEST HANDICAPPED?

73% Yes

27% No

► The saying about a member-guest is, don't win it twice. Apparently, Bob, who each year brings that mini-tour player with the plus-5 handicap (he says they're cousins?), didn't get the memo. One way to block ringers is to require that partners' handicaps add to a minimum. But most clubs just play with strokes. Says Dylan Thew, director of golf at Kiawah (S.C.) Island Club's Cas-sique course: "Unfortunately, we don't get the caliber of players required to make the top flight fair and equitable without handicaps."

THE MAIN SOCIAL EVENT OF THE MEN'S MEMBER-GUEST IS...

52% Spouses invited

38% Stag night

10% All members invited, even those not competing

► It's one night a year reserved just for steaks, cigars, chipping contests and dude-centric chatter. Then again, isn't more merrier? For guests traveling from afar, a dinner and dance function can help turn the tournament into a couples trip. At Richland Country Club in Nashville, they do both. Says head pro John Spelman: "One purpose of a member-guest is to showcase all the facilities of the club."

Illustration by John Ueland