



## ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES IN A PROPRIETARY CLUB

Colin Day identifies differing roles and potential conflicts in a Proprietary Club.

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Colin Day is currently the General Manager of Brickendon Grange Golf Club in Hertfordshire. This is a traditional private members club and Colin joined the staff there in October 1999. Before that, he had been the Secretary/Manager of a proprietary club for 5 years. That club was founded in 1993 and during those very formative years, Colin produced a report for the owners, which identified certain areas of conflict between the members and the management team at the club.

### INTRODUCTION

The management team, consisting of the owner, the secretary/manager and marketing director, had for sometime been experiencing difficulties with the captains of the club and their respective committees. Put simply, it could best be described as interference. Consequently, the owners asked the secretary/manager to prepare a report to look at a way forward. The following outlines the historical picture.

The club was founded in 1993 by the current owners. It was constructed on the site of a small run-down arable farm of some 240 acres. The make-up of the soil was clay and its yield of crops was very poor. The owners decided at this point, as did many farmers and landowners, to look at diversity and other avenues of business. This was about the time of the commissioned report by the Royal & Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, which pointed out a shortage of golf courses. As we now know this triggered the birth of many new courses. This golf club was visioned primarily as a business venture. It would be run by a management team working directly for the owners. Those in the management team would not be answerable to anyone else.

From the start, it was the owners wish that the club should resemble a members club. They wanted a club captain and a ladies captain to specifically look after competitions and handicapping. This would free up the club's management to concentrate on the primary role of building the business. With this objective, the membership was closely examined by the owners seeking suitable candidates from the newly recruited members to take on the positions of Club Captain and Ladies Captain. The owners clearly wanted people who they felt they could work with and who would not interfere with their business. Those selected were asked to form committees for the purpose of organising competitions, issuing and maintaining handicap records. This they did and did very successfully. By so doing it enabled the management team to concentrate on the day-to-day aspects of running the club.

In those early years, the first captains and their immediate successors co-operated very closely with the management team and found no conflict in their role of working with them or the actual owners of the club. They appeared to have a sound understanding of the needs of the business balanced with the needs of the membership.

However, after the early success, the feeling of understanding and co-operation began to evaporate. An air of a “them and us” feeling began to creep in. The Captains and those on their committees appeared to have little understanding of the needs of the business concept of running a golf club. They began to openly criticise the early captains and accused them of being ‘in the pocket’ of the owners.

This club, in common with many of the newer golf clubs, had a considerable mix of members from across the social strata. Many were first timers to the game of golf and it was their initial taste of golf club life. The club was clearly a ‘beginners club’, almost a nursery, where it attempted to educate newcomers to learn the rules of golf and the traditions of the game, and about club life. It was a stepping stone for those who were waiting to join private members clubs. That said, a high proportion of the founder members did not move on, although many had been on the ‘waiting lists’ of other golf clubs or were regular patrons of ‘pay and play’ courses. The attraction of joining this club was the opportunity of instant membership. A considerable number of those early pioneers have developed into very competent golfers and are exceptionally loyal supporters of the club. This was achieved in the main through the leadership qualities of the early captains. They had a vision, which the owners supported, and with the assistance, guidance and drive of the management team, the early objectives were attained.

Understandably in the early years of the club, groupings and cliques were formed. This is natural in any type of club. It is not something confined purely to golf. Some of the groups showed very little interest in those who were new to the club. It could be said that a number became almost anti newcomers. Several of the new members approached the secretary/manager to express concern at the somewhat unhelpful attitude being displayed by the committee members. The secretary/manager considered this should be addressed. He felt as a relatively new proprietary club and a business it could not afford to lose members. He held the view that the new members would not renew their subscriptions unless the management did something about it. The secretary/manager discussed, with the owners that all members should be looked upon as ‘customers’.

Golf is a ‘service industry’ and proprietary clubs are supplying a service to their members. They have no voting rights (as they would have in a private members club), and if they do not like what is offered they leave. After all, they are only holders of an annual season ticket. It is a consumers’ market, and this club is one of many in the area now available for anyone to join. The Secretary/Manager saw no real obstacle as to why the new members could not be made to feel happy and settle into the life of this club. The committees needed to be reminded of their role in a ‘your’ club. The new members require help and support - not an obstructive, unfriendly approach. The management team must monitor this and be on hand to try to resolve problems. They could no longer rely on the committee to help in the way they had in the past. The captains and their committees need to be aware that at least half of the membership do not wish to play in

organised competitions. They have joined generally to participate with their family or friends in social golf. Together with the newer members, they look to the secretary's office for help and advice with their problems. They do not recognise the captains or the committee structure in a proprietary golf club.

The Club has now reached the end of its fifth year of trading. Therefore, it is essential to carry out a complete review of the purpose and roles of the committees. This will ensure that there is a strategy to operate in terms of golf and business to progress into the next millennium and onwards through the next five years.

It has become difficult to recruit club members to take up the voluntary committee posts. Many have expressed the view that they cannot afford the time required on the various duties. To try to assist them and ease their burden, the owners purchased a new computer with a software package for competitions and handicaps, together with a touch-screen player-input leaderboard.

Although those on the committees complain they have not got the time to carry out their duties, the management team have noticed that they, (specifically the Gentlemen's and Ladies Golfing Committees) are trying very hard to involve themselves with the politics and day-to-day management of the club.

- ⌘ They question the decisions on advertising for visiting golf societies and the charges made.
- ⌘ They question the marketing strategy.
- ⌘ They admonish members of staff.
- ⌘ They question the decisions to hire and/or dismiss staff.
- ⌘ They question the decisions to furnish and decorate the clubhouse.

Many of these matters they record in the minutes of their meetings with less than supportive language. These can lead to confusion especially if not armed with the full facts of why decisions were taken. **This is not the role of members committees in a proprietary club.**

Proprietary golf clubs now make up almost 30% of the total of golf clubs in this country. The numbers have risen dramatically in the past 15 years. The neighbouring county of is one of the most over populated areas for golf clubs in the UK. It has more than one hundred registered clubs while there are forty-nine locally. Fifteen of these are within a 15-mile radius of the club, so there is no shortage of clubs. At present, there are not sufficient people to serve the needs of all these clubs. It is an extremely competitive market.

The club's policy is to be one step ahead of the competitors when looking after and taking the business forward. The management team continually strives to explore all avenues to obtain maximum income. They need to match what is happening in the market place and, if necessary, better it. The activities of other clubs are carefully monitored. There is a need to build and maintain a full portfolio of golf societies and to actively encourage green fee visitors to use the facilities and regularly return to the club.

This is not restricted to just the summer months. Autumn and winter ‘specials’ are promoted. There is a generous advertising and publicity budget for advertising both in local newspapers and in the national golfing press. This is the agreed management strategy but the captain and his committee do not agree with it and appear to be doing all in their power to undermine the adopted approach.

The time now appears right to make some fundamental changes. This document, although primarily produced to outline the difficulties of interface between the management team and the committees, could be adapted to form a policy document. It could form the bedrock to all future discussions with those identified to become captains over the next few years.

It is crucial that everyone at the club should be made aware of the fundamental fact that the owner as Proprietor and Chairman of the Management Committee, creates policy, goals and objectives for the business (the Club). The Secretary/Manager on your behalf leads the operational staff on a day-to-day basis and manages the club within the policy guidelines. The management team must be allowed to manage. They are full time professionals employed to do so. Obviously, suggestions and constructive criticism are welcomed. However, the management team must reserve the right to make the ultimate decision on all matters and to follow the correct path for the overall benefit of the business.

**The following paragraphs would form the basis of a booklet to be distributed to all elected to the position of vice captain at the club - as recommended at the conclusion of this report.**

The role of captain in a golf club traditionally carries a considerable amount of kudos. It should be viewed as a great honour to be chosen and elected to that office. It therefore should be understood that it holds a mark of respect in the golfing world. In a Private Members club, the position can be extremely onerous. The Captain may carry the mantle of Chairman of the Club for the year that he is in office. In effect, he is the Managing Director responsible for all matters. That said, many clubs have moved to the position of having a two-tier committee structure. These in the main consist of a Management Committee or Board of Directors. They have a Chairman who holds the position for at least a minimum of three years and the others who make up the committee or board are expected to have a specialist interest or professional qualification for the post they hold. The captain in such clubs purely looks after the golfing and social activities in the club. He no longer holds executive power during his year in office.

The role of captain at this proprietary golf club certainly does not entail anything like that. We recognise the need to have a captain; otherwise, the club would appear to be out of sink to those outside. We view the captain to be the “notional head of the membership”. Our captains should be ambassadors for the club. We view them as the conduit between the members and management. Their fundamental role is to organise the golfing year and any social functions akin to those events. All other matters are the sole responsibility of the management.

The overall purpose of this document is to illustrate the roles and responsibilities of the Captains of the club. Hopefully, it will enable those in office to make judgements and guide their committees along what is expected and acceptable to the owner. Equally, when a member is being sought to become elected as a vice-captain they will be encouraged to read this document. It will allow them the opportunity to see what is expected of them. If they foresee problems in carrying out their duties of captain, it will allow them to stand aside.

## **METHOD OF SELECTING THE VICE CAPTAINS**

It is imperative for the smooth running of this Club that the right members are performing the role of captains. Otherwise, there can be conflict. That cannot be healthy for the members, or the management. Our current method of selecting the captains actually commences with the selection of the vice-captains, for our rules state that the person selected vice-captain will automatically progress to captain.

There are many varied methods of selecting vice-captains. On speaking with the owners of other proprietary clubs, it would appear that they have a big say in the selection process. At present, this is not the case at this club.

Having considered all options, it is important that the owner becomes more involved in the selection process. It is only right and proper. The first three captains were selected by the owner and they worked very hard for both the members and the management.

One method used by proprietary clubs is for a small sub-committee of past captains to be appointed who meet to discuss the next vice-captain. This sub-committee would also include the current captains and vice captains. They would select three people, who need not have served on any committee of the club, whom in their opinion would make worthy captains. The names of these three are then forwarded to the owner who in turn considers them and finally appoints the vice-captain. This works very well in those clubs which use it and accordingly it is recommended that this policy for selection is used at this club.

## **THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CLUB CAPTAIN**

In normal circumstances the Captain will have served as Vice-Captain during the preceding year and invariably will have been a past member of the committee. We hope that he will be aware of the role of the committees in the club, and the wishes and needs of the owners will already be in his mind when taking up office.

The owners of the club will expect them to:

1. Be responsible for forming and chairing a small committee of gentlemen to look after competitions and handicaps for gentlemen members. (A schedule of the role of this committee, known as the gentlemen's handicap/competition committee is outlined later in this document)
2. Liaise regularly with the secretary/manager on all matters appertaining to competitions and handicaps. It is very important for the well-being of the club that there is good communication between both.

3. The fixture list for the gentlemen's section should normally be carried forward each year without change. It will be the sole responsibility of the secretary/manager to draw this together bearing in mind the needs of all sections within the club as well as the needs of the owners.
4. See that the competitions played by the gentlemen are run according to the rules of golf and the local rules of the club. To see that the Confederation of National Golf Unions (CONGU) handicapping system is applied correctly. (These will usually be carried out by the competition secretary or handicap secretary, assisted if necessary by the secretary/manager of the club.)
5. Attend with the secretary/manager of the club, or appoint a representative to attend, meetings within the county as a delegate representing the club.
6. Attend the general committee meetings of the club and ensure that all items requiring policy decisions are brought to its notice. Equally, decisions made at the general committee must be cascaded back to the handicap/competitions committee. (This is extremely important and has not always happened.)
7. Attend informal ad-hoc meetings with the owners, the secretary/manager and ladies captain. (Confidential matters may well be discussed at some meetings, which should not be discussed with anyone not present.)
8. Attend and play in as many matches and competitions as practical. In matches they will usually lead the club side and be expected to speak after the dinner held at the conclusion of such matches.
9. Attend as many social functions and events organised by the club as practical.
10. Liaise regularly with the ladies captain on all matters appertaining to golf and social events in the club.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR CAPTAINS TO HAVE AN ENJOYABLE YEAR

### DO'S

Use your year as Vice-Captain to see what is expected of you. Make notes of anything you think is important.

- ✎ Obtain a list of events at the club as early as possible and make a note of any major events.
- ✎ Captain's Day entails a considerable amount of forward planning and work on the day. Ensure that you have a working committee who is willing to undertake such background work. The Vice-Captain plays an important role in such matters to ensure you have a good day. Do not leave everything to the last minute. The Secretary/Manager and staff are very willing to help but they need to be asked.
- ✎ Divide matches with your Vice-Captain before the start of the year and make sure you are present wearing your Captain's blazer at the most important ones. Otherwise, a past captain should be asked to stand in for you.
- ✎ Ensure that you use your reserved tee off time of 9.00am on Saturdays regularly. Otherwise, if not required please give it back to the Reception as early as possible. You

should also use this time when playing in weekend competitions. By so doing it will make members aware that they are expected to make way for the captain and partners.

- ✎ Support the Ladies, the Seniors and Junior sections.
- ✎ Involve yourself in mixed competitions and matches.
- ✎ You should be a frequent visitor to the bar and support the club at its social events. By so doing you will be able to mix with other members and answer any golfing questions they may have.
- ✎ It will cost you money but spend only what you can afford. You receive a generous allowance from the owners of the club but this will not cover everything.
- ✎ Forget playing golf with your friends for a year and play with as many members as possible.
- ✎ Remember not to get involved in the day-to-day management of the club. You have no authority to chastise staff. They work for the Secretary/Manager, who in turn is answerable direct to the owners. This is an extremely important message to get across to those who serve on your committee.

## DON'TS

- ✎ Do not think of trying to leave your impression on the club. You have no executive management authority at this club. Concentrate on golf and the social side, and enjoy yourself.
- ✎ Do not get drawn into the politics of the Club. It is not the role of the captain in a proprietary club. You should also steer your committee away from all of this.
- ✎ Do not give any more cups or try to add any additional competitions into the calendar without consulting and getting the approval of the management.
- ✎ Do not tell your partner or your friends they can use your reserved parking space when you are not at the club. This is a privilege for you only when you are at the club and must never be abused.
- ✎ Finally, don't take the job on if you are not prepared to work hard all year and give up other things. The job done well is time consuming at all clubs and will cost you money but only a small number of members will ever get the chance, so think hard before taking it on.
- ✎ Above all else, we would expect you to enjoy your year in office

## TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE GENTLEMEN'S HANDICAP/COMPETITIONS COMMITTEE

**Title:** The Gentlemen's Competition and Handicap Committee.

**Purpose:** To be responsible for the organisation and efficient running of all golf competitions and matches. To see that handicaps are adjusted according to the handicap rules in Clauses 12 and 19 of the Standard Scratch Score and Handicapping Scheme 1983 (as amended). The Secretary/Manager will undertake the day to day responsibilities under Clause 15.

**Responsible to:** The General Committee and ultimately the Owners of the club.

### Main duties:

1. To review annually the Club's fixture list, and to make recommendations to the General Committee on any changes thought necessary.
2. To liaise with the Secretary/Manager who will draw up the Competitions calendar each year and to advise them of any proposed changes.
3. To oversee the running of all Men's and mixed club competitions, and to agree as necessary the conditions of entry, tees to be used, dates and starting times for each.
4. To deal with all disputes on all matters appertaining to all golf competitions and handicaps.
5. To see that all arrangements are made for the monthly medal/stableford presentations, the annual prize giving and the honours boards are kept up-to-date.
6. If necessary, carry out an annual review of handicaps.
7. To agree the dates and venues of all Men's and mixed club matches with the Secretary/Manager
8. To liaise with the member(s) responsible for the junior section to ensure that appropriate competitions, matches etc, are arranged and to obtain the approval of the management for any special requirements.

### THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LADIES' CAPTAIN

As with the Captain of the Club, in normal circumstances the Ladies' Captain will have served as Ladies' Vice-Captain in the preceding year and will have been a member of the ladies' committee. Also we hope that she will be aware of the role of the ladies' committee and the traditions of the club together with the wishes of the owners will already be in her mind when taking up office.

The owners of the club will expect her to:

1. Be responsible for the running of the ladies' section along with an elected committee and officers. The ladies' captain will take the chair at their committee meetings and at the end of year meeting of the ladies' section.



2. Liaise with the secretary/manager on all matters appertaining to the ladies' section. It is very important for the well-being of the club that there is good communication between both.
3. See that all competitions played by the ladies are run according to the rules of golf and the club local rules. See that the ladies' golf union (LGU) handicapping system is applied correctly. The ladies' competition secretary and handicap secretary will normally conduct this.
4. Attend or appoint a representative to attend, meetings within the county as delegate representing the club.
5. Attend the general committee meetings of the club. To ensure that decisions affecting the ladies' section are cascaded to her committee. This is extremely important, which has not always happened.
6. Attend ad-hoc informal meetings with the owners, the secretary/manager and club captain. Confidential matters may well be discussed at these meeting and it is important that details are not discussed with anyone who was not present at that meeting.
7. Liaise regularly with the club captain.
8. The fixture list and social calendar for the ladies' section is usually carried forward each season and the ladies' captain should liaise closely with the secretary/manager to ensure that this is achieved.
9. See that the ladies' locker room is kept clean by the staff and report any failings to the secretary/manager.
10. Neither the ladies' captain nor any member of her committee are authorised to admonish members of staff. She should not try to get involved in the day-to-day running of the club. Her mandate is purely to look after competitions and social events akin to ladies' golf.

## TO SUMMARISE

We want the captains to enjoy their year in office and not be bogged down with attempting to run the club. That is the job of management. Their task is to set up and run golf competitions for the enjoyment of those members who want to take part in those events.

The secretary/manager will be tasked by the owners to sit down with each vice-captain just prior to them taking over the reigns as captain to brief them on specifics within this document and expand on any areas of uncertainty.

## RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the principles of this document are agreed as a way forward. The issue of interference by the captains and their committees urgently needs to be addressed as they are interfering too much with the day-to-day management. This cannot be allowed in a proprietary club. They do not have the skills and do not have sight of the "big picture". This report, in a "draft" booklet format, could be used as a reference document by those selected to become vice-captains.

A booklet entitled “Welcome to the Club” would be given to all new members. It would contain specific details about the owner, the secretary/manager, the house manager, the head greenkeeper, the golf professional and the course marshals. It would outline the main responsibilities and roles of these people. Also the competitions and handicapping system at the club would be explained. It would serve as an aide memoir to all our members.

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