

Club and Divisional Championships

Why aren't we playing 36 holes?

That's a really good question but before I provide the rationale behind the current arrangement, please allow me to provide a little club background and to put forward a simple assumption regarding the potential winner of the Club Championships.

The assumption: Realistically, only category 1 golfers (handicap 5 and below) should win the gross competition, given the nature and format of the event; this then considerably narrows the field. The history: Traditionally, Shifnal Club Championship *has* been played over 36 holes and, unfortunately, has been turning into a non-event. Over the past 15 years, twenty or so golfers put their names down for the competition, play the first 18 holes and then, due to a poor score or some other reason, do not play the second round. As the years have passed and this practice became common place and accepted, the club found itself in the embarrassing situation of having more club officials present at the end of the competition than participants; the Captain of the day congratulating the Club Champion on his victory in front of only a handful of people. Thus making what is arguably the most prestigious competition in the club, something of a farce. Clearly this was not an acceptable state of affairs and it was recognised that the profile of the competition needed to be enhanced.

To further underpin and demonstrate the endemic culture within our club regarding 36 hole competitions, one only has to look at our 36 hole **nett** events - Halwell Cup and President Bowl. This year the attrition, or drop-out rate, for both competitions was over 50%. This is for a **nett event** where you have more chance to make a recovery from a poor first round score, by utilising your handicap allowance over the two rounds.

So what made you change the club championships to be played over 18 holes?

Obviously the lack of participation was a major driving force for change. Additionally a straw poll was taken across the category 1 club golfers, asking if they would prefer to play 18 or 36 holes, to which there were three general responses. A minority wanted to play 36 holes, while the majority of responses fell into two distinct categories: younger category 1 golfers only wished to play 18 holes because they did not want to spend 10 hours at the golf club (demonstrating a social and cultural change) while the older cat 1 members felt that 36 holes was too much of a physical exertion in one day, or indeed over a weekend. The results of this poll were significant factors in reducing the format to 18 holes.

You mentioned raising the profile of the event?

Yes I did, I'm glad you're taking an interest..... There were two things the committee set about doing regarding the club championships, which were one, to raise the profile and two, to increase participation. I'm sure you are going to ask some questions which will allow me to broaden out further.

Why do we have to qualify?

This is actually part of raising the profile of the competition. To have qualifying events through the summer - with results posted up on the board - ensures the general membership is aware of the event; it also creates a point of interest in groups where some players have qualified and 'rib' their playing partners who have not made 'the cut'! It may be argued

(tenuously) that by having to qualify in an 18 hole medal, the championships *are* actually over 36 holes. However given that the qualifying score and championship score are not accumulative, this argument is actually flawed but could be used as a point of 'principle'?

Why have divisional championships and not just division 1?

Remember the assumption that the club champion will realistically be a cat 1 golfer, which means a relatively narrow field. Including the three divisions in the day is part of increasing participation (having a clubhouse full of members to celebrate the event) while at the same time helping to raise the profile of the competition once more. We want the day to be more inclusive but we also recognise there is some risk in this strategy. Consider this: all cat 1 golfers have a poor day or the 'heavens open' while they are playing for example and a category 2 player returns the lowest gross score on the day. A cat 2 golfer as club champ?.... That's a committee risk but my summary to this 'note' may provide some food for thought for you to reflect upon.

As an aside, you should know that there are gross and nett prizes for each division.

Why don't we have an easier qualifying score?

We don't want the club championships to simply be just another 'medal'. The divisional targets are deliberately stiff and aimed at capturing the best **gross** players from each section. Players who make the qualifying score will quite rightly have a sense of achievement. However the overriding thought to retain is that the club championship is fundamentally a **gross event**. Category 1 golfers 'only' have to play to their handicap - or above in many cases - to qualify, which should make for a high calibre and competitive field.

I'll never make the 'cut' in my division....

Now that is a really good observation, particularly if you are at the 'top' end of your division (and a remark the match committee have both sympathy and empathy with!). But ask yourself this: how many times have you entered the club championships in the past? Were you one of the twenty? Were you one of the 8 to play in the second round? Or did you not enter because you knew that, realistically, you never had a chance of winning a gross competition playing against golfers off of handicaps 5 or lower? The prizes for all of our in year medal competitions are given to the best nett scores, with the lowest gross score being passed by, or at best, getting a mention 'in dispatches'. The Club Championship is the only gross club competition we have and should be unashamedly aimed at the gross players (including those in each division as the event has expanded to embrace).

Everyone has 12 medal rounds throughout the summer to make the cut. As a point of note, last year a member playing off 12 in the vets' cup, shot the division 1 qualifying score of 76, which proves it can be done (refer to Mr Dave Shannon).

What is the wild card all about?

Wild Cards are given to players who have made the qualifying score in their division and as the season has progressed, become better players (or their handicaps have at least reduced!) and have moved into a lower division. On the day of the club championships 'wild cards' clearly cannot go back into the division they qualified in, because their handicaps have been adjusted. However it would be churlish to exclude them from the event, given that

they have made a qualifying score 'in season' and so they are given a 'wild card' to play in their new division. In reality, unless the handicap committee have got it terribly wrong, a 'wild card' would not be challenging to win the gross prize in that division but would have a good opportunity for the nett prize.

If I don't qualify, can I play golf on the day of the championships?

The course will be closed for preparation in the morning of the competition and tees will be blocked off to accommodate the event. There will be the opportunity to play later on in the day but why not come and walk the course to support those who have qualified? You could perhaps caddie for a playing partner and hold him to a return favour when you qualify next year and he doesn't!!...

Summary:

Following the change to an 18 hole event last year, 68 players participated in the championships and the clubhouse was full to witness the 'crowning' of the Club Champion – the winner even has a car parking slot for the year in recognition of the achievement. This year 72 players have already qualified and there are still two qualifying events remaining. Nevertheless the match committee support the notion that the club championships should be played over 36 holes but, at the same time, recognise it is a question of balance and providing the right format to benefit both the membership at large and Shifnal Golf Club itself. At this time, an 18 hole qualifying medal event and an 18 hole medal round on championship day, meets that requirement. However, this is not to say that adjustments cannot be made. We recognise that a 36 hole format usually provides the best golfer, after all the more holes you play the better chance you have of really finding out who is the best 'gross' golfer right? Take the recent British Open for example. After three days and 54 holes, the amateur Paul Dunne was leading the field at 12 under, so clearly he is a better 'gross' golfer than Spieth, Rose, Mickelson, Fowler et al.

Okay, so sometimes this may not hold true..... and also highlights the difficulties of organising a competition and 'getting it right'.

I hope that many of your questions have been answered with regard to the club championships but as always, your committee members are happy to chat and provide greater granularity to decisions made on behalf of the club. I would ask though, that you try not to engage them when they are playing in a competition – they also want to focus on their game and play well too!....

Ad fin

Finally on behalf of the general committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank both Nick and Anne Peters, for their kind generosity and sponsorship to the Club Championships, by providing a post play meal for each of the participants – Wild Cards 'an all.....