

## ***Who's ruining (sorry - running) women's golf?***

### **Welcome Cambridgeshire**

Immediately I arrived at Abbotsley I threw out the hands of friendship to the women of the Cambridgeshire county association – the Cambs and Hunts Ladies County Golf Association – to give it its full name. I gave them free use of the golf course every time they wanted it for county matches and county practices, both weekday and weekend. I coached their teams and juniors either free or at absurdly subsidised charges. We even had a scheme where any first or second team county player could come free of charge at Abbotsley and play with other county players. I did everything I could to support them. And that extended not just to Abbotsley, but to the Cromwell course, our par-3 course and also Cambridge Meridian. In Abbotsley and Cambridge Meridian they had two excellent courses of county green and championship standard that would accommodate and support their county whenever required – with courtesy of the course – weekday or weekend. We hosted their County Mixed Championship, giving up the course free of charge for 36 holes on a summer weekend. I don't believe I could have done more. I don't believe many counties experience such generosity or support from any club.

### **Keeping out outsiders**

But Cambridgeshire as a county – not just in golfing terms – is renowned for its unfriendliness. It has more counties adjoining it than any other in England and the people seem to be on a mission to keep out those they perceive as outsiders. One town in the Fens even has a special club for outsiders. I read about it in the Daily Telegraph and it was featured on TV. Not a golf club – but just a club for people moving into the area who couldn't make inroads into this extraordinary county. They say you have to live in East Anglia for five generations before you are accepted or feel part of the place.

Anyway, the Cambs and Hunts Ladies' County Golf Association displays just this same attitude. Their rules were quite extraordinary. Their membership rules – going back to the early 1990's or before - clearly stated that you couldn't be a member of Cambs and Hunts if you were **a member of a club** in another county. Not just a member of another county – but a member of a club in another county. They would, of course, waive this if they felt like it. But the rule was clearly there, showing their extraordinary attitudes to anyone with a link outside the county border. I am sure this rule was unique to Cambridgeshire.

What hit me was the realisation that Cambridgeshire would do everything necessary to keep outsiders from their golf. In 2000 I decided to get back my amateur status, with the hopes of being able to enjoy my own golf for a few years. I made an application to the R and A in 2000, hoping to get back my amateur status for 2003. It then dawned on me that, as an honorary member of Surrey, I would be a complete golfing outcast in Cambridgeshire. Almost all counties have a rule that people can be associate members of their second county. In other words if you have a main allegiance to one county but also belong to a club in another county you can represent that club in team matches. It is of course logical. Many people belong to clubs in two counties and why shouldn't they play for each club? Some may be working away from home; others at university, some with a strong allegiance to one county but living in another and so on.

But Cambridgeshire, naturally, would do everything possible to keep out wicked outsiders. Had we also affiliated to Bedfordshire – as our men have – things would have been different. But I found myself in the absurd situation where I would own three clubs in the county and yet be stopped from representing any of the three clubs in the Cambridgeshire leagues. This obviously applied to many people. Almost half our lady members at Abbotsley live in Bedfordshire or Hertfordshire and several belonged to clubs in other counties.

The whole thing was discussed at length by the Cambs and Hunts ladies' committee, who obviously realised that their excluding rules were off the wall. The proposed rules changes were taken to the 2002 Cambs and Hunts AGM, with the assumption that the rules would be changed and "outsiders" accepted playing for their clubs. But not a bit of it!

## **That Cambs and Hunts AGM**

In November 2002 I received a letter from the Secretary of Cambs and Hunts asking if we might be able to host their county championship for three days, a Friday, Saturday and Sunday in May within the next couple of years. "Yes, of course, I'll be delighted to give you courtesy of the course for a weekend. Yes, of course you are welcome." The whole thing would have cost us £2,000 or more in green fees. But I am there to support women's golf. Yes, of course. Welcome.

But my mind and attitude was soon to be changed within the month. I can do no better than to record the minutes of their AGM, which read as follows:

Madam Secretary stated that it was hoped that Associate Membership would allow a few ladies who are members of more than one club and are members of another County to represent that Cambs & Hunts club and play in some Divisional and Foursomes competitions. She added that Associate Members would pay the same fees as Full Members, and would be allowed to play in all County events with the exception of playing in the County Teams (County week, 2<sup>nd</sup> Team or Veterans' Team) and could not play in the County Championships. Thus they could represent their club even if a member of another County but could not represent Cambs & Hunts – the followed current ELGA regulations. ...

Mrs. Jane Honey (Links, [Newmarket GC]) queried if Associate Members would be allowed to represent Club in Scratch League and it was confirmed that this was the plan, although finer details still to be decided. Mrs. Honey expressed concern that the day might come when a Scratch Team could consist of all Assoc. Members and felt some limitation should be set.....

.... Mrs. Jan Stockham (Gog Magog) stated that, speaking for herself, she understood that matter had arose following a letter to ELGA from Vivien Saunders, who was about to regain her Amateur Status and was looking to play in county events for Abbotsley/Cambridge Meridian. Being a Life Member of Surrey, she would need such membership to play in Cambs and Hunts. **Mrs. Stockham felt uncomfortable with the situation**, especially with proposed threat regarding transfer of clubs to Bedfordshire. On behalf of Gog Magog, Mrs. Stockham commented that the move would assist smaller clubs who had fewer members to enter and field better teams in Jean Wilkinson, Grace Norman and Scratch League, but, in fact, Gog Magog would have biggest advantage with lots more Silver Division players with membership of 2 clubs. ELGA rules state that ladies must opt in writing as to which Club/County they would represent. Gog Magog accepted that everything grows and can change, but felt that this change was wrong. Jean Wilkinson Trophy donated in 1983 to give more single match play practice for County Players and others, and this move would defeat this original purpose. **Gog Magog had given tremendous support to Cambs & Hunts over years and did not want to wreck this now.....**

....On the question of the letter from Vivien Saunders, Mrs. O'Grady confirmed that the matter had been considered very carefully and, although, they had some concerns as mentioned by Mrs. Stockham felt the idea had advantages for our Association and members and therefore warranted consideration. Mrs. Ramsay [Secretary] pointed out that the matter had been fully discussed at 3 full Committee Meetings, with clubs having the opportunity to voice their opinions, and there had been no negative feedback until it had

been accepted as a proposition for AGM. **The proposition was then put to the vote and defeated with a large majority against.**

Yes, defeated – keep out these wicked outsiders and these good golfers!

Frankly I couldn't imagine the President or Chairman of any other county association allowing someone to personalise the issue in this way, at an AGM, particularly with the object of the conversation not there. But Cambridgeshire is a law unto itself.

### **So what happened next?**

Needless to say, Cambs and Hunts are not getting any more courtesy of the course at Abbotsley, Cambridge Meridian or the Cromwell Club and we won't be hosting the women's county championship at a weekend! They don't deserve my support – or anyone else's.

Abbotsley and Cambridge Meridian brought forward this Associate Membership issue to the 2003 ELGA AGM. Cambs and Hunts of course opposed it. Now at last in 2005 this sort of "them and us" attitude has been kicked into touch by ELGA and by other counties. Now every county, including Cambridgeshire, has to have associate membership. Anyone working away from home, away at university, or just a member of more than one club in different counties can represent both her clubs.

**Mrs. Jan Stockham** was rewarded for her attitudes of keeping out the outsiders by being made President of Cambs and Hunts. Under her leadership Cambs and Hunts have fought this issue to the bitter end, still viciously opposing it three years later, and still cruelly telling me that I am only welcome in Cambridgeshire if I resign from Surrey. As she so succinctly put it, "**Gog Magog had given tremendous support to Cambs & Hunts over years and did not want to wreck this now.**"

The rigged up voting system in Cambs and Hunts gives Gog Magog far more votes at the AGM than any other club, hence everything revolving round them. Fortunately the women at Cambridge University have a wonderful golfing home at Royal Worlington in Suffolk, for they certainly aren't welcome in Cambridgeshire – unless they can be incorporated into Gog Magog!

The Government established one of the country's largest asylum seekers' centres just outside Cambridge. The hope, I am sure, is that the inmates might come across the ladies of the Cambs and Hunts Ladies' County Golf Association, realise how they despise outsiders and struggle to escape back home.

That's what I've done and bought a house in Surrey to escape their disgraceful attitudes towards good players and outsiders!