



THE FINANCIALLY STRESSED BONDI GOLF AND DIGGERS CLUB HAS AN OFFER FROM EASTS GROUP TO BUILD A NEW INDOOR POOL, A CARPARK, LICENSED BAR, RESTAURANT AND AN UPGRADED 9-HOLE, PAR-3 LAYOUT ON THE CROWN LAND SITE.

‘If there are fewer public-access courses for beginners to learn the game, then we can forget about growing the sport’

They like the environmental element,” says Blunden. “But from time to time, hard decisions are going to be made. And if you don’t own your land, well then you’re really vulnerable.”

What golf’s stakeholders can do is be ready for any government review of land usage; and to clearly and eloquently state the case for golf. The two largest state associations have woken up to this point.

In June, Golf Victoria released a report that quantified in dollar terms what golf brings to its state through business, tourism and health. It said golf was played by more than 300,000 Victorians and makes an \$849 million contribution to the economy, supporting 6,900 jobs.

Golf NSW is preparing a similar report on the financial, economic, social and health benefits. However, it will extend into the amount of money that clubs raise for charity. The intention is to build up a bank of information to prosecute the case why golf courses are important and shouldn’t be carved up.

THE FIGHT AHEAD

AUSTRALIAN GOLF DIGEST’s biennial Top 100 ranking is focused on the more appealing golf courses across the continent.

But that’s not to say we look down upon the unfashionable municipal and rural courses that would never pass muster in a veritable beauty contest. On the contrary, we acknowledge the important role that public-access facilities play by allowing social golfers the opportunity to learn and master the game.

It would hurt the golf industry if public-access courses were to disappear. Fewer golf courses would inevitably mean the sport becomes more expensive. That would lead to fewer people taking up the game. As a result, equipment manufacturers will have fewer consumers from which to sell products and, consequently, smaller marketing budgets to promote their brands. Golf publications – print and digital – will have fewer advertisements and therefore less editorial content to entertain readers.

Soccer mums who have never touched a golf club are unlikely to lose any sleep if golf were to suffer. They’re happy so long as little Johnny or Jilly has a safe place to play with all the other little kiddies on a Saturday morning.

It’s startling to think that golf may have to cede territory to a sport like soccer. Throughout the 20th century, the pioneers of Australian golf showed great foresight to discover suitable land across our capital

cities on which to build golf courses.

For the better part of last century, the soccer community was engaged in proxy wars where century-old ethnic tensions were allowed to fester and boil over on the football pitch: Italians vs Croatians vs Greeks vs Macedonians vs Hungarians vs Maltese. You only had to follow the National Soccer League to realise that local football was a basket case.

Golf’s governing bodies must acknowledge a big Australia will impact the scale of golf. Golf Australia can blow its own trumpet about ‘Grow The Game’ initiatives. But if there are fewer public-access courses for beginners to learn the game, then we can forget about growing the sport.

As sad as it may sound, golf’s stakeholders must consider how to make the most of fewer facilities. So when a club like Parramatta closes, it’s incumbent upon Golf NSW to lobby government for some sort of compensation that should go towards improving neighbouring clubs such as Cumberland, Fox Hills and Stonecutters Ridge where many of the Parramatta members have relocated.

Golf is a hard sell when only six per cent of the population play the game and just two per cent are club members. But golf needs somebody fighting at the coalface.

And it has to come from the stakeholders given the shots already fired by local councils. John Hopkins and the board of Golf Australia need to be up for the fight of their lives. So do the state associations as well as the PGA of Australia. If they’re not, then please go ... go for the sake of the sport.

Because the game of golf is at war. And this war has just begun. 🇨