

# Should the USGA Dump Trump?

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I have been a political junky as long as I can remember. I'm not sure why; maybe it's just that I love sports and view politics as a competition like baseball, basketball, football or golf. It's all about developing a game plan that can get you to your goal, whether it's winning an election or enacting a law.

My first memory of politics was when I was 7 and sat fascinated in front of the TV watching news of the often-violent efforts to integrate the public schools in Little Rock. My parents were highly amused that I knew the governor of Arkansas was Orville Falbus.

The first time I watched the presidential election returns was in 1960. I long for those days when computers didn't project the winner of a state as soon as the polls closed. That Kennedy-Nixon race wasn't called until after 7 a.m. the next morning.

But as much as I love the sport of politics, I can't wait for this presidential race to end. No matter where you stand on this bitterly divided contest, I think we can all agree that America has not put its best face forward to the world. Issues have been obscured by name-calling and that's just sad.

Sad also is the fact this presidential race has spilled over into the world of sports because of the high-profile position of Donald J. Trump in the world of golf. Already his Doral Resort has lost a PGA Tour event that's been there for more than 50 years. Whether that was political or economic is not clear. Ironically, the tournament is moving to Mexico.

The next immediate point of contention is the 2017 U.S. Women's Open, which is to be held at Trump's course in Bedminster, N.J., next July. There are those who feel the U.S. Golf Association needs to move the tournament because of comments Trump has made about women that many find offensive.

There are two questions here: Could the U.S. Women's Open be moved less than nine months before the event; and should it be moved. Could it and should it. Let's take the easy question first: Could it be moved?

In my opinion, yes. While it would require operational gymnastics, the Women's Open is nowhere near the behemoth of the U.S. Open. There is much less corporate hospitality and far fewer fans to accommodate. Overall, I'd say the Women's Open is about one-fifth the challenge of the U.S. Open.

Here's what you need: A championship quality golf course; Infrastructure support in terms of hotel rooms for players, USGA officials, corporate partners and media; Securing parking, shuttle services and developing a traffic plan with the cooperation of local police and governments; Making good on the corporate hospitality tents sold for Bedminster and securing buyers for the new venue.

Daunting but not insurmountable. If I was running the show I'd go to someone who's done the drill before, preferably recently, and already has developed a plan. I'd approach a place like Lancaster (Pa.) Country Club, which hosted the 2015 U.S. Women's Open to rave reviews and record attendance. Trump Bedminster is 45 minutes from New York City, a market women's golf has historically not drawn well so this might actually ease some financial wounds for the USGA.

There is sort of a precedent here. The 2003 U.S. Women's Open was supposed to be at Lake Merced in California with the 2004 Women's Open at Pumpkin Ridge in Oregon. In April 2002, it was decided that while Lake Merced was a quality golf course there were infrastructure issues that were going to be impossible to overcome.

So Pumpkin Ridge was moved up a year to 2003 and The Orchards in Massachusetts was awarded the 2004 Women's Open. Both events went off perfectly. In fact, The Orchards drew 27,000 spectators on Saturday, a very large crowd for a Women's Open. Yes, it can be done.

But should it be moved? Should the politics of a course owner play into the decision as to whether it can host a major golf event? Again, there is a precedent. After the Shoal Creek PGA Championship in 1990 it was decided tournaments would not be played where there are discriminatory membership policies. With the notable exception of Augusta National Golf Club, courses that were all white or all male were deemed ineligible to host tournaments.

Now discrimination is not an issue with any of the 16 golf properties Trump owns. The only discriminating factor is money. His public courses are expensive to play and his private courses are expensive to join. Bedminster has a six-figure buy-in to become a member.

What is an issue are Trump's public comments not just women but also about immigrants, especially those from Mexico and the Islamic world. Here's why that matters. The USGA is the governing body of golf in the United States. And right now, the game here is struggling as a participatory sport. For more than 15 years, growth has been, at best, flat.

Because of that, all of the stakeholders in the game – the governing bodies, the pro tours, golf course owners and operators – have been preaching a message of inclusion. Golf needs more young people, women need to participate in greater numbers, the game needs to make Asians, Hispanics and African-Americans feel welcome. And golf needs to continue its robust business relationships with the Islamic world.

At a time when the leaders in the game are preaching a message of inclusion and are casting the net as wide as possible to try to grow the game, Trump is preaching a message of exclusion. Remember also that the half-dozen corporate partners the USGA has will be involved in this decision. The possibility of protests at the Women's Open, and bad publicity, will be factored in.

All I know is that I would not want to be in the shoes of the USGA right now. No matter what they decide they will be criticized. Many women on the LPGA – particularly American women – support Trump and are appreciative of his generous support of the LPGA. The ADT Championship

at Trump's West Palm Beach course was a great season-ending event with \$1 million for the winner and the 32 players were treated royally at Mar-A-Lago all week.

But the LPGA is also a tour of immigrants. More than two dozen nations are represented in its membership. At least that many nations will be represented at next year's U.S. Women's Open.

The USGA has yet to weigh in on the growing controversy around Trump Bedminster and my guess is that it's waiting until after America decides on Nov. 8 so as not to look like it's trying to influence the election.

And that's just one more reason why I can't wait for this election to be over. I'm sure the USGA feels the same way.