

# One Lucky Swing

**O**N A WARM, SUNNY DAY TYPICAL of spring in the Sonoran desert, I became a professional (“non-amateur”) in the world of golf.

With one swing (truthfully, not a bad one), my golf ball flew into that blue, cloudless sky, arcing toward the flagstick 161 yards away. As it dropped to the green and ultimately into the hole, I quickly realized that I had just made my second career hole-in-one – but this one was for a gleaming, new, sporty roadster from Germany.

After the jubilation and congratulations, I recalled that accepting this motorcar would place me in violation of the USGA’s Definition of an Amateur Golfer. Simply stated, no amateur may accept a prize exceeding \$750 in value.

Immediately, I became ineligible to participate in any competition open solely to amateurs, unless the competition was a club event and I had the club’s approval. If I entered any other event, I could not accept any prize reserved for amateurs.

This controversial rule has historically been one of the most discussed, and violated, in the game of golf. It has been regularly reviewed by the USGA, and maintained with only occasional adjustments in the dollar amounts. The rules do allow an amateur (such as me who finds luck and timing on his side), to return to amateur status after a waiting period of only one year. Other violations carry a minimum waiting period of at least two years.

This special provision prompts me to ask the question, “Why must an act of chance deprive me of continuing a promising, yet mediocre, amateur golfing career?” While my swing was part of the game of golf and the ball settled in a regulation hole on a championship course, it was pure lucky timing that an automobile was being awarded in this club tournament. The odds against my lucky break are 18,000 to 1!

While all golf events are played under USGA Rules, it is certain no such prize is ever offered at USGA or other major amateur championships.

Invariably, it is the average golf-loving,

weekend player who with one swing captures a prize at a charity or member-guest event – one chance to bathe in the glory of success!

That left, then, my decision of what to do? Being an honorable golfer, I reported the amateur status violation to the USGA, and now have to forego playing as an amateur for one year. Certainly, my buddies know that my qualifying for an “Open” event is highly improbable. The one benefit of being a member of the Arizona Golf Association is that I can still play in all the Association events except the Amateur and Stroke Play because I have applied for my reinstatement to amateur status. I’m now known as an A-R (an applicant for amateur reinstatement), but I still can’t accept prizes (although I could win a trophy!). So, I guess the penalty for winning a convertible riding machine is not all that onerous.

Yet, after considering my status and the luck, not skill, involved, I believe it’s time for the USGA to reconsider and change this excessive penalty. The rule makes no sense to the average golfer and doesn’t apply to the best, so why so severe a penalty? They should allow the fortunate golfer to go unpunished for such an exhilarating deed. Why rain on a golfer’s parade when so much of the game is discouraging at best? Give the game of golf and those millions of us who struggle some renewed confidence that the rules makers do understand that one swing does not a professional make. ■

