

# Sports Sunday

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 1995

## GOLF

### It's best to beware of 'family memberships'

**J**ane (not her real name) and her husband built a home along a country club course some years ago and joined the golf club. She dreamed of raising her children in a golfing environment in which they could learn a love of the game and literally play golf in their back yard. She played in the evenings after work.

Then the couple divorced, and the dream became a nightmare.

The "family membership," which Jane and her children had mainly used, had been issued in her husband's name. And although the divorce settlement awarded her the membership, the club—in keeping with its bylaws—terminated her membership and sent her a check representing its redemption value.

The situation is not unique, legal sources say. Not only do many women lose their club affiliation after divorce, some lose their membership and family equity upon the death of a spouse.

"There is still an element of discrimination," said Lawrence Savell, an attorney with the law firm of Chadbourne & Parke in New York City. "Some clubs have the ability to bar women from taking over memberships."

Restrictions usually exist in the smaller, private clubs, he said. "It's like a fraternity. There's a little more leeway to set policies."

#### Patricia Baldwin On women's golf

In retrospect, Jane concluded she had been naive and ill-informed about her club's membership policies.

Savell said some discriminatory policies are changing because of lawsuits, state legislation and various state attorney general rulings throughout the country.

Some private clubs are adopting membership policies that designate a "primary" member for each membership. This primary member may be the man or woman of a married couple, but is the member who is accorded preferential tee times, if there are restrictions.

The lawyer recommends that prospective country club members, married or single, ask for a copy of the club's bylaws before joining. Ask, if it is a family membership, if there is a designated primary member.

Despite some progress toward equity in club membership, Savell believes the greatest changes are occurring as a result of economic pressure.

"The '90s are an era when people have less disposable income. And clubs are dependent on maintaining memberships," he said.

Increasingly, single women are joining clubs on their own and many balk at the thought of pay-

ing equal dues without equal access to course facilities, tee times and membership privileges.

Economics is making strides we haven't made before," Savell suggested. "The reality, however, is that this continues to go on despite the economic aspects. And the sense I get is that people decide not to take it to court."

**Tip of the week:** Here's a drill to help keep the clubhead low on the backswing and eliminate any tendency to pick up the club. Put a tee or piece of grass about a foot or less behind the ball. Try to clip it going straight back. This move will allow you to get the clubhead started on the proper path, and you can let it go naturally from there. Standing up or lifting your body on the backswing can be as harmful as doing so on the downswing.

**Briefs:** Three past Women's Open champions and a runner-up have been extended special exemptions from qualifying for this year's championship to be held in July at the Broadmoor Golf Club in Colorado Springs. They are JoAnne Carner, Hollis Stacy, Jan Stephenson and Ayako Okamoto.

*Patricia Baldwin is editor-in-chief of Golf for Women magazine. She writes this column for the Tribune's sister newspapers, the Orlando Sentinel and the Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel.*