

SICC Goes Transferable

(CHAPTER 7)



With the merger there became available three top class golf courses which members could boast about. This naturally attracted new members, and all too soon the necessity of a 4th course became all too apparent. A request was made to the Public Utilities Board (PUB) for more land to build a new course. In 1964 the PUB approved the building of this new course subject to the strict control of the use of pesticides and fertilisers that could pollute the reservoir.

In 1965, Frank Pennick, a former captain of the British amateur team, who was chosen to design the new course visited the club and drew up plans for the course. A special New Course committee, which included Norman Sutcliffe, Lee Kim Yew, C H Koh and Cheong Thiam Siew, was formed to monitor the construction work.

To finance the course the Club imposed a monthly levy of \$5 on all golfing members. To cut costs, turf for the new course was cut from unused portions of the three existing courses. The result was a savings of \$250,000. By August 1968 the first nine holes were open for play. In September 1969 the second nine was completed, and in August 1970 the New Course was officially opened by Chief Justice Wee Chong Jin. All in all the New Course had taken four years to complete and had cost \$1.2 million.

The maintenance of the New Course cost the Club an extra \$20,000 a month. To finance this burden corporate membership was introduced and the Club opened its doors to more ordinary golfing members. This resulted in a cash reserve of \$800,000 by 1971.

Even before the completion of the New Course the committee had the agreeable but onerous task of getting the Bukit prepared for the World Cup to be held in October

1969. The clubhouse was given a much needed face lift. A total of \$250,000 was spent on an extension to the kitchen, a new ladies' room, a bar and a proshop. Airconditioning was installed in the dining room and the lounge bar.

The Bukit was tweaked to make it a worthy challenge for the world's best professionals who would be out in full force trying to annihilate it. To ensure that it would not surrender with ignominy to the skills of the likes of Lee Trevino and Roberto DeVicenzo, its fairways were narrowed, the rough was grown to a punitive length and the greens were cut and mowed to make them as slick as possible, measuring a possible 10 to 12 on the Stimp metre. The fairway bunkers on the 7th and 18th were repositioned to trap errant drives of these long hitters. However, all these measures did not prevent Trevino from strolling home with a 275, nine under par, to win the individual honours, and together with his playing partner, Orville Moody, taking the World Cup back to the USA once again.

In the meantime the swimmers were campaigning for better facilities. The 25-metre pool at the Island was woefully inadequate with about 600 members squeezing against each other every Sunday. In June 1971 members approved the plans for a 1-million swimming complex. The 9-hole pitch and putt course behind the bowling alley was sacrificed and in its place appeared an Olympic-sized swimming pool with a posh promenade, purification plant, sun deck, changing rooms and a squash court. A little later came tennis courts, a new kitchen, a billiards room, a sauna and flood lighting for the driving range. The final bill for the swimming pool complex came to \$1.65 million. It was opened in 1974.

In 1981 the Ministry of National Development asked the Club to develop the 1.6 hectares occupied by the labourers' quarters, or face acquisition. On this piece of land was built the new social complex consisting of a Western restaurant (the present Chinese restaurant), a 200-seat theatre, a jackpot room, hairdressing saloon, billiards room, card room, library and a recreational pool. Adjacent to it came into existence seven tennis courts and six squash courts. A new caddy hut coupled with its own canteen and toilet was also built. The old clubhouse was refurbished and the dining room became a Chinese restaurant. By 1987 members were able to use all these facilities.

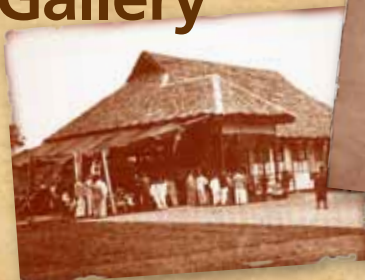
In the 1980s, new clubs like Sentosa, Jurong and Tanah Merah and even established clubs like Warren and Keppel introduced transferable memberships which commanded between \$25,000 and \$75,000 on the open market. Some



The late Chief Justice, Wee Chong Jin addressing members on the occasion of the New Course Opening on 23 August 1970

Our Island Heritage Gallery

A Heritage Gallery will be set up at the new Island Phase II building in 2011. If you have any interesting heritage stories, old photographs and memorabilia to contribute, please contact the **Marketing and Communications Department** at 6450 1352/349 or email John or Jumira at marcom@sicc.org.sg.



SICC members pushed for a similar change, but as the Club was paying the PUB only a nominal rent, such a move was opposed by the Board. **Instead a non-transferable Special Corporate Membership was introduced, costing \$150,000. To maintain a balance of the young and old, junior members were permitted to become Ordinary or Lady Members at the age of 21.**

In 1980-81, 60 new members were accepted under the "Restricted" category. These golfers were confined to the less often utilised courses at the Island location.

The Eighties saw a tremendous golf boom. There were already an estimated 12,000 golfers playing the game and the number of new golfers kept increasing. More golf courses were needed to accommodate these new entrants into the ranks, and the government obliged by releasing more land for golf courses in parts of the island where development was restricted.

Developers rushed for prime sites and the fierce competition saw them vying to outbid each other. Where the old courses paid as little as \$12 a year for property under temporary occupation licences, Seletar Country Club decided to pay \$5 million for its new 18-hole course on 57 hectares of land. To cap it all was Natsteel's \$131 million tender for land for two golf courses which meant that golf course property was no longer worthless but was on par value with the open property market. Natsteel's bid caused the government to re-think its policy towards fees paid by golf clubs for this land.

In May 1991 the government announced that all golf clubs would be placed on 30-year leases from 1 January 1992, and would have to pay market prices for them. Existing clubs, including SICC would have to pay rentals of \$104 per square metre. This meant that SICC had to pay \$154.12 million for its 291 hectares for 30 years plus property tax of \$3.05 million.

With only \$21.2 million in its kitty SICC was in a quandary. How was it to find the huge sum necessary to pay the PUB? The government offered the solution, which was to convert to transferable membership which would be subject to control by the PUB that owned the land. Transfer fees paid to the Club would

more than cover the necessary sum, and once made transferable, lady members would become ordinary members.

The idea of going transferable was anathema to long term members who felt that the influx of new members buying their way in would result in undesirable changes to the character of the Club. However, there were some who were excited at the prospect of the windfall which transferable membership would bring.

The PUB informed the Club that it would offer the Club a 30-year lease on condition that SICC introduced transferable membership. The PUB would appoint a chairman, who would have veto powers, and nominate the club's president, captain and honorary treasurer. The members to a man rejected the PUB's proposal. They objected to the PUB appointing key positions in the committee and the nominated chairman's veto power. Another objection was the PUB's stand against "hereditary membership" where junior members were automatically converted to ordinary members upon turning 21.

The Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong explained to the Club Committee in September 1991 that it was necessary for the PUB to have effective control as transferable membership would generate huge sums of money which had to be safeguarded. He also stressed that hereditary membership for members' children had to be phased out.

The PUB eventually agreed to limit the Chairman's veto powers to "matters which in his opinion have significant financial implications". **It also decided to extend the conversion of junior membership to include all members' children born on or before 31 December 1991. And so, at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 7 November, the Members voted overwhelmingly to accept the PUB terms.**

This is the concluding chapter of the history of The Singapore Island Country Club.

Bibliography

The Eagle and The Lion, The Singapore Island Country Club, 1993; Golf in Singapore, Alex Josey, Benson & Hedges, 1969; The Straits Times

Corrigendum – In last month's heritage article on page 9, in the last paragraph, the name "John McInnes" should be "Jim McInnes". The *islander* apologises for the error.