

THE CHILDREN IN GOLF STRATEGY GROUP

In early 2005 ELGA and the PGA had an advert inviting applications for the independent Chairperson of the Children in Golf Strategy Group. The Children in Golf Strategy Group is a partnership of the men's and women's governing bodies of golf in England, Ireland and Wales – plus the LGU, R and A, Association of Golf Club Secretaries, the PGA, the PGA European Tour and the Golf Foundation. The post was to be a voluntary one, chairing four meetings a year of the Lead Child Protection Officers of these governing bodies.

“Ah”, I naively thought, “this sounds something I'd be interested in doing in my spare time.”

I stupidly sent in an application, assuming that this would be open to men and women. After all, the group included the men's and women's governing bodies. And although the applications were to go to the Secretary of the PGA, I assumed they had modernised from the days when I joined the PGA – with rules stating, “Lady members shall have the same rights as men, save that they may not attend meetings, play in tournaments or vote”.

Modernisation

I assumed they might have modernised since they discriminated against a woman employee, effectively dismissing her for demanding women employees wear skirts and not trousers.

I assumed they had modernised since the days when PGA members were forbidden to wear ear rings – never thinking they had women members.

I even thought they might have modernised from the day their Executive Director announced to a huge gathering at St. Andrews “Did you know that clitoris is an anagram of solicitor?” Not just shocking in its sexism, but shocking in his inability to spell “solicitor”.

I assumed that golf might have modernised since the days, just a few years ago, when the R and A declined to invite Judy Bell – the first woman to be President of the United States Golf Association – to be a member, but instead gave her a brooch.

I naively assumed things might, at last, have moved on. The men on the EGU and PGA have been forced to sign up to various equity and equality policies in order to screw money out of the Lottery. One appreciates that many are closet misogynists – being R and A members, with their outdated views - but at least pretending to sign up to equality to satisfy Sport England and the Lottery.

My Application

My application included a CV, showing my experience as a national coach for England, Ireland and Wales, spanning 25 years, my work as a solicitor (being the partner in a firm specialising in family law and wardship), membership of various associations and chairing some, my work in golf, various academic and professional qualifications, and member of MENSA etc. Clearly if this CV had been submitted to the PGA by a man he would have been interviewed.

Needless to say I didn't even get an acknowledgement and wasn't called for interview.

“Here we go again.” A life time in golf suffering (as do many women) from shocking, open and blatant discrimination at the hands of men.

It transpired that there were only four applicants – three men and me. Instead of interviewing all four applicants my application was weeded out by the PGA Secretary and Pauline Perla – the ELGA Secretary. (For those who don’t know, the England Golf Partnership – the body formed to handle the £9.2 million of lottery money – is a partnership of the PGA, the English Golf Union and Pauline Perla – not ELGA, but Pauline Perla. So she’s a pretty powerful lady in the men’s world of golf.)

Discrimination and the golf world

I was appalled at being discriminated against yet again. When will it stop? In the rest of the world times are moving on, but not in the bizarre world of golf in the UK. You only have to look at the way it is run to see the fiasco. Yes it is a men’s game. Just look at the blurb the R and A puts out on their publications. Don’t be a Golf Menace – for example, reads:

“The R and A is golf’s world rules and development body and organiser of the Open Championship. It operates with the consent of more than 125 national and international, amateur and professional organisations, from over 110 countries and on behalf of an estimated 28 million golfers in Europe, Africa, Asia, Pacific and The Americas (outside the USA and Mexico). The United States Golf Association (USGA) is the game’s governing body in the United States and Mexico.”

Hoorah. What the R and A (which stands for Royal and Ancient) doesn’t say is that it is a male only preserve, happy to include the Royal name (54 years into the reign of a wonderful female monarch) and openly discriminating against women, openly discriminating against professional golfers and portraying all the attitudes that the European Union abhors in sport – lack of democracy and lack of transparency. It is a men’s only preserve, with archaic and discriminatory rules of amateur status, which belong in the 19th century. Rules which allows its own men members and its chosen few to tour the world, sponsored to play shamateur golf. Rules which in other sports were kicked into touch years ago.

So that’s the background to the world of golf. And I stupidly assumed that it was worth applying for a role as the independent chairperson of this Children in Golf Strategy Group. I must be off my trolley.

Proving Discrimination

Having written, six weeks after my application, to register my concern at not even getting an acknowledgement, let alone an interview, I decided to take the matter further. I personally have had enough – enough of this dreadful game, with its sexism and corruption.

I sent the PGA Secretary a questionnaire under Section 74 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. For those who aren’t familiar with the Act, now 30 years old, Section 74 allows someone who thinks he or she may have been discriminated against (or victimised for past complaints) to ask for information to ascertain whether or not discrimination has taken place. My questionnaire was

routinely ignored. Not one piece of paper requested was produced. There were tales of having written to all the child protection officers of the governing bodies circulating the four CVs, but the PGA secretary couldn't or wouldn't name them or produce the supposed correspondence. He refused to provide the other CVs (personal details of name, address omitted as required). It was pretty obvious that I would be asking the court to draw an inference that he and his cronies had discriminated against me on the basis of this refusal to produce documents. All he would say was that the chosen candidate was superior to me in that he had had 5 years experience as a junior club organiser. Obviously a man with 5 years as junior club organiser is a better applicant than a woman with 25 years as a national coach and an OBE for services to the game – and a qualification as a solicitor. Obviously! Strangely the advert had made no mention of experience as a junior club organiser, but a person specification was suddenly produced highlighting this. It would be cruel of me to suggest that this was concocted after I started to complain, but when asked to email it, to establish the date concocted, this too was refused. One can draw one's own conclusions!

Fighting for our Rights

Someone has to take a stand in this dreadful game. How can one have a sport like golf, with all its wonderful attributes, ruined by the people who run the game? Someone has to take a stand. So I did, lodging a small claim in Huntingdon County Court, asking for damages of up to £5,000, a declaration that I had been discriminated against by David Wright personally and by the Children in Golf Strategy Group – all these governing bodies, and a request that I should not suffer discrimination in the future. A copy of the claim can be emailed to any interested golf club member. Email me at viv@viv.co.uk.

How does the Sex Discrimination Act protect men or women in applying for volunteer jobs? They aren't covered by the employment sections that give people the right to go to Employment Tribunals. That's pretty obvious unless there is pay involved. But what does cover discrimination in other fields is the Section 29, which covers offering goods and services, and various opportunities.

Simple. Volunteering is a recreational activity. Whether you apply for a volunteer's role with a charity shop, for a charity, as a volunteer with the RSPCA, the RSPB, bodies that are charities or non-charities, this is something you do as a recreation, i.e. of your own choice outside your employment. And the Children in Golf Group offered this opportunity to the general public – and the golfing public.

Defending their position

The Children in Golf Group didn't simply defend this, they applied (and lost) to have my case struck out! Their defence was not that they didn't discriminate against me, but that they were not precluded from discriminating against me. In other words, they were entitled to discriminate against me because the law doesn't protect women.

Yes, acting on behalf of the English Ladies' Golf Association, the Irish Ladies' Golf Union, the Welsh Ladies' Golf Union and the Ladies' Golf Union (and through them the Scottish Ladies' Golfing Association), they are trying to defend the rights of men to discriminate against women who apply for volunteer posts in charities and non-charity voluntary bodies!

Do women golfers in this country really support their women's golfing governing bodies taking this extraordinary line against women? Or can we assume that the Secretaries/Chief Executives of these women's governing bodies haven't a clue what is being put out in their name by the PGA?

Golf is a men's only, single sex club

But that isn't the end of it. The Children in Golf Strategy Group (including ELGA, ILGU, LGU, WLGU) has put in a defence to say they are exempt from the Sex Discrimination Act under Section 34, because they are a single sex club – a men's club – entitled to discriminate against women. That is the section that allows women's only netball clubs to be women's only, it allows men's only rugby and golf clubs to be men only. And the Children in Golf Strategy Group, including your women's governing bodies, is prepared to say they are men's only. They are entitled to discriminate against a woman!

This isn't as laughable as one might think! Sad, but not entirely laughable. Because that is what the R and A itself is – a men's only organisation that somehow invites well-behaved women, who toe the line, to participate. And that, in effect, is what the PGA is. A woman member only able to go to PGA dinner dances if invited by a man member. Got it!? It is a men's only game. Yes, of course the Children in Golf Strategy Group is a single sex, men only organisation, exempt from the ramifications of the Sex Discrimination Act under Section 34. Yes, of course. And ELGA, ILGU, LGU and WLGU agree to being included in this defence. Frightening really.

But not really so absurd. Because many of their officials doubtless believe this to be the case. How many women on ELGA have a husband on the R and A who pays their sub? Yes of course the game is men only. If we behave nicely and don't rock the boat and agree it is men's only we get invited to be jolly scorers at the Men's Open Championship. Far more appropriate that wives of R and A members (and well behaved, submissive women) do the scoring at the Open and ogle at Ernie and Seve and Tiger and Phil, than give the opportunity to junior internationals who might appreciate the golf rather than the pomposity.

So, of course the women in these governing bodies agree that the whole game is a private men's club, with well behaved women tolerated and invited to participate. They no doubt hope that being submissive and behaving sweetly towards the men who run golf will earn them a place on some R and A committee, a star role as an R and A referee and invitations to all the right places. They aren't interested in the rights of ordinary women golfers in golf clubs who suffer from this men's only policy.

Yes, of course the men run golf in this country. And however many equity policies and equality regulations they sign they don't believe it. As the secretary of the PGA wrote to me, "I also object to the assumption that the Royal and Ancient Golf Club are clearly opposed to women participating in the governance of golf, when they have actively encouraged the inclusion of the Ladies' Golf Associations on the Children in Golf Strategy Group."

Why was there any doubt that they wouldn't be included? Because the whole of golf is a men's only, single sex club, with women invited to participate! Have you got that? That's what they say.

That's what their defence to my case says. And that's what, alarmingly, the women's governing bodies agree to on your behalf. Because it suits them – the women who run golf.

Wriggle out of that one

No doubt the Children in Golf Strategy Group will try to backtrack from this absurd single sex, men's only defence. What will they say? The Secretary of the PGA and Chairman of the Children in Golf Group lied in their earlier defence – surely not? Or perhaps they were too stupid to understand what they were signing – surely not that? Or perhaps the solicitors acting for the PGA and golf's governing bodies assumed the game is a single sex club – because that's how it seems to them – surely not the solicitors' fault?

No, the Children in Golf Strategy Group – the partnership of golf's governing bodies, men's and women's – is indeed a single sex, men only, private members' association, exempt from the provisions of Section 34 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and our own governing bodies endorse that view. And we women golfers who are mere club members must accept what they say.

The European Law

Fortunately Europe will fight this ridiculous attitude in golf. They have agreed that single sex clubs can stay. But once a club opens its door to members of both sexes equality will prevail. No doubt our golf's governing bodies – men's and women's – will be as unsupportive as possible to the concept of equality. Because, as I have proved, when the chips are down they still believe it's a men's only game, that men have the right to discriminate against women in choosing volunteers, and are prepared to put their name to such statements in a court of law. Astonishing!

The judge in Huntingdon made it clear that the Children in Golf Strategy Group is an unincorporated association and as such its members needed to be notified and possibly represented separately. For each is potentially liable. In a similar way, the Ladies' Golf Union and ELGA are unincorporated associations – mere clubs – and their individual members, clubs and counties are entitled to know the defence being voiced on their behalf.

Have you got it? In the year of the volunteer, these governing bodies, on your behalf, are defending the right for men to discriminate against women in choosing volunteers for charities or non-charities. And supporting the assertion that the partnership of golf's governing bodies, including the women, is a single sex, men only, private club – with women as some sort of guests in their world – and against whom they are entitled to discriminate!