

Golf Cuts Costs To Attract Players !

Stung By Recession, Courses And Equipment Makers Reduce Prices To Make Sport More Accessible.

(CBS) If you're looking for ways the economy is affecting the sport of golf, the Hamlet Country Club on Long Island, N.Y. is a good place to start.

"You were charging \$15,000 as an initiation fee," said CBS News correspondent Jeff Glor to Barry Weisberg, the manager of the country club, who started working there 16 years ago.

"When I started here, yes," Weisberg said.

"And now?" Glor asked.

"It is waived," Weisberg said.

"Nothing? Zero?" Glor asked.

"That's correct," Barry said.

Right now, golf is on sale.

"There's no question that the economic climate has certainly affected the golf industry, just as like any other," said Greg Nathan the vice president of the National Golf Foundation.

But it's not just the recession. It is part of a bigger trend, as the number of private golf clubs nationwide has dropped 12 percent in 20 years. Public course play has dropped off too – 20 percent in those 20 years. Of the courses left, 10 to 15 percent report being "seriously challenged," according to the National Golf Foundation.

"How does golf get that mojo back?" Glor asked.

"Well, we thought we had it with Tiger," said Chris Carter, the head pro at Hamlet. "I think that we were probably over built. I think that was probably part of it. In the 90s we saw a lot of courses being built, you know now we are in a stage where it's survival of the fittest."

Add to that changing family dynamics.

"I think now guys are getting married a bit later, having families a bit later, and there's more time restraints," Carter said.

To stay afloat, Hamlet dropped that initiation fee, is offering one-time summer memberships for \$4,500 and is opening the club to outside functions.



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"Anything goes to get people out here and playing, absolutely," Carter said.

Many clubs are also opening up to outside golfers. Another trend: for every club that closes, 10 go from private to public, which means anyone can book a tee time for a fee.

"If you are a public course golfer, the opportunity to play a super high quality facility for a very reasonable price, I mean those opportunities are better than ever," said Nathan.

And the deals don't end at the courses. Golf shops and golf manufacturers, stung by the recession, are trying to unload equipment with deep discounts.

"So right now, I spend \$300 on this and I get this \$180 club for free," Glor said.

"That is correct," said Chris Verrara, with Golfsmith.

The golfing industry is hoping that cost-cutting, creative thinking and a consistent push to open the sport to more players will lead to a new golden age for the game.

Just don't look for any evidence of a golden swing from Glor.

"Oh come on!" Glor groaned.

