

Arbitration

Members give their views on a popular cause of discussion and then a leading figure in the recreation world provides a summary in a later edition.

A MEMBERSHIP SYSTEM TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE?

Much has been discussed within the Recreation world on the pros and cons of a Centre membership system, but few conclusions have been drawn. This article does not set out to arrive at a conclusion for or against the system as circumstances can vary from place to place, but to throw out a few ideas, mainly based on the two Centres I have been involved in:

Pros:

- 1 A membership system may engender a sense of "belonging" to a group or organisation which can be desirable within a Centre.
- 2 It provides a "control" for the staff of the Centre. e.g.
 - (a) To control trouble makers.
 - (b) To inform users of events etc.
 - (c) Non-payment or failure to claim courts.
 - (d) A control on bar users (if a Club licence).

3 Once membership has been taken out it may encourage members to become regular users.

4 It brings in a regular income which is not affected by other factors.

Cons:

- 1 It imposes an extra admin burden on Centre staff.
- 2 It involves extra expenditure e.g. cards, forms, holders etc., also the staff hours involved in processing the system.
- 3 If a satisfactory system of control is not built in to the entrance income can be lost through non-payment. To install a control system can be costly. If there is more than one entrance staffing also becomes a problem.
- 4 Users have the extra burden of "remembering" their card, and staff continually having to check cards can be embarrassing to both parties.

In both Centres I have managed the same problems with the membership system have arisen. The main one being the considerable amount of people who come into the Centre

without paying due to the open plan reception areas, to overcome this some form of control must be introduced and this could prove costly. It is very difficult to assess how many people enter without paying and how much revenue is lost through this, but in Forfar Leisure Centre at present I would estimate that approximately £3000 per annum is lost. The cost of introducing a control system would be in the region of £2,500 or £3,750 if extra staff were employed to check on entry.

I feel that in the case of Forfar, a membership system is certainly beneficial but a control at entry is essential, to abolish the membership system and retain a similar income fees and charges would need to be increased by 25%. The arguments for and against a membership system will no doubt continue, but I hope that a few of the points I have mentioned might help a Manager to arrive at a suitable conclusion in his/her own situation.

T. C. Lowry,
Manager, Forfar Leisure Centre.

A great deal has been said on "pro and cons" of membership at sports centres.

At this moment in time we are delighted that the authorities ensured that we were membership orientated. Membership gave us the opportunity of a club set-up. Initially the authorities concerned were opposed to the centre having an "on licence" and we had to consider a club licence. This has worked to our advantage. Profit from the bar and catering provision together with the returns from the two fruit machines (allowed maximum is in the hands of the Club Committee to spend on the development of sport and recreation within the centre.

During the last three years we have been investing part of the profits in the hope of developing a major project. It was decided that as a 12 acre

piece of land adjacent to the centre was available we should consider the possibility of a nine-hole par three golf course. Architects were consulted and designs were submitted for tender. The crunch came when tenders came up for consideration as each one was between £10-£20 thousand above our estimates. The committee were not daunted as we had the land, a design and a schedule of operation plus £17,000 in hand.

An application was submitted to the Manpower Services Commission under the Job Creation Scheme and as such a development would necessarily create full-time employment of ground staff in the future, our scheme was accepted and grants up to £11,000 have been assured towards wages for the development.

Work is now in hand and we are employing eight persons for 30 weeks who would otherwise have been unemployed on a worthwhile community project that will give pleasure to many people in years to come.

It is appreciated by the management that as a club and knowing that the profits from the bar and catering services are for further development of the centre to the benefit of the members all the staff work extra hard to ensure that the centre refreshment and bar facilities run effectively, efficiently and profitably.

John Woodman,
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