

High costs stymie television coverage

By M.B. Dillon
staff writer

Golf aficionados anxious to watch Arnold Palmer, Sam Snead, Gene Littler and defending champion Roberto De Vicenzo tee up at the Senior Open at Oakland Hills had better buy tickets.

ABC, after careful consideration, decided not to beam the tournament, scheduled for July 9-12, into America's living rooms. And although the network could have relinquished its exclusive rights to broadcast the tournament, both NBC and CBS decided it was too expensive a proposition.

"Obviously, Oakland Hills is disappointed that the tournament isn't being televised," said Dick O'Donnell, vice president of Detroit sales for the Television Bureau of Advertising and the Senior Open's radio and television liaison.

"But it's only the tournament's second year, and we understand the high costs involved."

O'Donnell said the United States Golf Association consulted Reeves Communications in New York after ABC's refusal.

"Their syndicate would have filmed the tournament and fed it to stations who wanted it," O'Donnell said. "But Feb. 17 was when we decided to punt."

"Next year it'll be at the Portland Country Club in Oregon. This year, we happen to be the bridge, and we're going to make it work."

JIM SPENCE, senior vice president of ABC sports in New York, more or less reflected the opinions of the network sports cadre.

"But because the Senior Open comes so late in the season, and because of the cost involved — close to a million dollars — I doubt we would have pursued it even if we had known of ABC's decision far enough in advance."

—Dick Auerbach
NBC vice president

"Unfortunately, audience levels for the Senior Open aren't sufficient to make it an economically viable telecast," he said.

DAVE DILES, Jim Spence's Detroit colleague and WXYZ-TV sports director said, "Channel 7 will be out there live every day. But I'll tell you why ABC's not covering it — no ratings."

"We cover the British Open, the U.S. Open and the PGA live, but people out in New Mexico just don't care about the U.S. Senior Open."

"There are a lot of good players coming, but lights don't go off and cymbals don't clang when their names are mentioned any more."

DICK WOZNIAK, ABC's vice president of Detroit sales, agreed. "From a business point of view, it's extraordinarily expensive

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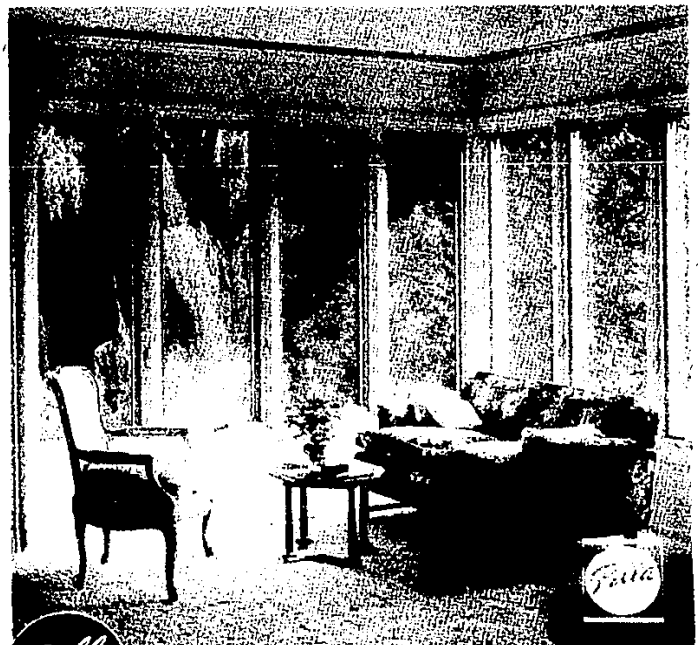
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