



ETIQUETTE – APPROPRIATE CONDUCT

J K Mayberry: an appreciation of the appropriate conduct.

Secretary At Work: September 2000 *(reviewed October 2011)*

Etiquette is that somewhat contentious and often little understood word that breathes fear and trepidation into the hearts of many aspiring recruits to the Game and in many cases provokes derision from the critics of Golf and even some of its more established followers.

However in keeping with popular practice let us first consider the definition quoted by the Oxford English Dictionary:

Etiquette: “The conventional rules of social behaviour” - “The customary behaviour of members of a profession/organisation towards each other and the unwritten code governing this”.

This is still a bit woolly when considering the progressive changes in conventions and customs, but to take it a stage further and analyse the latter, the dictionary again calls convention “the generally agreed” social behaviour and customs as the “usual” way or established practice.

All very well you may say, but where is this leading us! I would contend that etiquette is at the very heart of Golf and of most Golf Clubs. It is probably the single most important factor that has made Golf what it is today, the envy of most other sports.

Etiquette is in my view, the basis on which the whole structure of this great, dare I call it Institution we know as Golf has been established. It is a well conceived code of practice firmly based on and integral with the Rules of the Game, and with the customs and traditions of the Clubs themselves.

Let us consider primary Course etiquette “that of the player being furthest from the hole playing first”. It does not take much to appreciate that this is intended principally to protect his playing partners from being hit by the player’s ball as much as to give some order to the game - an important consideration I’m sure you would agree. However it could be seen as equally important, if for quite different reasons, that someone entering the Main Entrance to the Clubhouse carrying Clubs and wearing the shoes in which they had just played Golf is not only likely to offend but may deposit debris and cause damage to walls, doors and floor coverings in areas where one could rightly expect clean and well ordered conditions to be observed.

Other, perhaps less obvious examples, might be the marking of scores before leaving the hole that has just been played which could give rise of slow play, or perhaps simply the thoughtless parking of cars so as to obstruct another person's access to their boot. Perhaps rather trivial you may feel, but both examples of etiquette and all based upon the same principle, that of conforming with an established code of practice which considers the well being and sensitivities of fellow Members and Guests.

The examples quoted may be seen as extremes, but they serve to illustrate the basis upon which etiquette has become established and I suggest that any rule or practice, be it on or off the course is, or at least should be, based on practical considerations.

There are of course instances where strict conformity with etiquette totally negates the object of the exercise, like the occasion when attention was drawn to the Visitor who had somehow escaped the attention of the Professional and had gained access to the first tee dressed in a smart and obviously expensive pair of jeans. On being challenged the offender apologetically suggested that he was on holiday and unfortunately did not have other trousers with him. In an attempt by the Club Official to placate the situation, he was asked whether he perhaps had his waterproof trousers with him with which he replied in the affirmative and returned to the Car Park to put these on. To the amazement of those concerned he reappeared sometime later dressed in the most appalling pair of ragged paint splattered over-trousers that had ever been seen on a golf course, but which in principle satisfied the terms of the etiquette requirement (dress rule) if not the intention.

When considering etiquette it is necessary to appreciate and accept the reason behind the requirement and whilst some practices may seem antiquated by today's standards they are often introduced and retained simply as a means of establishing and maintaining high standards of behaviour.

To preserve and engender an appreciation of etiquette Clubs need to review their accepted standards as a matter of routine and where appropriate Bye Laws should be introduced to bring particular issues to the attention of Members, whether it relates to the tucking of trousers in socks or acknowledging the Club Captain's privileges. These are all examples of established Golf Club etiquette and Members must be encouraged to observe these standards under penalty of reprimand.

There is some ignorance, particularly on the part of the less Member orientated Clubs, to observe nationally accepted practices, which could be detrimental to the Game and could in consequence encourage a decline in standards. Probably the best and unfortunately some of the worst influences on the situation are seen on television. Coverage of the recent Open Championship highlighted a prominent competitor attired in a beach shirt spitting on a number of occasions after playing a shot, an example that would surely provoke an instant response from the most tolerant of Club Secretaries.

When quoting the Dictionary's definition, there was reference to an unwritten code and whilst Golf Clubs generally like to see all rules and regulations in print, etiquette however must also encompass the spirit in which these rules and regulations are intended.

It is interesting to me that the more sort after Clubs generally are those who maintain an above average standard of etiquette indicating that Members and prospective Members acknowledge and see merit in the preservation of this code.

In promoting and enlightening Members on the subject of etiquette it is seen as important not to differentiate between the Green and the Clubhouse as collectively both areas make up the Golf Club and should be administered similarly. Conduct on and off the Course must be and must be seen to be of the highest standard as an example not only to the younger Members, who are quite often beyond reproach, but particularly to the huge numbers of new recruits wishing to take up the Game in their more mature years.

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