



## **SLOW PLAY DUE TO THE COURSE CONDITIONS**

Ray Burniston writes “we all experience this problem at times”. This article suggests that clubs should make sure that conditions are not a major contributor to the problem.

Secretary at Work: August 1999 *(reviewed September 2011)*

Most clubs experience this problem from time to time. We regard it mainly as a modern problem often associated with members watching TV golf of Professional Tournaments. However there are records suggesting that the problem has been around long before TV started. Most secretaries have tried many suggestions to speed up play of which probably the most effective is having committee members around the course on big days at strategic points pointing out to any transgressors the error of their ways.

However one area that we often forget is that the type of course itself - not only the terrain or design - can result in 18 holes taking much longer at course A as against course B. Many new courses have vast distances for players to cover between holes. In some cases the architect may have designed the course for play mainly in caddie cars but not everyone wants to play golf this way. Inevitably this results in those walking having to cover several thousand more yards than the actual course itself. They could be accused of slow play when the real problem is the course design. Ironically two players in a caddie car have been known to hold up play because unfortunately they are both playing erratically.

You need to work out carefully and accurately the estimated amount of time that 2, 3 or 4 players should take in completing a round. This should be based on average handicap golfers and sensible time allowed for playing each hole along with any long walks between holes. More difficult courses with long carries over uncut grass, heather or such like, will undoubtedly slow up the average golfer. Then having worked out a sensible average time per round, you should publish details of it so members are made aware that the committee is concerned about the problem. The rules allow a person to search for five minutes for a ball. In practise even if you wave those behind through, it will undoubtedly add time to the average round.

The average time on a course playing the different games could well differ along the following lines:

- 2 Ball Medal - between 2: to 32 hours
- 3 Ball Medal - between 33 to 42 hours
- 4 Ball Better Ball - between 32 to 43 hours

Although a Stableford round should take slightly less time if players pick up if out of the hole, this invariably does not happen.

Another factor which committees should take into account, is the restrictions on the course such as directing caddie cars on a particular route. This can add time to a round especially the practice of marking white/yellow lines in which these vehicles must not go over as you approach the green. Although these may be correct from the course preservation and good greenkeeping aspect, they need to be carefully monitored. The committee need to be aware of the fact that they may well extend a round by anything from 10 to 30 minutes.

If your course has several holes that can be difficult for the visitor to locate the next tee, then adequate sign posts should be installed giving clear directions. In certain cases if these are positioned on approaching the green then they can save time as one invariably will park one's caddie cart the wrong side if there is no obvious direction. Another reminder to players to keep up with play is the placing of a notice on the tee, after say three holes, stating the time you should have taken to play the first three holes. This can be repeated further along the course.

There will always be arguments about keeping the rough and semi-rough cut. The New Captain may well be a category one golfer who decides to let the rough grow at least until after the Club Championship in July. This could result in thousands of lost balls and the Secretary being overwhelmed by complaints from members. Although the R&A will let the rough grow for The Open each year, these are the best golfers in the world. Much of the rough will get trampled down during the week and also the players will have the advantage of having several hundred spectators looking for their ball. Remember under the rules in this case the five minutes only starts when the player or his caddie starts looking not when the spectators around the area do so.

As the vast majority of club members will be playing off a handicap between 12 and 24, committees should think very carefully before making the course more difficult. Moving tees can often result in slow play as players will often have to wait to play because a nearby green is in play. Blind holes with a bell to ring are another cause as those waiting to play will often wonder if those in front have omitted to ring the bell and so on.

Notices on scorecards can also be a useful reminder and a regular warning in the club newsletter can help. Many years ago when I first played golf I played at a club in which they had a local rule. When playing in a fourball only the player looked for his/her ball. This might seem unsocial but it can certainly speed up play especially in the Saturday/Sunday morning matches.

In most cases the Slow Play is caused by the golfers but it will pay the club to have a careful look at the course and its management to see that there are no factors which can add to this problem. Finally if all else fails then in extreme cases, players should be penalised after a caution. Before taking this action you are advised to include any penalties for slow play in the details of the competition prior to play.

*[This document is prepared for guidance and is accurate at the date of publication only. We will not accept any liability (in negligence or otherwise) arising from any member or third party acting, or refraining from acting, on the information contained in this document.]*