



ETIQUETTE

Ray Burniston comments on the importance of etiquette on the Golf Course.

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

Most of us who took up golf years ago were invariably quickly shown the required etiquette when playing golf by our fellow members. I well remember at Alresford Golf Club back in about 1963 in my first months of playing being egged by my fellow players to play a shot towards the fifth green having duffed my drive as there was no way I could reach it. As it happens I relaxed and played probably my best golf shot ever which pitched onto the green between the Club Captain and his partner who were playing a mixed foursome. The Captain proceeded to put his putter down and march down the fairway and give me a good ticking off for not observing the etiquette of the game. I hasten to add that I have never made the same mistake again! Even to this day I will wait until those in front are well away. They are far safer now than they would have been when I was nearly forty years younger.

To their credit most clubs take great care in teaching their juniors the etiquette and in my experience you have far more problems with older persons taking up the game than youngsters.

On the course probably the four main areas of abuse are repairing pitch marks on the greens, replacing divots, raking footmarks in bunkers and slow play.

Most greens will have certain times of the year when they will be liable to show pitch marks especially par three holes. Having plenty of pitchforks, which you can give out to members and visitors at these times, can help. It is probably sensible to give some simple explanation in what they are required to do with them. I have seen notices with a player repairing a pitch mark at the edge of the green just played which can help remind players of their duty. But these notices are probably best put out at specific times rather than leave them out all the time.

Nothing can be more annoying on a golf course than to find your ball in a bunker in a large foot print. Most courses these days have simple bunker rakes in each bunker so keeping them well raked should not be a problem. Regrettably it happens far too frequently and if you happen to be playing towards the end of the field in a competition then you may well encounter this problem. You can only stress to all players to point out this problem to fellow competitors if they see them fail to rake. Often if a player has had several attempts to get out they walk out the bunker in rage or sorrow forgetting to rake the marks they have just made.

Replacing divots can be a problem at certain times of the year as birds will pick them up with their beaks looking for grubs unless they are very firmly put back. Again you can only try to encourage members to make sure they carry this out and also to see their fellow players do as well. Notices placed at strategic places on the course can help.

After the above three the bane of most golf clubs is Slow Play. Each year it raises its head at major events but very little seems to be done about it. Some direction from the very top would in my view assist golf clubs. The following sentence is from the section on etiquette “If a match fails to keep its place on the course and loses more than one clear hole on the players in front, it should invite the match following to pass”. This is abused more than any part of this section at all levels of golf.

What can a club do to try to avoid slow play? In some cases a careful survey of the golf course should be undertaken. Where the tee and a green are in line with each other this means that someone has to give way. So it is important to define who has the right of way. The normal policy is to give this to those who have played the most holes. In other words if it is the tenth green and say the fifth tee then those playing the green have priority. Often a committee has moved the tee in the past to put an extra fifty yards on the course but this has resulted in causing a bottleneck. Always obtain expert opinion before trying to add extra length to a hole so that all factors can be taken into consideration. Very long rough especially coupled with narrow fairways with a strong wind can add extra time to the round and result in very slow play. Long rough that traps the longer handicaps only adds to frustration and does little to improve the course.

Most of us remember The Open at Carnoustie in 1999 when the best golfers in the world had problems adding extra time to every round. Unfortunately at St. Andrews on the Old Course the following year the double greens slowed up play which could not really be blamed on the players. In normal play on the double greens on the Old Course this is not a problem but crowds clapping and cheering the players you could not expect both matches playing the same green to putt simultaneously.

Some clubs time players both out and in on the course. This can certainly encourage players to speed up, just as notices around the courses saying after playing six holes you should not have taken more than so much time depending whether you are playing in singles, threes or fours. In major club competitions the best solution is position club officials at strategic places around the course and this will usually result in speeding up play.

It must be remembered that courses will vary in the time players take to get round. If you have several blind holes this can add to the problem along with layout which if there are narrow fairways coupled with thick rough then again you will have further problems.

So it is well worth having a thorough survey of the course to see whether there are any areas in which changes could be made to help speed up play.

Good clear signs guiding players to the next tee can be a great advantage especially for visitors. Most of us have played courses at times in which there has been no clear indication as to the direction of the next tee.

I believe that if clubs had a real blitz on this problem over a set period, a great deal could be done to convince players that golf can be played in a reasonable time even in major competitions. When you think that a 4½ hour medal round playing in threes means that average time per hole is 15 minutes per match and this is becoming the accepted norm for competitions on many courses.

What can the club do to improve Etiquette generally? Make sure that all new players taking up golf are fully aware of the etiquette and do not just accept it if they just say they are. Give them a free copy of the Rolex - Rules of Golf. Have purges at times at your club on specific items such as: raking bunkers, repairing pitch marks, slow play, taking unnecessary practice swings on the tee. Many clubs define an area close to the first tee for taking a practice swing. Apart from the safety angle this also saves taking divots out of the tee, players are often nervous when having a practice swing which results in removing a large divot.

If you send out a regular club newsletter then devote a section to course care each time. Be careful to stress how the member can improve the state of the course by just following a few simple rules. Try and time it with times of the year when you are likely to have a problem such as pitch marks on the green.

****Additional points of etiquette added in June 2001***

Generally it is accepted that mobile phones should be switched off and not used to receive or make a telephone call while in the clubhouse or on the golf course. It is recommended that the use of mobiles should be restricted to the car park area and entrance of the clubhouse.

Dress code is generally the responsibility of the officials of each club to determine and operate. It is usually accepted that casual wear on and off the course does not include jeans, trainers or shirts without collars. In summer, tailored shorts, long socks and a collared shirt for men are acceptable with ladies following similar guidelines except the long socks. The Secretary or Official taking the green fees has the right to refuse individuals permission to use the facilities if dress is considered unsuitable.

[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.]