Courses should teach etiquette, add signs, rangers

It seems every summer the topic of slow play is raised. With more and more golfers—more beginning golfers—slow play will continue to be discussed and commented upon. Recently, I had yet another experience that reinforces the need for continued discussion, new ideas and continued education for the golfing public.

Although not a bad experience, it was typical of the new golfer not knowledgeable in golfing etiquette. When playing a quick round with my brother at a public facility, we had played five holes in less than 40 minutes when we caught up with a foursome; three obviously beginners. After waiting 10-15 minutes on holes 6, 7 and 8, and after seeing, tees shots fly into ditches and water hazard, I invited myself to play through. Reluctantly, the group allowed us through but later hit into us on a par 3, which could have caused injury.

There are several ways to educate the golfing public to speeding up play. The fundamental rule is to allow faster players through. This is well stated on signage and on the scorecards at the facility we played.

There is a need for continued education of the new golfers so that everyone will enjoy the game:
1. Modern signage. All players should have signs to alert players on the tee to hit before the players on the green put out. The signage should also note that faster players may play through.
2. As I mentioned, when ranges are not available, members of the group might monitor play and give direction—particularly when there are a few holes open ahead of two or three foursomes.
3. I disagree with time limits per hole; there always will be five-hour rounds at busy public facilities, but if all offer better education to the golfing public, perhaps we can work to make these longer rounds more enjoyable.

The recent death by lightning at the U.S. Open is a tragic example of the danger of not heeding educational messages to the golfing public (in this case, the gallery).

How many times have we heard not to take cover under a tree in case of lightning? Although I am sure, many lives have been saved by the education provided by the USGA, PGA and the PGA Tour, this tragedy should make us aware of the importance of continuing education for golfers and gallery.

Preaching to the converted doesn’t spread truth

"It’s like preaching to the converted," Dr. Richard Cooper said after speaking to lawn-care and seed industry people at Lehn Seed Co.'s field day in Martinsville, N.J., June 12.

The crowd had agreed wholeheartedly. Cooper showed results of several university tests showing chemical use on turfgrass does not lead to pollution of ground or surface waters.

If Cooper had given the same speech to environmental activists, he might have been dismissed in a slicker to protect himself from a barrage of tomahawks.

In the whole spectrum of humanity, Cooper said afterward, there are people to the far left and people to the far right on any one issue. They won’t listen, won’t budge from their viewpoint—no matter if the sky falls all around them and their beliefs.

The other 90 percent will listen to reason, wisdom and knowledge. They will listen to a body of knowledge, to the results of scientific study.

Environmental activists, Cooper said, are philosophically opposed to use of pesticides. No amount of evidence will change their mind. The "converted" in this instance are people working in golf course maintenance, landscaping and lawn care who rely on a certain—though increasingly smaller—amount of pesticides and fertilizers to do their work.

They have been joined by some of the "90 percent uncommitted" who have seen the statistics, heard presentations, and agreed with studies like those at Penn State, the University of Rhode Island, and on Cape Cod.

Yet only 99 out of 99 percent uncommitted stand out in the midst of a storm of words, swayed left or right by the bent of the speaker.

It seems someone somewhere will always take a stand for something. "Since barbarism has its pleasures it naturally has its apologists," Spanish-born poet and philosopher George Santanyana once said.

Yet, wisdom and understanding are "a tree of life to those who em-brace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed," we’re told in Proverbs 3:18.

The golf industry has to stand with wisdom and understanding, particularly on such divisive issues as chemical use. We can speak to one another until the sheep come home but we can’t win a single "convert." The message has to go out to the public.

Hats off to Dick Drew, superintendent at Olde Salem municipal golf course in Salem, Mass., who spoke out when opponents rose up against an expanded course because of concern over chemical use.

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The pro's side of the superintendent-pro coin

By Gene P. Smith

"Hey, Pro, what's wrong with the greens today?" "Why is the back fairway mower and the maintenance worker not there?" "Why is the back fairway mowing, and is the grass being aerified?"

These are just a few of the hundreds of questions members and guests ask the golf professionals when something unusual takes place on the golf course. The pro’s side of the superintendent-pro coin is proper marking. It’s hard enough to get golfers to play by the Rules of Golf, but putting them on a poorly marked course and it becomes impossible.

I generally prefer marking the course myself or allowing my assistant professionals to prepare it for tournaments. It becomes important when the players are moving around the boundaries or hazards stakes that they get replaced immediately. The crew must understand why this must be done.

Mutual respect, cooperation, communication and teamwork are the necessary ingredients to a successful relationship between a golf professional and superintendent. Without these, one or the other, or both, could find themselves searching for a new position.

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