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. While 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 four tee shots flying into trees and water hazard, I invited myself to play through. Reactuantly, 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.

Here are a few more suggestions for educating the new golfers so that everyone will enjoy the game:

1. More signage. All par fours should have signs to alert players on the tee to hit before the players on the green putt out. The signage should also note that faster players may play through.

2. As I’ve mentioned, when ranges are not available, members of the grounds crew 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.

Practicing 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 Leh’s 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 turfgrasses does not lead to pollution of ground or surface water.

If Cooper had given the same speech to environmental activists he might have wound up in a slicker to protect himself from a barrage of words. Opponents of chemicals will always be there, he said. They are there because of the public’s changing attitudes toward the 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 the arguments, and agreed with studies like those at Penn State, the University of Rhode Island, and on Cape Cod.

Yet now that 90 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 be there for something. “Since barbarism has its pleasures it naturally has its apologists,” Spanish-born poet and philosopher George Santayana once said.

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

The golf industry has to stand on wisdom and understanding, particularly on such divisive issues as chemical use. We can speak to one another until the sheep come home but it won’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 nine closed?” “What’s that strange fairway?”

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 credibility will be tested with each question, and without an intelligent, informative answer, that credibility could vanish.

Knowing what is happening on the course and why is as important as knowing how to fit a set of clubs, run a tournament or give a lesson. Only one person can properly inform the pro on course activity and that is the superintendent. With his help, the pro will be able to answer the many questions about the condition of the course and what activity might be taking place.

A good relationship with open communication is essential between the pro and the superintendent. Regularly, playing the course to gather and discussing present projects and future plans will keep the pro informed of what chemicals are being applied to the course, when aerification will be taking place, when the irrigation system is being repaired, etc.

Throughout my 21 years as a golf professional, I have heard the horror stories of greens being aerified the day before a member-guest tournament. At times there seemed to be a “we vs. they” attitude between pros and superintendents.

In recent years I have seen this attitude change to the extent that we see each other as part of a team with a common goal, which is to provide the best possible playing conditions for our members and guests.

The educational clinics and seminars conducted by the PGA of America and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America have enhanced the understanding of the roles we each play in working toward a successful golf operation.

Understanding each other’s responsibilities is essential in cultivating a working relationship between two key individuals. The pro is usually the first person a golfer sees in the pro shop and the person most likely to be asked any questions about course conditions and playability.

He is in a position to make the superintendent look like a hero or someone who is less than competent.

Conversely, the superintendent is in the same position in regards to how his crew reacts to the golfer on the course. If play catches the fairway mower and the maintenance worker has no regard for the golfers, it could be an ugly scene in the pro shop after the round.

It is proper marking. It is hard enough to get golfers to play by the Rules of Golf, but put them on a poorly marked course and it becomes impossible.

I generally prefer marking the course myself or allowing my assistants professional to prepare it for tournaments. It becomes important when the crew begins chasing around boundary markers or hazards stakes that they get re-placed 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.

Gene Smith is the golf professional at Delbury Plantation Golf Club in Delbury, Fla. He is president of the North Florida Section of the PGA and is a member of the National PGA Rules Committee.
Landowners join forces in 2,000-acre development

NEWGARDENTOWNSHIP, Pa. — A group of major landowners here have gotten together on the future development of 2,000 acres by the group include construction of homes. The development is to be named Kaolin Commons.

The four landowners would each develop their own individual properties in keeping with the master concept, and own and operate them independently of the others.

The first project likely to be built is a 18-hole golf course, along with a retirement village, hotel-conference center, town center, and luxury homes. The development is to be going through the approvals process.

Comment

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Drew educated residents by telling the Salem Evening News how he safely applies chemicals, trying “to apply the bare minimum” at all times.

Superintendents are the experts, the hands-on applicators to whom the public will give credence. More should tell the media their side of the story in local debates.

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we can look at the next five to 10 years as finding hands-on products. And we can concentrate on breeding grasses that haven’t received a lot of attention. Buffalograss, for instance, will be a hit.”

He said the funds will probably continue to support research the USGA is backing today.

Meanwhile, the Green Section will send out requests for proposals in August, then narrow those down for a Research Committee meeting in December. Finalists will then be asked for full proposals, and the funding decisions will be made in mid-1992.

“We’re excited the Executive Committee has committed itself to this program. It will help very much environmentally,” Snow said.