

USGA's Pace system can help your course cope with slow play

By DEAN KNUTH

Just about the time course management and golf committees had despaired of overcoming the slow play obstacle to running an efficient golf course, the U.S. Golf Association's (USGA)

Dean Knuth is senior director of handicapping, GHIN and Green Section Administration of the U.S. Golf Association. He developed the USGA Pace Rating system, as well as the USGA Course Rating and Slope Rating System.

Pace Rating System Manual has come along with a bookful of remedies. And they work.

For 10 real-life examples, consider the manual's case studies of courses which have speeded up play dramatically through a combination of course management and education. The courses, which include membership and daily-fee facilities, are successfully replac-



Dean Knuth

ing five hour rounds with rounds of 4-1/2 hours or less.

Obtain Your USGA Pace Rating and Time Pars

To a course, they began by determining an appropriate pace of play for a round. The

USGA's contribution in this area is a custom measure called "time par," the number of minutes it should take to play a given hole. Each time par on a course is

unique to the hole. It is calculated according to a formula, developed by the USGA, that takes into account the length and difficulty of the hole, and related factors, such as whether players normally walk or ride. The sum of 18 time pars equals the "pace rating," of the course, or the hours and minutes it should take to finish a round.

An advantage of the USGA formula is that it assumes play under "impeded" conditions, mean-

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Peter Blais, associate editor

Growth in the face-lift market hardly cosmetic

As person ages and the face sags. Same thing with a golf course.

Over time, irrigation systems decline, bunkers fill in, greens fail, noxious grasses invade, trees encroach on fairways. Eventually, a facelift is needed if the course is to continue attracting golfers.

"A lot of courses built between 1920 and 1950 are just worn out," said Tim Liddy, an Indiana architect and Pete Dye apprentice diligently trying to build his own practice. "They've paid their way and now things need updating, especially if they are going to keep pace with the newer courses being built down the street."

Age takes its toll on the best of courses. Wailea in Hawaii, Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles, Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Grand Cypress in Orlando, Medinah Country Club near Chicago are a few of the classic layouts spruced up over the past two years.

The *Golf Course News Development Letter*, a paid-subscription publication tracking golf projects throughout the country, has reported on 1,422 golf projects during the past 26 months. Of those, 143 have been renovations. That's better than 10 percent. Nothing to sneeze at.

The cost of a renovation project varies greatly. A sampling of renovations underway or planned from the past few issues included:

- \$5 million for a new irrigation system and realignment of nine holes at the University of Oklahoma Golf Course in Norman.
- \$2.6 million for an ongoing remodel that closed Coffin Golf Course in Indianapolis for two years.
- \$1.5 million for course and building upgrades at Buffalo Hill Municipal Golf Course in Kalispell, Mont.
- \$1.2 million for an irrigation overhaul at GolfCorp-operated Diamond Bar (Calif.) Golf Club.
- \$1.2 million for improvements to New Reid and Snyder Park municipal courses in Springfield, Ohio.
- \$1 million to spruce up Oak Tree Golf Club in Edmond, Okla.
- \$600,000 for irrigation

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Knuth: Slow play

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ing the course is full of four-somes so that faster groups cannot play through. Because it is geared to play at capacity, time par serves as a realistic time target any day of the week.

For most courses, the USGA Pace Rating has turned out to be just under four hours. Tougher and longer courses may rate over four hours. Participating regional golf associations are using the USGA Pace Rating software program to calculate time pars for their member clubs. To have your course pace rated, call your regional golf association.

Then Put Them To Work

The successful courses are using time par in several ways:

- As a scheduling guide: Once you know the time par for each hole, you can assign each hole its own starting time. Players will know how long they have to play each hole and what time they're due on the next tee.

- As an enforcement weapon: The USGA has developed a course grid, the USGA Pace Rating Tracking Matrix, which pinpoints where a group should be at any given time during a round. When your ranger is armed with a grid, he or she can quickly identify groups that have fallen behind and help them catch up. The Matrix will be available from your regional golf association later this year.

- As an analytic tool: Begin recording the time it takes to play each hole. Compare the actual finishing times with time par for the hole. If players are failing to achieve time pars on certain holes, look for:

- tee time intervals that are too close together. Generally, starting groups less than 10 minutes apart will cause delays, no matter how badly players want to keep to time pars. This is especially true if there is a par-3 among the first five holes. Do all you can to get players off to a fast start by spreading out starting times, and clearing brush and reducing obstacles on the opening holes. Create the expectation of fast play, and players will continue to make time pars. When initial play is slow, the opposite mindset occurs, and the pace of play degenerates throughout the round.

- cart rules that are slowing play. Restricting carts to cart paths adds 13 percent to time pars. Allow carts on fairways and the pace of play matches that of walking golfers.

By All Means Communicate

Finally, the courses that are winning the battle with slow play are doing a good job of educating their players about:

- Time par and the USGA Pace Rating for the course, and

- Ways to pick up speed on the tee, fairway, or green. Until players are exposed to fast play

tips through booklets, posters, videos, or other communication materials, they really are not aware of their own slow play habits. The USGA Pace Rating System Manual cites several communication and education resources that are available on the market.

And Manage

Employ management tools that keep players alert to the pace expectations of your course. They may include:

- Course starters, marshals, and rangers. Successful clubs know the costs associated with

these employees are more than offset by added play that ensues when a dent is made in the five-hour round.

Pleasant, courteous on-course staff can be trained to advise players on the course's time standards and help dilatory groups catch up. At some courses, marshals are handing out slow-play tickets and ordering players to skip holes or play from forward tees. Course management is backing them up by withholding morning tee times from slow players or sending them to pace clinics.

- If your course is wary of

offending slow players, keep in mind that slow players are ruining the day's play for all the groups stacked up behind them. The clubs studied in the manual report widespread respect for stringent policies.

- Balance the more punitive measures with a system of rewards. Allow those who keep to the pace to participate in early start times, prize drawings or merchandise discounts.

- On-course time reminders, such as signs, clocks or in-cart displays. The manual lists a number of vendors of time-management devices, as well as other

consultants on speed of play.

If you've lost patience with the reduced revenue, diminished return business, and blot on your course's reputation that slow play has produced, order a copy of the USGA Pace Rating System Manual and try the suggestions it contains. USGA member clubs were sent the manual in early February. To obtain your own copy, send \$5.00 to USGA Order Department, P.O. Box 708, Far Hills, NJ 07931.

And, let us know of your ideas for speeding up play; we'd like to include your success story in our next edition!

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