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) Pace Rating System has come along with a host 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 replacing five-hour rounds with rounds of 4-1/2 hours or less.

Obtain Your USGA Pace Rating and Time Par

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 “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, meaning...
Knuth: Slow play

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...the course is full of four-somes so that faster groups can- not 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 System has turned out to be just under four hours. Tougher and longer courses may rate over four hours. Participating regions publish and availability avai-
ning the course's time standards and help dilatory groups catch up. At some courses, mar-
shals 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.

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 offending slow players, keep in mind that slow players are ruin-
ing 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 num-
ber of vendors of time-management devices, as well as other consultands 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!

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 Rat-
ing 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 educat-
ing 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 Sys-

tem Manual cites several com-
munication and education resources that are available on the market.

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