A couple of months ago, I experienced one of those gorgeous Indian Summer days that helps carry me through the cold, nasty winters up here on the North Coast. I was visiting a course outside Dallas and playing a fun but mediocre round. I had my feet propped up on the dash of a golf car and was nursing a warm beer while killing time waiting for the group in front of us to clear a nasty little par 3. The moment didn’t suck.

As our foursome chatted, I spotted a huge red-tailed hawk turning lazy circles in the azure Texas sky above us. It was an incredibly peaceful scene that made me feel slightly better about being forced to sit behind some boneheads who were convinced they each needed 10 minutes to line up their critical double-bogey puts.

Suddenly, the majestic bird broke its slow, smooth glide and rocketed straight downward toward the native area to our right. At the last second, she spread her wings and slowed just enough to lower her talons and expertly snap something small, brown and furry that had — up to that moment — been minding its own business in the tall grass. She screamed that cool hawk victory cry and slowly flapped off into the distance to enjoy her snack.

It was a very bad day for that pitiful little varmint, but just another fast-food meal for one of Mother Nature’s kick-ass predators.

That moment got me thinking: In the great outdoors, every day is life or death for that deadly killer hawk and for either the predator or the prey.

Is our industry any different?

We have 16,300 golf courses each trying to get their share of a revenue pie that just doesn’t seem to grow from the 500-million-round plateau it’s been stuck at for a decade. Every course is different, but each has to hit a number that makes it economically viable to survive or even prosper. When it comes to hitting that number, are you the sharp-eyed, hungry hawk or the unsuspecting little fuzzy mammal? Are you the predator or the prey?

Take this quiz

Here’s a quiz based on Jeff Foxworthy’s “You know you’re a redneck if …” routine to help you gauge which category you fit in.

- You know you’re a predator if you have a well-thought-out player development plan to attract and retain golfers at your facility.
- You know you’re prey if you just assume people will show up and plop down money to play at your place.
- You know you’re a predator if you’re almost 100 percent focused on the golf course as your primary source of business.
- You know you’re prey if you’re spending all your time worrying about choosing a new wallpaper design for the clubhouse or hiring a new pastry chef for the kitchen.
- You know you’re a predator if you’re aggressively finding ways to improve the golf course and keep up with modern club and ball technology and offer something new to players.
- You know you’re prey if you think the course is just fine as it is and there’s no need to consider any upgrades or improvements.
- You know you’re a predator if you show up for work every day feeling like Conan the Barbarian, with a strong desire to crush your enemies, see them driven back for more.
- You know you’re prey if you just asume golfers to give you a try and makes it easy for them to help you gauge which category you fit in.

Are you a predator or prey?

Don’t forget to check out Pat’s Digital Coffee Shop column that appears twice a month in GCN’s weekly e-newsletter. To subscribe to the newsletter, visit the GCN home page and click on the “news” drop-down menu.