DYING A SLOW DEATH

If you visit Google and search for “slow play” and “golf,” you’ll find 115,000 results. (Warning: If you search for “slow play” by itself, you’ll find a few sites unsuitable for children.)

Research shows the time it takes to play the beautiful game of golf is second only to television Tour golf. The hacks at home don’t participate. In short, speed – or the lack thereof – kills.

The causes are many. It’s easiest to blame televised Tour golf. The hacks at home watch and copy notoriously deliberate play-signers such as Bernhard Langer and Ben Crane, who take eons to select clubs and line up putts. I’ve always thought slow professional groups should be haunted by the ghost of Rodney Dangerfield’s “Caddyshack” character screaming, “Hey! While we’re young!” when they lag. Yet, the Tour hasn’t fined a pro for slow play in centuries, so where’s the penalty for being a bad example?

Some people blame more difficult designs that include nastier bunkers, environmental areas, fairways as narrow as a ’60s necktie, higher rough and the like. I’ve played a ton of high-end daily fees, many designed by an architect whom I shall not name (hint: rhymes with “Fickless”), and too many are ball-eating monsters for the average schmuck.

By the way, I’ve come to start calling facilities like these bag-tag courses. You play there once, get your brains beat out during a six-hour round, grab your souvenir bag tag and never come back. If your facility is one of those, slow play is just a symptom of the real problem.

Some cite blazing green speeds as a contributing factor. Mounded putting surfaces designed in the 1920s for native turf cut at .25 can be a wee bit tricky when they’ve been redone with modern bents double-cut at .08 and rolled three times a week. If people are seven-putting and taking 20 minutes to clear a green, it’s probably time to rethink your mowing standards rather than booting them off the course.

Some blame the lack of etiquette and simple courtesy among modern golfers. Clowns who hit a dozen mulligans, take 10 minutes to look for a crappy ProStaff in the woods or have a preshot routine consisting of nine or more practice strokes are the worst offenders. The obvious solution to this (besides the liberal use of Tasers on the gluteus maximi of slowpokes) is a good, well-trained, motivated ranger staff. Every one of you has one of those, right?

I was reminded of the effectiveness of most rangers when I received the following “Top Ten Rules for Rangers” from my superintendent friend Junior down in Naples, Fla.:

1. Never read yesterday’s newspaper while on the job.
2. Never pick up lost balls until they stop rolling.
3. That sign that says, “Do not enter – nature preserve,” doesn’t apply to you.
4. It’s always OK to start people on the back, especially if it’s one guy by himself.
5. Employee lunch means get as much trash, now did he?

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