

Welcome



Slow Boat To Golfing Stagnation

I attended the annual R&A Press Day held each year at the Open venue and much of the conference revolved around what is becoming increasingly regarded as golf's biggest problem – slow play.

Gone are the days when you can zip around a course on a Saturday morning with a couple of friends in three hours and be home in time for family duties before lunch. Now, best to set aside five hours. Oh and buy one of those golf bags with a drink holder and a cool pocket for much needed supplies... and make sure you have some money to buy a snack at the half way house. You don't want to go weak with hunger while you're out there.

It's putting people off the game and that's bad news because the more people who decide that golf is great, but too time consuming to play regularly, the fewer people we have joining clubs and that's solid income disappearing for golf clubs.

For a pay and play course the slow play disease can be even more startling. For example, if a course loses 10 tee times a day because play is backed up, and remember that can be fewer than one tee time an hour in the summer season, the costs can be staggering. Take it as £25 a green fee, it works out at £100 a tee time; £1,000 a day; £7,000 a week.

That works out at £364,000 a year! All because someone didn't watch where their ball landed in the rough; parked their cart on the wrong side of the green; stubbornly maintained the laborious pre-shot routine they'd copied from JB Holmes or thought the plumb bobbing method for reading greens actually worked.

What to do?

The R&A actually feels that the real slow coaches are the top amateurs, who have been coached to take their time and who often, would you believe, have to speed up when they joined the pro ranks. But let's face it there are more tortoises on the main Tours than hares and the odd fine doesn't spoil the day of many millionaire players. Shot penalties are a must because a player will never know when even a single shot would help him make a cut, or even win a tournament. What price can you place on that?

Another explanation for longer rounds is that we're all walking further. Tees have been pushed back; walks between green and tee seem to have grown - all because we're hitting the ball further. Let's face it even those of us who are getting older are hitting it further!

Knock 10% off the distance a ball travels and, by definition, 10% could be knocked off the length of a course without effecting scoring and we could end up walking/playing 600 yards less each round. That in itself could knock half an hour off a round.

Will it happen? Your guess is as good as mine but one thing is sure. Something has to be done or the game will continue down the slow road to stagnation.

Scott MacCallum
Editor

LIKE A PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES

In June 2007, Muswell Hill Golf Club was left devastated after a fire broke out in the club's machinery shed.

With the building housing a diesel tank recently topped up with some 5,000 litres of fuel as well as chemicals including fertiliser, the force of the inferno consumed the club and lit up the London skyline. It took six fire engines and 50 firefighters to bring the blaze – believed to have been started deliberately – under control.

Fast-forward one year, however, and the club has risen like a phoenix from the ashes. Arid demoralised staff walk-outs, Matt Plested walked in as the club's new course manager and set about rebuilding the club and restoring staff confidence. One of his first tasks was replacing the £300,000-worth of grounds maintenance kit destroyed by the fire.

"The first thing I did was order new Toro kit," Matt recalls. Things are looking up now – we have an enthusiastic new greenkeeping team, the right machinery for the job and an excellent dealer in AT Oliver. It's an exciting time."



PRESENTATION DINNER

A presentation dinner was held at Ratho Park Golf Club on April 4. This was to honour the Club Professional, Alan Pate and Head Greenkeeper, Tom Murray. They both have clocked up 30 plus years service.



Left to right Alan and Susan Pate, Pat and Tom Murray