

The Back Nine

A column for writers and members to air and share their views on golf greenkeeping topics

Master Greenkeeper Norbert Lischka explores golfing etiquette by writing an open letter to the world's golfers

Dear golfer,

Greenkeepers live up to their name and used to be called Keepers of the Green. They want you to enjoy golf and the course. The Course Superintendent has to have a huge amount of technical knowledge, but when they start work at daybreak to prepare the course they have simpler jobs to do. First they remove dew from the greens, then mow and relocate the holes, at times they will have to spike and topdress for the long-term health, performance, and presentation of the course.

But – look at all the things that can interfere from that moment on. Pitch marks which are inadequately (or not at all) repaired, badly raked bunkers, divots not replaced, damage to the hole by careless replacement of the flag, balls lying around on pitch or putting greens, cigarette ends, the list goes on! Etiquette as in The Rules of Golf is important and is your responsibility, not the greenkeeper's. Having to repair the damage done by careless or thoughtless golfers wastes the time of highly qualified green staff, and means they have less time for the more important work of course maintenance. This etiquette is for your benefit, as there is nothing more annoying than finding a ball sitting in a badly raked bunker or having to repair someone else's pitchmarks before you can putt.

Most important is the green and its surrounding. You want a hole with an undamaged edge, because the ball could lip out otherwise. The hole remains undamaged without any difficulty if the ball is fetched out of the cup by hand – and not by using the club head! The flagstick should be handled carefully when removing it, and replaced with caution. You should repair your own pitch mark before putting, and in an ideal world should repair other marks spotted at the same time! Pitch marks should be repaired by drawing or pushing back the turf, not by lifting or digging. A good instruction can be found at www.PitchPin.de

High roughs are supposed to please the eye, affect the strategy of the course and benefit the environment. I feel it's best not to take trolleys or electric carts through the rough. The turf needs to be treated with care in all situations. Thus, it is a good habit to keep a minimum distance: 3m to the edge of greens and 2m to the edge of bunkers, and trolleys should definitely not be pulled between bunkers and greens. To avoid compactions on the putting greens it should be a general rule not to practice for more than five minutes on the same spot. The following players will be grateful for it!

Cigarette ends should be put in the ashtrays on trolleys, not dropped on fairways, bunkers, or greens. Range balls should be collected from all



about the author

Norbert Lischka MG has been Course Manager at Hamburg-Falkenstein Golf Club in Germany since 1994. After studying agriculture he travelled the world before landing his first greenkeeping job at Unna Frondenberg Golf Club. He has been a member of BIGGA since 1995 and is a member of the German Group of Sustainable Greenkeepers.

playing surfaces in the baskets provided. After a tee shot tees should be picked up. Tees should be wooden not plastic as they are more environmentally friendly and are less likely to damage mower blades.

When it comes to divots they must not be put back on tees. However, on the fairway divots are grateful for particular attention – taken back to their original place and treaded down carefully. On the range, care should be taken to ensure some turf remains between two divots in order to allow the seed to germinate faster.

To ensure a carefully raked bunker, the rake should be held with both hands and the sand carefully distributed. The edge of the bunker should be free of sand, leaving none on the grass to ensure the bunker does not lose its definition. By the way: the least bold border is the best one to enter or leave the bunker.

If the flagstick is not visible on the green, it could mean that a greenkeeper is currently working there. It is good etiquette for you to warn the greenkeepers you are playing the hole by calling "Fore" and waiting for the greenkeeper's hand signal before you start playing. A "Thank you" is always acceptable.

This is all for your benefit! More understanding from golfers will help greenkeepers immeasurably.

Yours faithfully, Norbert Lischka MG

The views expressed within this column are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International