



Repair Those Ball Marks and Divots

by Roy Damer, Chicago Tribune

Stan Mikita scored 600 goals during his Hall of Fame hockey career with the Chicago Black Hawks. Now his "goal" is to see people stop mistreating golf courses.

Mikita is the teaching pro at Kemper Lakes, a well-maintained public course in Hawthorn Woods. But he winces when he looks out of the club house windows over the beautiful landscape.

"I'm concerned about the abuse people give to golf courses — from pros to a guy who shoots 150," says Mikita. "I've seen pros drive their carts onto tees and some golfers who step out of their carts right onto the green."

In addition to driving carts too close to tees and greens, some golfers don't fix their ball marks on the putting surface and don't replace divots out on the course.

"Things are getting worse," moans Mikita. "When I play golf in the evenings after work, it looks like the crater of the moon out there.

"That's why I can't play here. I'm looking all over the place checking on the condition of the course and I don't concentrate on my game. I just can't enjoy it here, and this is one of the nicest courses around."

Mikita gave a good example of how even a new layout is mistreated.

"I was asked to play at the opening of Forest Preserve National," he says. "There are 120 invited guests — the first golfers to play the course. There was a shotgun start and my group went from the first tee. When I reached the third green, I had already come across four divot marks. Only eight people had gone through those two holes and already there were four divots."

There are two principle reasons golfers should fix ball marks on greens, replace divots and keep carts away from greens and tees:

1. It will help maintain the fine playing conditions that golfers want.

2. It will help keep the cost of golf down. If an employee does that work, the cost eventually is passed on to the golfers.

This is a problem that doesn't just affect public courses. Members of private clubs report the same conditions exist there.

"Don't get me wrong," said Mikita. "The majority of players will fix the course. But there are perhaps 10 percent of golfers who will leave everything whether they're playing at Medinah, Butler National or anywhere."

"We have certain rules at Kemper Lakes but essentially we ask people to leave the course the way they found it. And it would be nice if they'd fix an extra ball mark along the way, too."

Here's a graphic illustration of why it's important to fix ball marks. If it's fixed within 5 minutes, it will start healing in 24 hours. If it isn't repaired, it takes 15 days to start healing.

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