

# NGF figures show more golfers, fewer rounds in '89

## 'Relatively little growth overall for industry,' reports Beditz

The number of golfers grew, but rounds decreased in 1989, according to the National Golf Foundation's latest research report on golf in the United States.

The report, "Golf Participation in the U.S.," showed that the nation's golfer population rose 5.6 percent — from 23.4 million to 24.7 million players — but aver-

age rounds played per golfer dropped 7.7 percent — from 20.8 to 19.2. That decrease resulted in a 2.7-percent decline (487 million vs. 474 million) in total rounds played for the year.

Rounds played is one of the leading business indicators for golf course owners/operators, golf equipment manufacturers, and other golf-related businesses.

In 1987 and 1988, annual rounds played had increased three percent and 12 percent, respectively.

Researchers believe that record spring rains that drenched the Northeast and Hurricane Hugo's assault last fall on the Southeast

contributed to the dropoff in 1989.

"Whatever the reasons," said Dr. Joseph F. Beditz, NGF president and chief executive operator, "our findings show that, while there were certainly more people than ever playing golf in 1989, they played on average a little less often ... meaning relatively little growth overall for the golf industry."

"It also shows us," he added, "that to achieve its full potential for growth, the industry needs to work together collectively to not only ease the entry of beginning golfers into the game, but also to encourage less frequent golfers

**'The industry needs to work together collectively.'**

**— Dr. Joseph Beditz**

to play more often."

In its surveys, the NGF defines a golfer as anyone 5 or older who has played at least once during the survey year. It also distinguishes players by frequency of play, with "frequent golfers" being those who play 25 or more times a year.

Frequent golfers, who consistently constitute approximately 25 percent of the U.S. golfer popula-

tion, historically account for 75 percent of all the rounds played each year. In 1989 their numbers decreased slightly — from 5.6 million to 5.5 million.

The report also shows that the national participation rate (percentage of population that are golfers) increased from 10.4 percent to 10.8 percent in 1989.

Minnesota, Wisconsin, Utah, Iowa, Michigan and North Dakota remain the only states with participation rates exceeding 14 percent. Minnesota, breaking last year's tie with Wisconsin at 15.9 percent, became the first state to exceed 17 percent.

California still easily tops the nation in total golfers with more than 2.6 million. New York and Illinois are next with just under 1.5 million golfers each. Texas, Ohio, Michigan and Florida remain the only other states with golfer populations exceeding 1 million.

Ten percent of golfers, or 2.5 million, were beginners — playing for the first time in 1989. There were also 2.1 million golfers who "returned to action" after one or more years of not playing. Those two pluses were offset by the 3.3 million golfers who dropped out in 1989 after having played during 1988. This yielded a net increase of 1.3 million golfers for the year.

Among other findings of the report were:

- For the fourth straight year, about 40 percent of all new golfers were females — 1 million out of the 2.5 million total. However, the attrition rate among females in 1989 also continued to be disproportionately high. Although women constituted 22 percent of the golfer population, they accounted for 33 percent of those who dropped out.

- Highest participation rates are among Americans in their 20s and 30s — 16.2 percent and 14.0 percent, respectively. Half of the nation's golfers come from these two age groups combined.

- Although their numbers remain at about 3.4 million, seniors (age 60 and older) represent a diminishing proportion of all golfers. In 1986 they were 16.5 percent of the total, in 1989 only 13.9 percent. Golfers age 60 and above constitute nearly 30 percent of all frequent golfers.

- Golfers' average household income is \$45,100 a year, almost 30 percent above the national average.

- More than 40 percent of all golfers live in households headed by a college graduate. Another 28 percent come from households whose head attended college but did not graduate.

- In 1989, as in previous years, 80 percent of the nation's golfers were "public golfers," playing at least 50 percent of their rounds on public courses.

- Private golfers play more often than public golfers (26.7 vs. 17.1 rounds per year).

- Male junior (under age 18) golfers are 4 1/2 times as numerous as junior females — 1.6 million versus 362,000.

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