

# Clark lists ways for golf courses to speed up play

The key to a successful public golf course is the number of rounds played. When players get hung up in tall grass, water, trees or sand, play often slows to a snail's pace, resulting in fewer rounds completed and less-than-expected revenues.

Architects can take several measures to speed play, according to Tom Clark, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

"A well-designed, well-drained course with visible 'target areas,' properly placed bunkers and water hazards, and smaller greens will usually play fastest," said Clark.

"The key is to challenge the player without overwhelming him with hazards and slowing play considerably."

## BUNKERS AND BLIND SHOTS

Bunkers and blind shots play a critical role in the time it takes to complete a round.

"Getting out of the bunker may take two or three shots and then the player has to rake the area," said Clark. "To speed play, we are designing more grass depression bunkers instead of the traditional sand bunkers. Interestingly, pro players seem to have more problems with grass bunkers than the average player."

Clark also recommends holes be designed with only visible targets, eliminating blind shots, which often end up in the rough or out-of-bounds.

"A visible target enables the golfer to see the green or landing area," Clark said. "Seeing the target is 90 percent of speeding up play."

## GREENS AND WATER HAZARDS

Oversized greens and poorly maintained water hazards can also slow play.

"We used to design greens as large as 9,000 square feet," Clark said.

"Smaller greens, though still a challenge, usually require fewer putts and less time spent lining them up."

Water hazards also can be designed and maintained properly to speed play.

"The banks of water hazards should be bulkheaded or otherwise kept clean, without weeds or dense grass to hide a ball," Clark said. "If a golfer hits his ball near the water's edge, he's going to stop and look for it. A well-designed and maintained water hazard keeps the ball search shorter."

Time spent looking for balls slows play considerably. To remedy this situation Clark recommends clearing and maintaining wider landing areas. "Many courses save on maintenance by not mowing certain areas," he said. "But what they may save in maintenance, they lose in the number of rounds

played."

As an example of a well-designed public course with features that speed play, Clark pointed to the Herndon (Va.) Centennial Golf Course. Because of its design, maintenance and the benefit of good weather, Herndon hosted 70,000 rounds of golf last year.

## PROPER ETIQUETTE SPEEDS PLAY

Part of the responsibility for eliminating slow play rests on the players' shoulders. "Golfers

should practice course etiquette and know the rules of the game to speed play," Clark said. "For example, golf etiquette dictates a player is allowed no more than five minutes to look for a ball."

Golfers should also consider taking a provisional shot when necessary. "If a tee shot lands deep in the rough, a provisional shot should probably be taken before you start looking for the ball," said the ASGCA president. "That way, if you can't find the ball, you won't have to backtrack

to hit another shot."

## DEVELOPING LEARNING CENTERS

Architects also are designing learning centers to help golfers improve their ability and shorten playing time.

"Learning centers provide areas to practice putting, driving and chipping," said Clark. "As a general rule, the lower the handicap the faster the golfer can complete the round."

With this in mind, some elite courses require golfers to present

a handicap card before they tee off. "Requiring a handicap provides golfers with a compelling reason to improve their game," Clark said. "Improving their game offers golfers the opportunity to play the prestigious courses with less waiting, while hopefully shooting a lower score."

A brochure on master planning may be obtained by sending a stamped self-addressed business envelope to the American Society of Golf Course Architects, 221 N. LaSalle St., Chicago, Ill. 60601.

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