

Go-Golf is part of an intensive campaign for faster play at Los Angeles golf courses. Its avid supporter, golf manager Ray Goates, claims that faster play can result in higher profits for golf operators and better scores for golfers

By DON CURLEE

THINK

Many golf operators complain about slow play—with good reason—but the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks and golf manager Ray Goates are doing something about it, and it's beginning to pay off.

This month the 1970 edition of Go-Golf will be held at Los Angeles municipal courses, using new and even more dramatic techniques to show that it's better for everybody when golf is played briskly.

For the past two years, this spring event has amounted to a race against the clock around any of the city's nine golf courses for anybody who has wished to take part. It has resulted in a barrel full of statistics and records of fast playing times (and often improved scores) which give Goates ammunition for his relentless attack on slow play.

During Go-Golf players found reminders about faster play everywhere. For example, a sign reading: "385 golfers played this course under four hours during Go-Golf." A sheet of helpful hints was distributed, and promotional messages about the event beamed out for weeks ahead in a publicity campaign through newspapers, radio and television, a project that is already in progress this year.

One of the new tactics Goates has devised for this year will involve a comparison between speeded up Go-Golf rounds at one

course and rounds at the regular pace at a parallel course. The city operates two 36-hole layouts on which the comparison will be conducted.

At each location, Griffith Park and Sepulveda Basin, golfers on one of the 18s will be encouraged to play as rapidly as possible, with signs, literature and all the prompting, while those who play the parallel course will not be reminded about faster play in any way. Goates expects some interesting contrasts.

Where Go-Golf is in effect the standard round will be four hours or less, and all who beat that time will receive a badge reading: "I am a Go-Golfer." Goates expects to hand out many badges, since more than 4,000 golfers played 18-hole rounds in less than three hours and 18 minutes in 1969 when all courses in the municipal system took part.

Catchy slogans about faster play have been very popular, and Goates is conducting a contest among Los Angeles golfers this year for the best slogans. Winners will receive preferred starting times wherever they wish to play. Goates will see that the slogans are painted on small signs and distributed strategically at the participating courses.

Another innovation this year will be a series of time studies. These will cover six strategic



SPEED!



movements from tee to green, and Goates expects to learn just where the slow-downs occur. Certain groups will be timed on the tee, from tee to their second shots, hitting the second shot, hitting a recovery shot, holing out and moving from the green to the next tee.

Some background for the time studies has been accumulated already by Goates. Certain holes have been timed in past Go-Golf and regular play without golfers knowing about it, and Goates expects to repeat this procedure for further comparisons.

In many ways Go-Golf is a testing ground to determine the benefits of faster play and to learn how play can be speeded up. So far the golfer participants have enjoyed being guinea pigs, and Goates thinks they will be just as willing this year.

Response during both previous years of the experiment has convinced Goates that golfers want to speed up play and appreciate the "laboratory conditions" that allow them to do so. These favorable comments were received:

"This was the greatest. Please get after those slow players who made golf miserable."

"I didn't realize it could be done."

"I promise to play this fast if I can play at 10 a.m. on Saturdays or Sundays."

Continued

Slow golfer's nemesis is Ray Goates, golf director, Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, with Go-Golf reminders.

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"Our demonstrations prove beyond doubt that faster and more enjoyable golf is possible," says Goates. "Our statistical comparison from last year shows that we gained 14,756 more rounds for the first six weeks after Go-Golf."

Goates sees convincing evidence that Go-Golf has already achieved one of its primary goals—making golfers more time conscious. This is especially true in the organized groups, the men's and women's clubs. He is sure that continued promotion of faster golf will cause the time consciousness to spread.

He believes he has a case for showing that faster play is more profitable for golf operators. While he has no figures to show increased returns in the professional shops, driving ranges, restaurants and other concessions on the fastplay days, he recognizes the potential. "Faster play on a permanent basis would increase the number of rounds played. This would naturally improve business conditions for the professionals. We haven't worked out anything completely on the dollar increase that we might expect if all golfers played faster," he says, "but the fact that more players can use our facilities would certainly mean increased revenues."

During the first test of Go-Golf in 1968 several of the participants equaled their all-time best scores while playing rapidly. Among them were two 12 handicappers with scores of 80 and 78. In the weekly sweepstakes conducted by the Sepulveda Women's Club, 26 of the 55 players came in with net scores in the 70s as part of Go-Golf, while only 15 could score that well a week earlier playing on an easier course. "Gee, this is the way to play golf," said one of the club members after the faster round.

One member of the men's club at the Rancho Park course said, "The speed is better for my game.

Felt like a private club—we didn't wait for any shots."

Goates finds that the inspiration and example of Go-Golf keeps play moving faster for a few weeks, "but our golfers gradually fall back into a slow pace again." And this is exactly what he's planning to overcome now.

Surprisingly, the perennial slow movers seem to take the pushing well. "Complaints from the slow movers have been minimal during the Go-Golf demonstrations," says Goates. "All seem to join in and enjoy making it successful."

The United States Golf Assn. has promoted faster play consistently, using a cartoon character named Baffy, created by Hank Ketchum, to illustrate all the steps not to take. Baffy daydreams, dawdles and drags his way around the course, oblivious to the detrimental effect his inconsiderate acts have on his own game and the games of others.

Joseph C. Dey, former executive director of the USGA says, "All the timesaving could probably be done on and about the putting green, if yours is an average group. The green is the home of the tortoise (Baffy). Here he seems to go into his shell, blotting out all thought of others, as he engineers his tortuous, tortoise way over the close-cropped turf."

Dey, writing in one USGA brochure that encourages faster play, says his own rule of thumb regarding playing time is about three hours—but that's championship play involving two players, "A friendly game ought not to take more than two and a half hours," he writes.

The National Golf Foundation's activities in behalf of faster play are well known. They center around two rabbit-like characters, Speedy and Mrs. Speedy. The NGF indicates that more than 2,000 courses put Speedy to work in 1968, in posters, decals, imprints and course markers on tees and elsewhere. A complete kit of these materials is available.

NGF also advocates a system of course operation that sends players off the front and back nines simultaneously. When the course is saturated it is closed to play for four hours and 22 minutes (allowing four hours and 12 minutes for complete rounds, plus a 10 minute cushion), and when it is reopened the procedure is repeated. "Figure your gain based on cost per round," the NGF says. "You cannot afford not to use the system."

Some of the NGF's other suggestions to golf operators about faster play:

- Markers 150 yards out on all four- and five-par holes
- Signs giving directions to next tee at all public fee courses
- Include the recommended playing time for each hole on the sign at each tee
- Instruct players in the proper use of golf cars—they can help speed up play only if they are used properly.
- Use slogan signs about faster play, but keep them in repair.

The demonstrations at the Los Angeles courses have proven several points about faster play, but one is that promotion must be constant. Players need repeated reminders to speed up, at least until this becomes part of their habit patterns.

The president of one non-proprietary private club in northern California is so convinced that slow play ruins golf scores and golfers that he won't permit it under any circumstances. He tells of warning one member repeatedly about his slow-down tactics until finally the member protested, saying that he had paid his membership fee and he'd play at the pace he chose.

Next round he did just that, playing even slower than he had previously. When he reached the 18th green, the president of the club was there to greet him. He presented the golfer with a check in the amount of his membership—\$3,600.

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It's been four years since that incident, but the club president is more convinced than ever that it was a reasonable price to pay. What's more he's ready to pay it again if necessary. His members know it, and his club is flourishing in the absence of "snail's pace" golfers.

Goates' tactics at the public courses in Los Angeles are having the same effect. He's identified with faster play, and the players won't let him forget it.

"If Go-Golf does nothing else it has speeded up my game," he says. "Whenever I'm on the course golfers keep reminding me about moving fast. It seems like more people comment all the time. They're thinking about faster golf constantly, and that's something we can build on." □

Tips for Faster Play

On the tee

1. Tee off as soon as the group in front is clear
2. Carry an extra ball in your pocket
3. Limit conversation until you leave the tee

On the fairway

1. Select club and hit without delay
2. Watch your ball. Mark it if it leaves the fairway
3. Help search for lost balls after you hit your shot
4. If you are lagging, first ones holeing out tee off first
5. If you are lagging, do not wave up following group on three-pars

From green to tee

1. Leave green immediately after last player has holed out
2. Mark scores after you leave the green
3. Hit tee shot without delay

In general

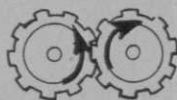
1. You must keep pace with the group ahead
2. No golf lessons on the course.
3. Keep practice swings to a minimum

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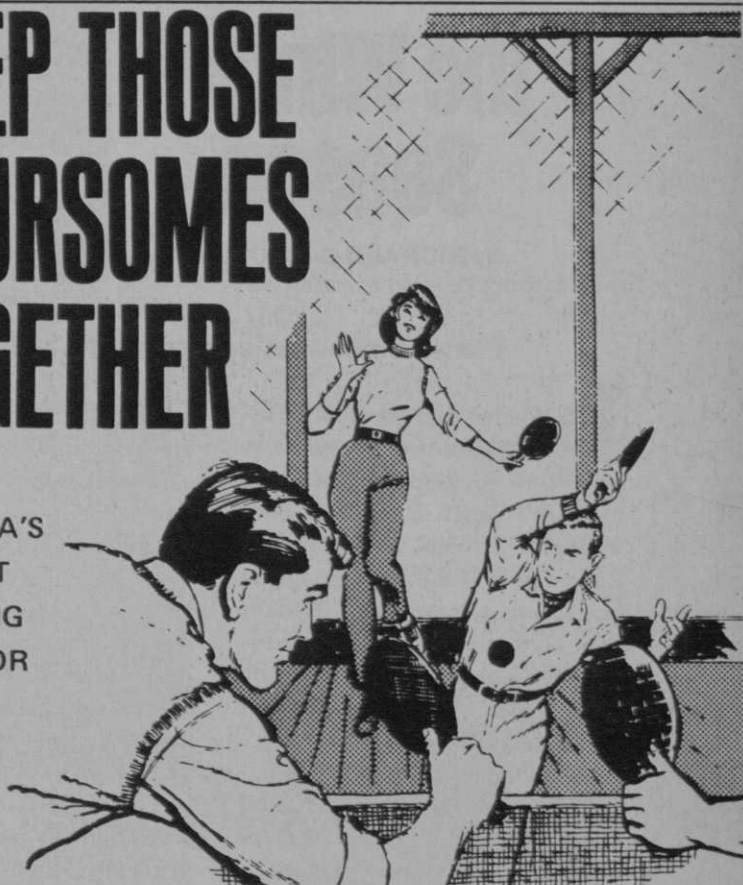


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