

They kick their balls and throw them, too. You can hear them guffawing when they skip their tee shots into the drink. A quintuple bogey? Big deal. A 90

score for nine holes? Who cares?

These girls just want to have fun. And they do in the Fast Bad Golf League at Sunnybreeze Palms GC in Arcadia, Fla.

The league was created by Kathy Baker, co-owner of Sunnybreeze Palms, who saw the need for an entry-level and easygoing format for women who enjoy golf—but on their own terms. Eight years later, the league remains as popular as a long-running Broadway hit.

"I like to play golf for fun, fellowship and being outdoors," Baker says. "I was tired of playing with competitive, bloodthirsty women who count their strokes and everybody else's strokes when they're playing. Golf needs to be less serious."

Baker believed other women empathized with her just-want-to-have-a-good-time attitude. When she organized the Thursday morning league, they emerged with clubs in hand.

Players come from all walks—moms, widows and professionals. "Once we had two 90-year-olds playing in the group," Baker says.

It's no surprise because more women want to play golf. They account for 40 percent of all new players, according to the National Golf Foundation. Many women just need to feel like they belong. "They don't want to look stupid," Baker adds.

And they don't want to be intimidated. There may be more new women golfers, but many of them quit soon after starting partly because of the intimidation factor. Some are even unnerved by their husbands.

"Many women don't want to play with their husbands and others who are good because they are intimidated by them," Baker notes.

It was another reason that Baker formed the league. She makes it clear that intimidation doesn't have a place in the Fast Bad Golf League. Even those with godawful games are welcome.

"This is a great place for women who are just learning the game," Baker says. "If they tip

Girl Golfers Just Wanna Have Fun

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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over their golf carts, we have a good laugh. If they hit their balls in the water, nobody cares."

But don't get the idea that the Fast Bad Golf League doesn't have rules. These women are versed in golf etiquette. And they don't want to delay others on the course with slow play. (Hence, the word "fast" in the league name.)

"If they go over 10 strokes, they have to pick their balls up," Baker says, adding that women usually complete their 9-hole rounds in about two hours.

Not surprisingly, the "good" golfers didn't want to play behind the perceived "bad" women players when the league began in 1992. But their criticisms were quelled when they saw that the "bad" women players moved at a quick pace. And something ironic happened. "Some of the good women players from other groups wanted to join the league when they saw how much fun we were having," Baker says.

Other women joined the league with the intention of learning the game and moving on to other challenges. But they were having so much fun that they didn't want to quit the league, Baker says.

The Fast Bad Golf League also doubles as a support group. Golfers with personal problems will find that other league members are willing to help them deal with their grief. "It's like group therapy, which is what golf is," Baker says.

But mostly the league is about fun, which is what golf is supposed to be about, Baker stresses. So if a woman wants to throw her ball instead of driving it off the tee or kick her ball instead of putting it, she can, according to the rules of the Fast Bad Golf League.

And she can burst into laughter at herself for doing so.

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