

Taking a Step Back

By now you've probably heard or seen the public service announcements promoting "Tee It Forward." This is the USGA and PGA of America's joint answer to golf's ills. The campaign hits full throttle July 5th through 17th when the associations encourage "all golfers to play the course at a length that is aligned with their average driving distance."

The benefits of the concept? "Golfers can speed up play by utilizing tees that provide the greatest playability and enjoyment. With many more golfers hitting approach shots with 6- and 7-irons instead of hybrids and long irons, their chances for enjoyment increase."

There's no question many golfers play from the wrong tees. Since the USGA and R&A bungled equipment regulation over the last twenty years, elite golfers now launch the ball like never before. New courses were built to accommodate the new game while everyday courses compensated for the seemingly overnight changes by building new tees, planting trees, growing rough and most costly of all, speeding up greens. So as new technology gave a disproportionate boost to low handicappers and pros, hacks only saw marginal distance gains.

The reaction to these changes in the game finally caught up to us as rounds take too long and only the wealthy or retired can commit to an 18-hole "experience."

In other words, teeing it forward won't make a bit of difference, especially since the USGA and PGA of America are not offering any financial enticement for golfers to move forward.

IF EVERYDAY GOLFERS START TEEING IT FORWARD AND HAVING THE SAME WAITS AS THE PGA TOUR PRO, WHAT FUN WILL THAT BE?

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



Even as they sit on huge hordes of cash, neither organization is backing their faith in Tee It Forward by offering golfers a token reimbursement for committing to move forward. Such a rebate, even if it's a token \$3 for playing up one set of tees, would have shown just how serious they are about a concept that figures to only wreak havoc at courses where unified implementation actually happens July 5-17.

For starters, Tee It Forward offers a yardage chart that makes no sense. The associations list the proper yardage for a PGA Tour Professional at 7,600 to 7,900 yards, meaning only one tour venue is officially long enough (Cog Hill). The rest of the time, the PGA Tour is essentially teeing it forward by the USGA and PGA's calculations.

And if you've been to a PGA Tour event lately, you know that the fields are backing up on nearly every par-5 — now that most of the field can reach even the longer three-shotters. Driveable par-4s where only a few bombers could get home a decade ago are now essentially long par-3s, creating another backup.

If everyday golfers start teeing it forward and having the same waits as the PGA Tour pro, what fun will that be? And how safe will it be? Missed

shots off the faces of today's incredibly well designed clubs travel farther offline when combined with today's longer flying balls. So just when you thought you had the safety issues at your course figured out, Tee It Forward is likely to introduce new issues.

Ultimately, the state of the game still comes down to this: The golf course industry has four times the impact that the equipment industry has on our economy, yet it keeps working around what a few manufacturers believe is necessary to sell the latest and greatest equipment to meet their earnings estimates. We gave the equipment companies a chance over the last decade to let this model play out, and look where it got us.

The only way out of the spiral: Create a tournament ball for professionals to eliminate this silly distance chase. Return the emphasis to shot making, fun and skill, returning the championship golf course to something around 7,000 yards. Golfers will relate to the professional game again. Who knows, they might even tee it forward without prompting.

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