



“The request to build forward tees is coming from not only public facilities, but also resort courses and yes, even private golf courses.”

MARK WOODWARD, *Contributing Editor*

No shame in playing it forward

One trend in golf that I actually think might be working and getting a foothold is the “Play it Forward” program. The premise behind this program is the idea of making golf easier and more fun. Sure, golf is a difficult game and takes time to learn, but once a person gets smitten with the golf bug, it’s hard to get it out of their system. With this in mind, however, many golfers continue to make things difficult on themselves and take the pleasure out of the game by playing the wrong teeing grounds.

Last year my partners and I started a golf course renovation and construction company (I know, insert joke here), and we often get asked to construct forward tees. In many cases, golf courses are designed for better players. The average golfer can’t truly enjoy himself or herself from 6,500 to 7,000 yards. So, why not make golf more fun by constructing tees that shorten the course to be more in line with the average player’s ability?

As good as we are as superintendents, we can’t maintain a golf course to match the average player’s ability, particularly if they think in their

minds they are better golfers than they really are. The truth is, with all the improvements to golf equipment, facilities, and the game itself, there are still plenty of golfers who can only dream of enjoying a round from the tips.

So as an industry, let’s continue to recognize this and encourage and promote the fact that golf would be a whole lot more enjoyable if golfers play the tee complexes that are more in line with their abilities. We also need to continue to educate golfers and change the mindset that “playing it forward” is not something to be ashamed of. Golfers need to understand

that if they are going to spend the time and money to play a round, they may as well enjoy themselves. Let’s face it, if you have more fun, you’ll want to come back and have some more fun. If you want to come back, rounds will go up, and if rounds go up, revenue will follow. To me, that sounds like a win-win-win for golfers, facilities and the industry overall.

The request to build forward tees for aging golfers, beginning golfers, junior golfers and golfers who just want to have more fun is coming from not only low-end public facilities; it’s also coming from resort golf courses, daily

fee golf courses and yes, even private golf courses.

We’ve recently constructed forward tees at several high end private clubs with aging memberships who have come to realize that if they are going to spend four-and-a-half hours out on a golf course, they want to enjoy the experience and not come off the 18th green feeling like they’ve been beaten up.

The great thing about the “Play it Forward” concept is that it is generally easy to implement and relatively inexpensive. Many golf courses that cannot afford to build actual forward tees just place tee markers out on the beginning of the fairway and market them as junior tees or “play it forward tees.” In some cases this simple recognition of shortening the golf course to increase the pleasure of the round works quite well.

I’ve even heard that many of the well-known golf course architects (including Jack Nicklaus) have embraced the “Play it Forward” program. Like all of us, Jack is aging and doesn’t hit the ball as far as he used to. But more importantly, he understands that in order for the golf industry to continue to recover — and even grow — golf needs to be fun.

So, I encourage all of you to promote this concept at your clubs. Because it actually works.

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