



## Women In Golf

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**Editor's Note:** Last spring I drove to Davenport, Iowa to attend the USGA Green Section Regional Meeting. All of the previous such conferences I have attended were time well spent. The meeting in Iowa proved the same.

One of the speakers on the program was Maggie Giesenhagen. She is the Western Region Manager of the USGA Women's Regional Affairs. Her lecture was excellent and offered wisdom for any golf course superintendent. I left feeling glad she had travelled so far to speak. At lunch I approached her to see if she would allow me to share her speech and its advice with all readers of *THE GRASS ROOTS*. She graciously agreed, and here it is. If you read it carefully and think about what she is saying, you will be better prepared to meet some of the reasonable needs of this very significant group of golfers on our Wisconsin golf courses.

I would like to share with you some of the issues in women's golf that might be of interest to this audience. We realize we participate in a male-dominated sport. It is part of the culture and the traditions of the game. However, we are becoming involved more and more with our club's golf committees, green committees, boards of directors and I can even name a few clubs which have had a woman president. I guess the men are coming to understand we are doers, we are organized, we will see a task to completion. The USGA and all golfers are fortunate to have the expertise, services and dedication of Judy Bell and Carol Semple Thompson—both accomplished amateur players and well-known administrators of the game—on our Executive Committee, which is THE ruling body of the USGA.

There are increasing numbers of women as golf course superintendents, club managers, and golf professionals. Change is even apparent in the PGA of America as a one-year pilot program has been initiated for women PGA professionals, allowing them to play for the same purse in some local events from shorter tees which measure 82 percent of the yardage played by their male peers.

Equal access to tee times and facilities at the club level is a hot topic among the women. Several states have recently enacted legislation requiring it. Others are beginning to see the light. Recent newspapers and golf magazines have documented lawsuits that are pending. Generally, we women have an uphill battle on this issue.

Women number approximately one-third of all golfers. However, the beginners coming into the game are predominantly women. We take twice the golf lessons the men take; we spend more money in golf shops. But sadly, it is estimated that three of four women beginners are dropping out of golf. Why? Because of a bad experience? Because we are intimidated? Because we do not appreciate the manner in which we were treated?

I agree with Carol Mann, LPGA Hall of Famer and past president of the LPGA and the Women's Sport Council, who addresses this issue and challenges the golf professional to cater more to women—from the sales people in the golf

shop to the lesson tee. She points out most women have not been trained to retain instruction and lack the same seriousness men have when taking up the game. They get easily overloaded with the technical aspects. Consequently, they try too hard. Carol says to the pro, "impress the need for lessons and practice and proper playing partners for them. Extol the joys of a round of golf. They are away from the kids, meeting new people. The landscape is beautiful; there is wildlife to be seen. There are social aspects to the game, and it is relaxing." Don't be condescending; research your women's market by listening to them.

Alice Dye, member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and Pete Dye's wife, suggests most course design and setup is discouraging for women entering golf. On this subject I would like to elaborate more.

Who is the female golfer? The BEST amateur women players with SCRATCH HANDICAPS—let's say those who make it to match play in our US Women's Amateur Championship—carry their drives an average of about 190 yards. Add some roll and they will end up at about 210 yards off the tee. In two shots, they will be about 400 yards. However, the AVERAGE woman golfer has about a 30 HANDICAP. She can carry the ball with her driver about 120 yards and will get some roll to end up at 130 yards total off the tee. In two shots, we will be at about 250 yards, and three full shots will be at about 370 yards.

Now remember, this is the AVERAGE woman player I am describing. She plays almost every hole in double bogies. There are as many women players with handicaps OVER 30 as there are UNDER 30. The USGA has a handicap index limit for women at 40.4. Numerous women's associations, however, calculate women's indexes up in the 50s or 60s in order that their less skilled members might be competitive. Any index OVER 40.4 can ONLY be used for INTRA-CLUB PLAY. These players hit the ball 80 to 100 yards tops with almost any club in their bag. These are the triple and quadruple bogey players. Certainly one thing you

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can say about the skill level of women's golf is that it is extremely diversified. LENGTH is the single most difficult factor that most women have to contend with on the golf course.

Consider having a choice of two or three sets of tees for the women at your courses. Men have used two or three tees for years; women's skill levels are much more diverse than men's. Those clubs that use two sets of forward tees have found the shorter tees can be shared with the juniors, and the longer second tee is sometimes shared by the senior men.

The key is to offer the women a CHOICE—to be able to play the length of course they enjoy. Suggested lengths of courses are 5900-6200+ yards for the close-to scratch players. This is often the normal white tee yardage most men play and is about the length we set up the courses for our US Women's Open and Women's Amateur. The 20-30 handicap players enjoy a course set up at 5300-5700 yards. The 40 and above player should play at about 4900-5200 yards. Corresponding women's course ratings should be requested from your state golf association for any set of tees on your course that ANY woman might play, not just members at the course. This way, all scores can be correctly posted and the women's handicaps will be correct. Understand that from the same set of tees, women's course and slope ratings will differ from men's course and slope ratings.

Please consider the higher handicap women as you maintain, design or redesign golf holes. SPEED OF PLAY is a great concern for all of us, but especially for these players. Their shots normally have a low trajectory and they get a lot of bounce and roll. Consider having ROUGH eliminated in FRONT OF GREENS so they can bounce the ball on. If they have to carry their ball ON the green, they will normally roll over. A carry of 75 yards OVER ROUGH in FRONT of a TEE is very penalizing for the average woman, especially if it is high rough and stops the ball. Severe obstacles, like water, that require a carry of more than 75 to 80 yards with no bailout area often penalize some ladies to the extent they cannot even finish the hole. If a severe obstacle is positioned to be carried on the DRIVE, a solution is for a SHORT TEE to be designed on the GREEN side of the obstacle. However, if the severe obstacle is in front of the GREEN, the less skilled women need some sort of a short carry, mowed bailout area to the side to allow them to complete the hole.

Don't misunderstand. Women do not want to play a course that is boring and devoid of obstacles. Everyone enjoys the challenge of "letting it all out and going for it." But the high handicap player should be able to finish every hole, even if she has to play AROUND the severe obstacles she cannot possibly carry over.

The USGA has set guidelines for women's par:

Up to 210 yards.....	Par 3
211 yards to 400 yards.....	Par 4
401 yards to 590 yards.....	Par 5
Over 591 yards.....	Par 6

Of course, you can deviate from these guidelines due to the design of a hole or elevation changes, but women's pars should be assigned to reflect the skill level of the SCRATCH woman player, not the skill levels of your LOCAL MEMBERSHIP. In other words, a 370 yard hole should NOT be a par 5 for women just because NO WOMAN MEMBER AT THE CLUB can hit the green in two shots.

Please consistently set up your courses as they were MEASURED and rated by the state or regional golf associa-

tion. These assigned ratings are the basis from which handicaps are calculated from scores shot on your courses. Holes are measured from the MIDDLE of each teeing ground to the MIDDLE of the green. Not every set of tee markers from which the women play have to be set one yard behind the FRONT TEE CUT all the time. And please understand the easiest hole location on ladies day is not three paces from the FRONT EDGE of the green! I'm exaggerating, but I hope you get my point. Every deviation of 18 yards from the official total course yardage measurement for women can affect their course rating by .1.

Another word about the teeing grounds: when I ask a women's association what can the USGA do for their players, the most common response is to please inform the golf course architects and the golf course superintendents that many women's teeing grounds are not level and are not fairly positioned. I would suggest golf course superintendents play a round of golf from your forward tees, using a five-iron, to not only check out the teeing ground, but the angle of the shot and the landing areas the women have. I think you would find it enlightening in many instances.

Women have not traditionally communicated well with golf course superintendents, club pros and club managers. We are probably quick to criticize the course maintenance practices. We are positive you purposely pour on the water the night before or during our ladies days! We can count on you to aerate right before our member-guest tournaments and schedule course construction to be done the day of our invitationals. We are upset when a huge banquet is scheduled that interferes with our after-play luncheons. We women have to make more of an effort to communicate, to coordinate, to grasp a better understanding of your golf course maintenance problems, priorities and schedules. Communication is the key. It is a team effort.

Lastly, one of the greatest concerns for women golfers is the general lack of interest and participation in girls junior golf. The numbers of girls as compared to the boys participation numbers are not even close. Many women's club and state organizations do not let girls compete or participate with their ladies until the age of 18. The USGA is concerned about this trend and has produced a short upbeat video promoting girls junior golf. You would enjoy viewing it.

The bottom line, from my point of view as a manager of Women's Regional Affairs, is better communication and understanding so that we can promote and enhance the game of golf for all of us. ♣

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