

It ain't about green speed

A recent study gives fresh insight into the preferences and expectations of US golfers. Result shows they just want to play.

by KEITH HAPP

What type of experience do golfers want to have when they visit your course? A recent study by the National Golf Course Owners Association offers insights into golfers' attitudes, including why they play golf, why they play the courses they play, and what features are important to them when choosing a golf course.

The main topics the study addresses are:

▶ How golf enthusiasts use course facilities (amount of play, use of practice areas,

and the use of golf club houses);

▶ Golfers' views and preferences regarding a host of golf course features, services and amenities.

Tee time availability

The consumer study indicated that there are five underlying themes in the reason why people play golf:

▶ outdoor pleasure, including enjoying natural surroundings and getting some exercise;

▶ challenge of the game, including hitting the ball accurately and improving their game;

▶ companionship, including being with family, business contacts and friends;

▶ taking part in the tradition of golf;

▶ competition.

The survey included a list of 53 amenities, features and characteristics of golf courses. For each, the respondent was asked to rate it in terms of its importance in deciding where to play. The following 10 items were most often rated of high importance

by all the respondents.

1) Tee times available when you want them.....78%

2) Availability of drinking water on the course.....76%

3) Yardage markers.....71%

4) Availability of restrooms.....68%

5) Smooth greens.....68%

6) Conditions of fairways/roughs.....68%

7) Cost of green fees....66%

8) Quality of the food.....63%

9) Hole description on score card.....62%

10) Practice putting green.....57%

The study looks at all 53 amenities, categorizing them as either general course features, access, practice facilities, cost factors, food and beverage service, pro shop and golf carts.

Included in the study is a section that tells the reader which group preferred which amenities.

More courses, more golf

Additionally, the study measured the attitudes and reactions of golfers to new developments and trends in golf.

For example, respondents were asked what their attitudes might be to the possibility of more courses being available in their vicinity, and to a number of potential developments in golf courses.

While almost five out of 10 say they would shop for the best green fees, four out of 10 say they would play more often. In other words, both outcomes are likely to occur.

A similar number indicates that more golf courses would facilitate their access, by making it possible to play at more convenient times.

Finally, the study considered findings indicative of special target groups, including the differences between the attitudes and motivations for men and women; private, semi-private and daily fee course players. □

This article originally appeared in the Central Ohio GCSA news.

Close to home counts

The following results from the NGCOA survey indicate the basic golfing characteristics of survey respondents:

▶ 97 percent of the respondents indicate they play golf near their home an average of 39 times per year. Also, 73 percent indicated they play golf on vacations an average of 5.2 times per year, while 26 percent play golf on business trips an average of 4.6 times per year.

▶ Of the total, 45 percent of respondents says they play golf primarily on weekdays, and 40 percent say they play mostly on weekends. There is, however, quite a bit of variation in this number between different types of players. For example, relatively strong weekend play is apparent among players under 55 who can be expected to have full time occupations, and players with incomes of more than \$120,000.

▶ The most regular users of the driving range are low handicap players, and higher income players. Also, relatively many private course players (17 percent) say they always use the driving range.

The study is based on a survey mailed to a national sample of 10,000 households known to include regular golfers. The survey and report were compiled by C&R Research in Chicago.

Returns were obtained from just over 2000 respondents, for a 20 percent response rate. About 80 percent of those respondents are men, 20 percent are women. The respondents included all age groups starting at age 18.