

Keep the Game Moving

A Strategy to Avoid Slow Play

Here is an amended re-issue of my note from last year, written on behalf of your Committee, on playing efficiently. It is our good fortune that as seniors we meet regularly to enjoy our golf, and are not suggesting, or advocating, speed-golf; we are, naturally, older than many others out on the Course. There is a perception in many clubs that senior play = slow play; anyone who has played a round at the weekend will know that we are not necessarily the prime culprit. Nevertheless, we all know colleagues who continue to tell anecdotes when they should be preparing to play, whose pre-shot routine on the fairway and green is lengthy, laboured and thus time consuming, and who generally are not “ready golf” minded. None of us like the irritation of an overly long round, so what follows are some points to re-affirm the requirements for a reasonable pace of play:

- **Be ready when it is your turn.** It’s not a race, but you do need to be ready when it is your turn. Start assessing your approach shot as you are walking to the ball; have distance measured, club selected, your glove on and shot planned whilst others are playing. Equally, you can gain a general idea of the read as you first approach the green and, as long as it doesn’t distract anyone, you can be working on your line whilst others are putting.
- **Maintain a decent pace.** We all have different traits and fitness levels, and dare I say it some are prone to ambling. If you see you are losing ground on the group ahead, up the tempo with a slightly brisker pace until you are back in position (set the speed on your electric trolley one setting higher perhaps); now is not the time to go fishing for balls. Walk as quickly as possible between shots, without hurrying whilst playing a shot.
- **Refreshment.** We all enjoy food and drink from the Cabin, but please do not hold a tea party outside and back up the field. It goes without saying that it is inexcusable to have more than one group waiting on the 7th tee for the previous players to putt-out.
- **Keep pre-shot routines in check.** An overly long pre-shot routine may not necessarily be helping you to play to your potential, and is unlikely to impress your playing partners. Condense your routine down to a point where the benefits to you are not at the cost of the enjoyment of others. A routine longer than 15 seconds needs reviewing – it will probably benefit your game as well.
- **Play more “ready-golf.”** Competition match play aside, with the agreement of your partners the honour could easily be forsaken for the overall pace of play. So if you have just got out of a bunker, and it’s still you to putt, it makes more sense for others to putt whilst you rake the bunker, get out your putter and so on (unless of course one or your partners offers to rake the bunker for you to maintain the pace of play).
- **If in doubt, hit a provisional.** If there is doubt, then there is no doubt – reload when the rules allow (Rule 27-2). We often spurn the chance to do so, usually out of frustration or a refusal to accept the possibility of trouble. If you don’t take a provisional ball and then

can't find the original, the impact on your group's momentum is considerable, considering search time and the long walk back. Err on the side of caution; if you and the others haven't seen your ball land, for the sake of 20 seconds play a provisional ball.

- **Leave your clubs in the right place around the green.** As well as assessing your putt as you approach the green, look for the correct place to leave your bag or trolley. Make sure they are in the optimal place for a speedy exit to the next tee.
- **Mark cards at the right time.** Not on the green if others are waiting to play in. And when you have arrived at the next tee and it is clear to play, the priority for the person with the honour – or the first one ready if you are playing “ready golf” – is to play first and mark their card whilst the others are hitting.
- **If you can't reach, play up.** Notwithstanding a degree of caution, common sense will dictate when a shot can be played and not interfere with the group ahead. Other than match play, if you are a shorter hitter than others in your group offer to go first if you are not going to reach (such as laying-up on the 4th and 12th).
- **Watch where you have hit it.** After a bad shot it is all too easy to spin away in disgust at our inability to hit the ball where we intended (I know I have!). However, it's at just such moments that we should be following the ball as closely as possible to give ourselves the best chance of finding it.
- **Waving through.** Be considerate to those behind. If you have gone off line, and are looking for the ball which may be hidden by leaves, the call through needs to be timely to be of any pace of play benefit. Similarly, if the group behind is clearly playing faster than you, and the course ahead is clear, do wave them through.

I am aware these points are not original thought, but nevertheless are worthy of airing from time to time. If you are not abiding by them you will be depriving other members of your group, and indeed everyone on the course, of a fair share of time if they are trying to keep up. Golf is supposed to be fun and should not be spoiled by moaning about the time taken to play or being held up. Enjoy.

Bob Wilson
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