



The spirit of the game

According to a recent published survey "Golf around the world" by the R&A there are just over 34 000 golf facilities on the planet. To give an exact figure on how many golfers who walk down the playing areas on these courses are difficult to say but an estimation would probably be in the region of 60 million. As we all know the human being is by nature a social creature who wants to be in relations with other human beings. When human beings are together it could sometimes create tension and problems, so therefore we need to have rules and laws on how we are supposed to behave. Our ethics and morals standards tell us which actions are considered right and what we should strive for or avoid in moral situations. So during the time we spend on the golf course (in some cases to long...) playing the game and socializing with other golfers, we are supposed to follow the Rules of Golf and live up to the spirit of the game.

In the Rules of golf there is a section called etiquette and behavior on the course. Among other things it says "the game relies on the integrity of the individual to show consideration for other players and to abide by the Rules. All players should conduct themselves in a disciplined manner, demonstrating courtesy and sportsmanship at all times, irrespective of how competitive they may be. This is the spirit of the game of golf".

Compared to many other games, golf is unique in having a written code of etiquette which for instance make us all aware of not making funny noises in our opponent's backswing or when asked by a fellow competitor "where in God's name did that useless ball go?" you will immediately answer "just over the fence to the right and it landed a couple of meters from that big black and white thing in the pasture". We should also show respect for the course on which we are playing and the work and effort that has been put in to create it. The golf course architect often gets the blame for misdirected golf shots or golf balls finding a watery grave. Hazards are there for a reason and by calling him or her different unprintable names does not make the bunkers or ponds go away. And by ignoring to replace your divots or not mending



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your pitch marks on the green you are not only making the greenkeeper sad and furious but you are also acting disrespectful to the players behind you. But perhaps today the most important part concerning the spirit of the game are connected to the pace of play.

A global survey regarding the golfers' attitudes to pace of play has been carried out by the R&A. Over 56000 responded to the survey from 122 different countries which makes it a very powerful document regarding the standpoints and conclusions in the report. As the report is a part of an ongoing project concerning pace of play the survey gives a description on how golfers around the world experience the issue rather than give suggestions for solutions. At a later stage the R&A will however publish a guidance document on the matter.

The three most significant issues towards other golfers the respondents have concerning pace of play are players pre-shot routine, bad play and poor etiquette. Other significant issues are players mimicking Championship Golf, using tees that are too difficult for them, lacking knowledge of the Rules of Golf, marking their card when it is their turn and unnecessary marking and lifting on the putting green. Generally issues concerning the golf course are not so significant from the respondents except the length of the rough.

From my perspective as a golf course architect what can I contribute to reduce the lengthy golf

rounds on a course? In the beginning of a design process you have to know who is going to play the course and most of the time you are involved in a membership club. With that in mind you decide on how long the course will be and the difficulty of it. You try to make the fairways as wide as possible without making them look like landing areas for flying vessels. Hazards will be laid out in a way that it still makes it challenging for the high handicapper but a real knee trembler for the scratch player. You will also try to make the walks between greens and tees as short as possible. You will introduce multiple tee areas on the holes which makes it possible to offer different length of the golf course. By referring the player to the right tee which reflects his or hers playing standard it will not only shorten the time spent on the course but it will also enhance the players enjoyment on the course. Playing from the right tee is more fun!

When the course is ready for play it is important that the course set-up is done in a way to encourage quick play without any unnecessary delays. A course policy is an important document to have and it should be developed together with the golf course architect. It should contain many things but for instance trying to keep the rough as low as possible without ruin the visual impression of the course will have a positive effect on pace of play. And having the hole locations on a sensible place on the greens together with a reasonable green speed will also significantly reduce the time you spend on the greens.

But in the end the biggest responsibility to improve pace of play on our golf courses lies within the players themselves and if we don't respect the spirit of the game it will be unbearable to play and you might just as well spend your leisure time doing something else, like collecting stamps, which is perfectly okay with me. Peter Dobereiner, one of the finest golf writers that ever lived, once wrote that golf is like a song, "you can learn the lyrics because they are written in the Rules of Golf, but the tune is even more important and that is something we all have to pick up ourselves". So it is about time we all try to sing the same song!