

So...what is the #1 complaint heard by golfers at most golf courses? You guessed it, slow play! In this month's segment, we'll provide some info on how we can work together to improve the pace of play.

The start time interval matters. At Crystal Falls, start times are set up in 10 minute intervals. This is generally known as the sweet spot for both the players and the golf course. For the course to cover its costs and make a profit, it needs to serve a certain number of golfers per day at a given green fee rate. Some courses use 9 and sometimes 8 minute starting intervals to maximize the number of players that they put out onto the course. This usually causes extremely slow play as there are just too many golfers trying to make the loop. On the other hand, 12 to 15 minute intervals can be great for pace but would require increased green fees to generate the per round revenue needed to operate the golf course. 10 minutes usually works well to achieve rounds in the 4 and a half to 5 hour neighborhood. But of course, there are plenty of additional factors that affect the pace on a given day.

Starters and start times. We ask our starters to put each group out at the designated start time and no earlier. Some players get irritated if the group ahead is "way up there" and want to start before their actual start time. Not a good idea. As we all know, one triple bogey or a lost ball can slow down even the fastest groups. Not to mention stopping for a resupply at the turn or using the necessary facilities around the course. Maintaining the proper interval, by starting on time allows for this. For the player, starting on time means that the first player in the group is putting a tee in the ground and starting their pre-shot routine at the designated start time. The rest of the players in the group should be on the tee box with ball and tee in hand ready to step up and tee off as soon as their playing partner has completed their shot. A foursome should be able to tee off in 3 to 3 ½ minutes. 4 minutes max. This includes any provisional shots that need to be hit and moving between tee boxes as needed. Remember, pre-shot routines shouldn't be much longer than 20 seconds. Set your stopwatch the next time you tee off. You'll be surprised how quickly you're off and running without feeling rushed. Lastly, if a player is late for their start time, they'll be asked to join their group wherever they are on the course. If the whole group is late, they will be put out on the course as soon as a spot is available. "Squeezing" late players or groups in between start times only serves to holdup the start times that are behind them. Then no one is happy.

Once on the course, there are several things that we can do help manage the pace. Our first line of defense is our Player Assistants (PA). They keep an eye on things out on the course and as the title suggests, are there to assist the players in enjoying the round. They can help locate a player's ball, speak to slower groups and alert the clubhouse of any issues that may arise. Our PAs are all volunteers as well as golfers. They know the value of a good pace and do a great job helping to keep things moving. Unfortunately, we don't always have a PA available. For those times, our golf shop staff can keep an eye on things by monitoring the golf car tracking system in the shop. Although they can't see walkers or private cars, the

system gives them a good indication of how things are going out on the course. They can send messages to slow groups when needed as well. They're also there to take phone calls from players that need assistance and are happy to pop out onto the course when needed.

Players can significantly improve the pace by simply being prepared to play. This means being ready to hit when it's their turn, bringing several clubs (and a sand bottle) to the ball if it can't be accessed by golf cart, playing ready golf and helping to find a playing partner's lost ball only *after* hitting their own. Here are a few more tips courtesy of the USGA.

**Be Pre-Shot Ready:** While a playing partner is hitting, take your yardage, select your club, and plan your shot. When it is your turn, you should be ready to execute immediately.

**Limit Practice Swings:** Take no more than one or two practice swings. Focus on your routine on the driving range, not the fairway.

**Use the Cart "Buddy System":** If riding with a partner, don't sit in the cart waiting for them. Get out, take a few clubs, and walk directly to your ball.

**Streamline Green Play:** Read your putt while others are putting. Consider continuous putting (tapping in short putts rather than marking them) if it doesn't step on anyone's line.

**Green-to-Tee Placement:** When approaching the green, leave your bag or cart on the side closest to the next tee box

As one would imagine, pace of play can also be affected by the skill levels of each individual player. On any given day, +20 handicappers can be found on the course along with scratch players or better. Each player is responsible for setting realistic expectations for the round. And that reality is, if we were good enough to play as well as the folks on TV, I wouldn't be writing this, and you wouldn't be reading it. Most of us play for the enjoyment of it and sure, maybe a little competition. Here are a few ways to keep it real.

- Play from the correct tee box. Gone are the days of the men's tee, ladies' tee, junior tees, etc. Players should choose a tee that best fits their skill set and not their ego. It's also fun to play from different tees from time to time. It gives the course a whole new feel. Here's a good rule of thumb when choosing a tee box based on a player's average driving distance.

**Less than 200 yards:** Forward tees (Red).

**200–225 yards:** Middle-forward tees (Green).

**225–250 yards:** Middle tees (White).

**250–275 yards:** Back tees (Blue).

- It's ok to play badly, just play badly, quickly. We all have bad games when nothing seems to be going right. When this happens.....relax and change the perspective. Forget the score and just work on hitting good shots while keeping up with the pace. Don't let a bad score ruin a good day! New golfers and high handicappers (+20 or more) should give themselves a max number of strokes on each hole. Say triple bogey. Once that max is reached, they should pick it up and move along. If they haven't reached the green, they can still stop by and hit a few putts before moving to the next tee box. Scoring a round like this can't be used to establish an index but the player will learn more about what they need to work on at the range. Besides, they're going to hit some good shots too. Those are the ones to remember.
- Stay in position. Players should keep an eye on where they are in relation to the groups ahead and behind them. Sometimes on busy days, being in position is the best way to measure pace. The round may be 5 hours, but the play should be consistent. To be in position on a par 4 means that the group on the tee is ready to tee off as soon as the group in the fairway hits their second shots and clears the area. The group in the fairway is in position if they are ready to hit their second shots as soon as the group on the green is clear. Simply put, all players should be ready to hit as soon as the group in front of them is clear.

Lastly, a word on etiquette. We can all get frustrated when the round is slow and we think the folks ahead of us are holding things up. That may or may not be the case but how we handle it says a lot about us as golfers. Yelling at the group or becoming confrontational usually just worsens the problem. Being disrespectful or belligerent to the staff or volunteers doesn't solve anything either. Accidents happen and there are a few blind spots on the course but intentionally hitting into the group in front is one of the quickest ways I know to get removed from the course. When things get backed up...take a breath and enjoy the scenery. If the pace doesn't pick up or you see an obvious problem, call the golf shop. We'll send someone out to try and get things moving. If we work together, the game is fun for all of us!