

What's behind Slow Play

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The evil of slow play is that it imposes the will of a minority upon the majority. The speed of the fastest player is cut down to that of the slowest.

Life on a golf course is community life, a sharing of the use of eighteen holes with other players. This necessitates that certain golf manners prevail.

The duty of keeping one's position or giving way is fully as important in this code of manners as the duty of replacing divots and smoothing footprints in sand.

Discharge of this duty is complicated, however, by the fact that it is more difficult to recognize in ourselves a tendency to be slow than it is to recognize our divot marks and footprints.

As a matter of simple fact, we never hear a golfer admitting he is a slow player—although we hear an infinite number of snails disclaim all snail-like tendencies. Slowness usually is related to one or more of three factors. We should periodically check our own golfing habits against these characteristics of slow play:

1. Practice swings before every stroke. It is hardly necessary to engage in repeated rehearsals of our intentions once the ball is in play. The violinist tests his strings before he starts, but not again before each phase. We don't change our theory of hitting the ball unless we are desperate.

2. Indecision in choosing one's club. Judgment of distance should be almost automatic. In most cases, a player should be able to narrow the choice to one of two clubs before reaching the ball. Actually, the choice thereafter may not be important when the distance to the green is short; there is only eight or ten yards difference between a woman's No. 7 and No. 8 irons. How she plays the stroke is a good deal more important than which club she uses in that case.

3. Undue deliberation on the putting

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green. While patience increases to a greater degree here, the time required for three or four players to hole out and re-try their missed putts sometimes is half as long again as the time it took them to get onto the green. An experienced player should be able to gauge the roll and speed of a green quickly in most cases, and a re-tried putt is nothing more than locking the barn door after the horse has been stolen.

All of us have personal knowledge of club groups which are guilty of these habits and which wind their weary way around the course in four and one half or five hours.

All of us have been in the groups caught helplessly in their wake.

Let us reassess our own playing habits, then, and give greater consideration to those behind us.

Someday I should like to see a flag or tombstone tournament conducted on the basis of time, rather than strokes taken. In this event par for the round for a couple would be 2 hours and 45 minutes and each would be required to stop when their time ran out and plant their flag.

Such an event would provide the slow-down on the slow players.