

GOLF = Gentlemen Only, Ladies Forbidden? Not anymore!



WHEN I STARTED PLAYING AT the private club my mother belonged to in Montreal, tee times for women were so restricted that a working gal could hardly ever find a time to play.

The idea was that if women wanted to play golf they should do it on weekdays when men were at work. So, once I graduated from university and started working full time I gave up my membership and the game for years.

Thankfully, times have changed. The "little woman" doesn't have to stay home with the kids if she has other ambitions. And if clubs charge a woman the same membership price as a man, they need to give equal rights.

But there's still a hangover of golf being a men's territory first and foremost.

When people learn that I joined ClubLink on my own and that my husband doesn't play golf at all, they tend to be incredulous. The assumption is still that a married woman joins to play with her husband.

That prejudice is deservedly being eroded as more women take up the game for business reasons, and as couples fall out of love with each other but not with golf.

In today's world, men-only golf clubs are being clobbered by human-rights activists and the more enlightened. NewsLink Associate Editor John Gordon tells me of a press trip to Scotland a few years ago where the writers were scheduled to play Western Gailes which then had a men-only policy.

Showing that chivalry is not dead, the 11 men refused to play if the one woman in the group couldn't. The lady couldn't and they didn't. Today, even Western Gailes has changed with the times.

And men who hold the opinion that a woman on the links spoils a man's game with the boys have to bite their tongues now. Even in Jolly Old England, the edifice of conservatism is crumbling. Female golfers used to be confined to ladies' lounges and were not tolerated in the "19th hole" until certain hours, if at all.

I experienced the last vestiges of that attitude on England's Golf Coast just last year. Royal Liverpool and Royal Lytham and St. Anne's had a separate outside entry for women away from the main entrance. These monuments to the game, which opened in the late 1800s, are steeped in history so maybe I can make an exception for them, and forgive them for scolding me for stepping where I shouldn't.

To their credit, the social rooms for ladies are unisex (I recollect being told ladies used to do something like sew or embroider in them, Heaven forbid). We may drink with the men at our leisure at the Royals—and I did.

In Scotland, things were much less formal and we got the front-door treatment. No one blinked an eye at two chicks with sticks heading to the first tee at Royal Dornoch. We got more stares when I dragged my friend Anita into several Speyside distilleries and, later, the bottle-lined barroom of the Craigellachie Hotel for a wee dram or two after our various games in the Highlands.

In the Czech Republic, we had the rudest treatment and an early end to our game when the greenskeeper shredded our last golf balls with his mower (they are expensive in Europe and we hadn't brought enough). However, I put that more to a holdover from a Communist view of service than an anti-women statement.

Thankfully, at ClubLink, tee times for women have never been restricted, we walk in the front door and, aside from the men's locker room, we go where we want to go.

As it should be.

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Royal Liverpool in England still has a separate entranceway for women, but now women and men enjoy the social rooms equally. It's another indication that women are more welcome than in the past,