

CHECK YOUR OWN PACE OF PLAY BEFORE POINTING FINGERS

Margaret Swaine

I WAS HEADING THROUGH the pro shop after a game when I overheard someone say, "It's a funeral procession out there." My immediate reaction was that I hoped he wasn't referring to me and the other women in my foursome. Like all female golfers, I have had to deal with this misconception in the past. I well remember golfing with my women friends when we've been singled out for a scolding by a course marshal and told to speed it up when in fact we've been waiting to tee off on every hole.

Part of the problem is that men hit a longer ball. If the marshal comes around just after the men have hit and have sped far down the fairway on their carts, and we are in the process of teeing off, it can look like there's a gap in play. That long ball is the same reason why men may play slower than women. There has been many a time playing with men that I've seen them wait for what seems like forever to hit. "Don't want to hit into that group ahead," is their comment. Pointing out that it's a par 5 and a tee shot is highly unlikely to reach the green where the group in front is now putting doesn't necessarily motivate the macho man to action. And then, after all the waiting, a shank into the fescue is followed by a long time searching for the ball.

That's not to say women can't be slow, especially if they are beginners or half-interested golfers out for a gossip. However, the majority of women I know will pick up their ball once they feel they've had a few too many hits on a hole. So is there a gender factor in pace of play? I first asked some men. "I'd rather play behind some of the ladies on our golf course

than the men," said Kevin Lynch, a Member at Glencairn. "They play faster." He said he knows guys who have money at stake on every hole and even if it's just 50 cents, they'll take their sweet time.

For a professional opinion, I asked Stephanie Lam, Assistant Professional at King Valley. "I agree that women can often play faster than men. They don't hit long but they're generally on the fairway."

We all want an efficiently run golf course. What helps keep groups speedy on the track?

If the first few groups are slow, they will back up the entire course. Of course, it's not all up to the club. Members need to learn fast-play tips, be aware of their position in regard to the groups ahead of and behind them, and adhere to pace of play standards. Punitive measures could include slow play tickets, ordering players to skip holes or play from forward tees or sending offenders to pace clinics.

It doesn't have to be all "stick," though. Carrots to those who keep the pace could include monthly prizes. Who would say no to that? Women may save the chatter for the 19th hole if there's a gift to be won. For men, it might be worth giving up the 50 cents for the bragging rights of being the fastest group at the club.

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