

NEW APPROACHES TO PACE OF PLAY



TAKING ADVANTAGE OF TODAY'S TECHNOLOGY CAN GIVE GOLF FACILITIES FRESH STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

By Don Jozwiak, Senior Editor

PLAYERS PACING ON TEE BOXES, STANDING IN THE FAIRWAY WITH HANDS ON hips, or walking off the green looking at their watches in despair. These images were widely seen throughout this past year on golf's professional tours, where pace of play became a hot-button issue.

As bad as those scenes looked, remember this: the tour professionals who are so fed up with pace of play are getting paid to endure five-hour rounds and long waits between shots. What's the impact when players who are paying for the privilege of teeing it up at your facility encounter similarly slow conditions?

"When you're playing golf, you don't want other people to negatively affect you – you want to play against the course and enjoy the camaraderie of your group. But when pace of play is a problem, it affects your game, your ability to score and, most importantly, your ability to have fun on the course," says Charlie Kent, the PGA Director of Golf at Hidden Cypress Golf Club in Bluffton, South Carolina. "It's a hot issue

Pace of Play Research Results

Key takeaways from USGA research into pace of play, as presented at the organization's Golf Innovation Symposiums:

- **Golfer experience is determined by flow**, not round times.
- Studies show **an increase in round times of as much as two hours between the first group on the course and later groups**. Most of that time is spent waiting.
- A large number of golfers ages 25–44 have expressed **a desire to cut 60 to 90 minutes off their typical round time**, creating a market for shorter formats such as three- and six-hole loops.

on tour right now, but it definitely comes into play at the club level.

“Having to wait throughout your round simply makes the experience worse, whether you’re playing on tour or playing on a Tuesday with your friends.”

The topic of pace of play for recreational golfers is also getting attention from publications and websites. MyGolfSpy.com ran a story earlier this year titled “The Pace of Play Conundrum: Does Golf Really Want to Fix It?” that, despite the headline, was mainly about how pace of play is a tricky problem with no one-size-fits-all solution.

The website also ran a pace of play survey with responses from more than 600 avid golfers. The survey’s results included the following numbers:

- 82 percent of respondents said slow play negatively impacts their enjoyment of the game;
- 27 percent said they’d pay a premium for a round guaranteed to be four hours or less; and
- 67 percent said they don’t think golf courses look at pace of play as a problem that needs to be solved.

That last number should get the attention of anyone who works at a golf facility – it’s quite possible your customers think you’re not concerned about the time it takes them to play golf at your course. While MyGolfSpy’s sample size is small, recent research by the USGA backs up the idea that some golf facilities are not making pace of play a priority.

“We started our pace of play research with the idea that it’s something people complain about, so let’s research some of the underlying factors,” says Scott Mingay, Director of Product Development, Research, Science and Innovation for the USGA. “Our research showed that 75 percent of facilities think that pace of play is a key factor in golfer enjoyment, but only 35 percent of facilities have any kind of formal program to improve pace. So there’s a significant gap right there between knowing there’s a problem and trying to do something about it.”

Pace of play is hardly a new issue for golf facilities, but new technology and the data it provides are showing fresh ways to improve the issue – and new reasons PGA Professionals and their facilities should want to provide a pleasing pace for players.

In the past, pace of play was often seen as an

inventory problem: If facilities could figure out how to get players around the course more quickly, that should lead to more openings on the tee sheet – and more revenue. That theory, however, reflects a different era in golf when demand outweighed supply and tee times could be scarce.

Today’s pace of play proposition is less about packing the tee sheet and more about improving the customer experience at all facility types, from private clubs to daily fee and resort courses. With competition for consumers’ time coming from all sides – work obligations, family time, other leisure activities – pace of play is among the top three factors that make or break the golf experience, according to research from the USGA.

“In researching golfer behavior, we asked what most influences a golfer’s enjoyment of a round,” Mingay says. “The conditioning of the course, the people you play with and the pace of play are the top three factors in whether the experience was enjoyable. That says to us that pace of play is something that’s important to everyone, and it’s an area where we’re focusing our research.”

Likewise, companies such as Tagmarshal and FairwayIQ are harnessing GPS tracking technology and crunching the numbers to give PGA Professionals and their facilities new tools to help alleviate and manage pace of play issues in the short and long term. Golf car companies are also offering technologies that can assist with monitoring pace of play, such as Club Car’s Visage system, Textron Fleet Management and Yamaha Golf Car’s YamaTrack.

On a given day, these technologies help the golf staff locate where each group is on the golf course, allowing them to see precisely where rounds are slowing down – giving them the opportunity to go directly to that group and encourage them to speed up play before the entire course is impacted.

By the Numbers

60.1%

Percentage of avid golfers who say playing in less time would improve their enjoyment of the game.

source: The R&A

“Something you see at a lot of courses is morning rounds starting fast, then pace slows over the course of the day – there can be a 50-minute difference from morning to afternoon at some courses,” says Bodo Sieber, CEO of Tagmarshal. “A solution like ours can help you accurately know when to step in to speed somebody up with a polite visit from a golf team member, and how to stagger tee times, goal times and intervals to get more out of your quicker time of day and literally pull more business along.”

Takeaways on Improving Pace of Play

Here are some of the key points PGA Professionals should know about strategies to improve pace of play at their facilities:

- 1** **Pace of play is one of the top three factors** that influence how much customers enjoy their golf experience.
- 2** **Pace of play on the world's professional tours is a hot topic**, giving PGA Professionals a chance to start a conversation about pace with recreational golfers at their facilities.
- 3** **New technologies** for tracking pace and location of golfers on the course **are being leveraged for research** and to create new strategies for improving pace.
- 4** **The USGA is conducting ongoing research** into pace of play, and has invented specific statistics that help facilities measure pace.
- 5** According to research, the USGA believes that **overall round time is not as important as maintaining a steady flow** during the course of a round – golfers don't like to wait to hit shots.
- 6** **Technology solutions** from the USGA, and companies like Tagmarshal and FairwayIQ, **can help facilities learn more** about patterns, challenges and possible pace solutions.
- 7** The ROI for **pace of play technology solutions can include spending less money on payroll for rangers**, which can be shifted to additional PGA Professionals, while improving the consumer experience.
- 8** **Using a pace of play solution** that enables PGA Professionals to monitor pace from a smartphone or computer **can allow a golf professional to handle difficult situations directly**, instead of involving a ranger or other employee.
- 9** Daily fee and resort courses can benefit from **a pace of play solution that helps them pinpoint slow groups quickly** before they cause a course-wide backup.
- 10** Private clubs benefit from **improved pace of play** by increasing member satisfaction, which **can lead to retention and even acquiring new members** once a culture of improved pace is created.
- 11** Facilities can also **improve the experience for tournaments, leagues and events** by recognizing bottlenecks on the course, and by aligning tee time intervals with data on realistic pace expectations.

National Golf Links of America improved tournament pace of play by providing shuttle service to avoid a long walk around water.

Over the longer term, these companies can compile data from hundreds of rounds that can help identify root causes of slow play at a facility, and can lead to policies or practices that improve pace of play. For example, data could show areas of the golf course where pace slows, giving the facility the chance to make layout or maintenance changes in the area. Or tracking groups of fast players on an uncrowded day could help establish what the fastest realistic time is for players to get around the course, which could lead to a change in tee time intervals.

The result of improved pace of play can be seen in increased engagement for golf facilities: More rounds played, more time spent at the range prior to a round or enjoying food & beverage afterward, or having more time on the tee sheet for events or

junior golf programs. Slight data-based tweaks to the tee sheet can add thousands of dollars to the bottom line at some facilities.

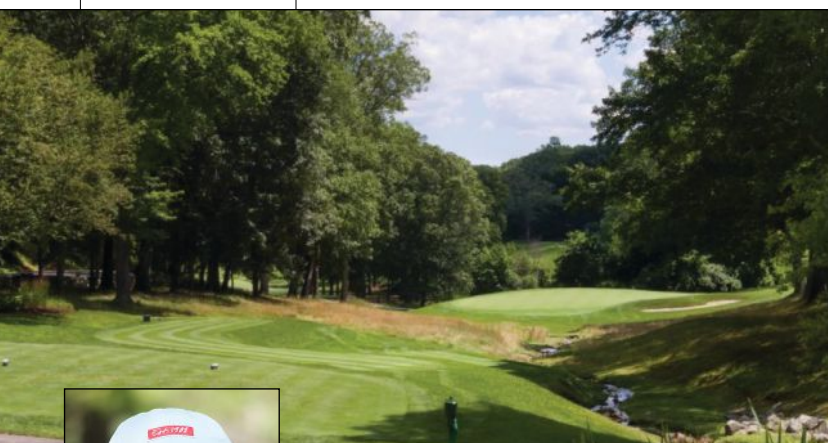
“A lot of this isn't possible without today's technology – it empowers everything we're looking at in pace of play,” Mingay says. “The ability to visualize and analyze data on a large scale makes new strategies possible. To get data points from hundreds of rounds or thousands of golfers really helps move the needle in a way that anecdotal evidence simply can't.”

The USGA is making pace of play a major focus, with the organization including pace-oriented changes in the new Rules of Golf that went into effect earlier this year, as well as hosting regular Golf Innovation Symposia to share research and discuss new ideas for improving pace of play. The topic is also a key part of the USGA's goal to improve golfer satisfaction by 20 percent while reducing the consumption of key resources by 25 percent before 2025.

To help golf facilities learn more about pace of play at their individual facilities, the USGA started a research program using GPS loggers at participating golf courses. To measure how golfers move around the course, and what causes backups, the USGA created a measurement called Cycle Time – essentially the amount of time it takes for one group to leave a green and for the next group to reach it – as well as a tool that helps calculate a reasonable target time for groups to play that course.

What the USGA found is that Cycle Time is an important variable in deciding tee time intervals.





PGA Head Professional Graham Cunningham is seeing ROI from using a pace of play technology solution at Framingham Country Club in Massachusetts.

After all, if it takes the average group 10 minutes to cycle through a green and a course has eight-minute tee time intervals, play will start backing up after three or four groups go off. By setting proper tee time intervals and ensuring groups remain in position – where a product like Tagmarshal or FairwayIQ can be extremely helpful – facilities have a better chance of keeping golfers flowing through the course at a good pace throughout the day.

This strategy of monitoring round times, eliminating waits and monitoring groups as they play – what Mingay calls the “three-legged stool” approach to pace of play – can be accomplished without using outside services or technology. For example, you could time your fastest groups to learn the approximate fastest possible pace at your facility, and use a stopwatch to time how long it takes groups to cycle through greens on a busy day for a rough Cycle Time estimate.

Facilities using subscription services such as Tagmarshal, FairwayIQ or the USGA’s own GPS-based service are often able to quickly find a return on investment by improving customer satisfaction and spending less on hiring marshals – or hiring more golf shop staff instead of part-time marshals.

“We’re finding that golf facilities are having no trouble generating value with a solution that helps improve pace of play,” Sieber says. “There’s an increasing understanding that you need to measure something to understand it – and improve it – and that’s where this technology, with all its optimization data, comes into play.

“If you get pace of play right, everything’s better. On the other hand, you can have perfect weather and perfect conditions, but if the pace isn’t good, everything else goes out the window. Of all the ways to improve the golf experience, pace of play is now one area you can control with less resources than ever before.”

And, of course, PGA Professionals are ideally situated to help their facilities – and golfers – benefit from improved pace of play. As PGA President Suzy Whaley points out, coaching can help golfers play better and more quickly.

“Everything we do as PGA Professionals is about the consumer experience, and pace of play is one of the ways we can make it better,” Whaley says. “We

can use our talents to make improvements to the flow of the game on the course, and also help coach golfers to understand what might be slowing them down during a round.

“I think it’s especially important to think about new golfers and how we can help them learn to play at a good pace. As coaches, we need to get them out on the course to show them how to manage their games, and even basics like where to park a golf car so they can exit a green quickly. There are lots of ways we can make pace of play part of the coaching experience.”

PGA Magazine talked with PGA Professionals at golf facilities around the country about ways they’ve identified and improved their pace of play challenges, as well as their advice for their peers for how to optimize the experience for their customers.

Saying Cheers to Faster Rounds

Matt Summers,

PGA Head Professional,

Mountain Branch Golf Club, Joppa, Maryland

As a semi-private club open to the public, Mountain Branch Golf Club in Joppa, Maryland, faces the same pace of play problems that other daily fee courses often battle.

“There was always this perception that you’re a public course, so golfers are going to be out there for five hours or more. ‘How long is this round going to be?’” says PGA Head Professional Matt Summers. “We’re always looking for ways to improve our image and level of service, and ownership was on board with finding new ways to do that.”

Summers was also looking for a way to shift payroll away from part-time course rangers so Mountain Branch could spend more money on its PGA Professional staff. In talking with other golf professionals, he decided to look into Tagmarshal’s services three years ago.

By the Numbers

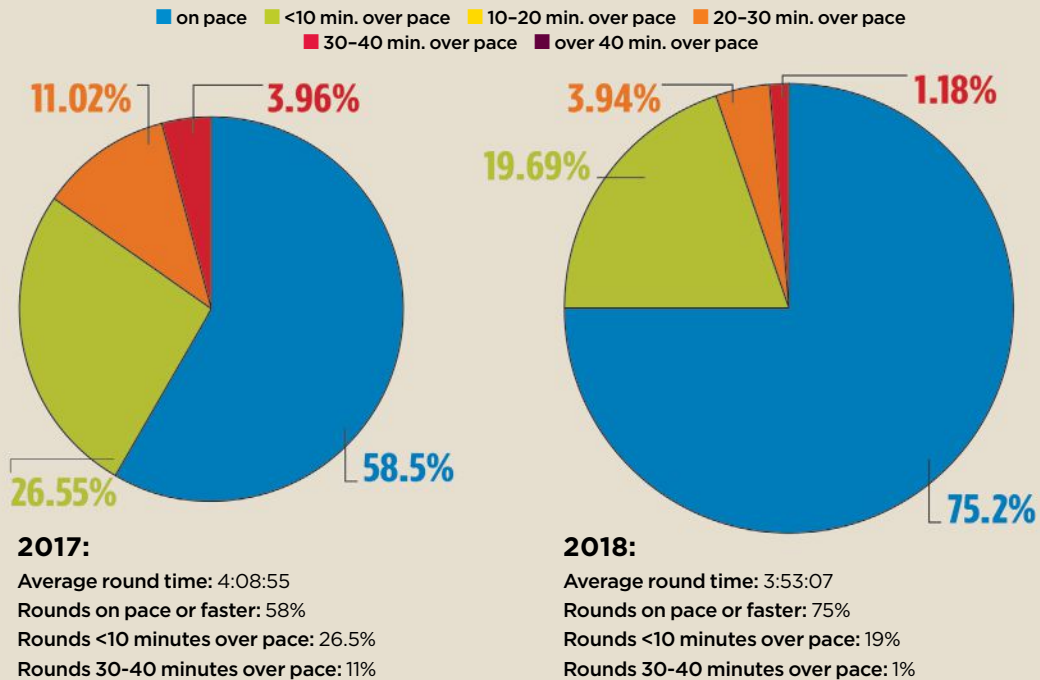
9.1%

Percent increase in green fees average golfers would pay for a 15–30 minute improvement in pace of play; golfers under the age of 40 would pay 14.2 percent more.

source: USGA

Mountain Branch Pace of Play

A comparison of pace of play at the facility in 2017 and in 2018, after implementing changes using data from Tagmarshal



By adding Tagmarshal GPS units in Mountain Branch's golf car fleet – under the seats, hidden from customers – Summers and his staff were immediately able to monitor pace of play from the golf shop, or from anywhere on property if they were using a smartphone, tablet or device connected to the Internet.

As a result, Mountain Branch was able to do away with marshals completely on Mondays through Thursdays, and often goes without marshals on weekends. When the golf staff sees a pace of play problem using the Tagmarshal app, they can go directly to the group causing the slowdown.

"It's the toughest job on property, telling someone they're playing slow on a busy day," says Summers, who is in his 13th season at Mountain Branch. "But now that it is usually a PGA Professional coming out to talk with the golfers, they respond with a

lot more respect. And if they dispute that they're behind, we can show them the Tagmarshal data as backup. That makes it an easier discussion, and they're more likely to pick it up."

Summers also adds a deft customer service touch in these situations.

"When we go out to talk to a group about speeding up, we'll watch their progress on Tagmarshal," Summers says. "If they catch up to the pace, we'll send the beverage cart out and buy them a round as a way to thank them for getting back on track."

This combination of technology and customer service has helped create an environment at Mountain Branch where pace of play is valued by the facility's 300-plus members and many regular daily fee players. Average round times have improved by more than 15 minutes during peak season, from 4:08 to 3:53, and the golf staff has more flexibility and information to rely upon in setting the tee sheet at the facility, which hosts more than 23,000 rounds annually.

"We don't know what kind of golfer is going to walk through the door on a given day, so we'll use the data to know whether or not we should throw an open tee time in if we have a lot of public play on a given day – we can always fill it in later if things are smooth, and we know if we can squeeze a group in if we have people walk in wanting to play," Summers says. "And because Tagmarshal keeps data on individual golfers, I can see if those golfers are fast, which helps with the decision about getting them out."

Summers is also looking forward to using the Tagmarshal data in new ways going forward. For

"PACE IS THE TOP PRIORITY EVERY DAY AT OUR CLUB. MAKING SURE OUR ROUNDS GET OFF TO A GOOD START FROM A PACE OF PLAY POINT OF VIEW PRETTY MUCH SETS THE TONE FOR THE REST OF THE DAY."

—MATT SUMMERS, PGA HEAD PROFESSIONAL, MOUNTAIN BRANCH GOLF CLUB, JOPPA, MARYLAND

How Pebble Beach prepares guests for pace of play

One of the most sought-after tee times for most golfers is Pebble Beach Golf Links, where a difficult golf course, windy conditions and players looking to savor a bucket-list destination can conspire to create pace of play problems. To help set expectations and prepare players for a speedier pace, the resort directs visitors to a special page on its website prior to their visits, located at <https://www.pebblebeach.com/pace-of-play-guidelines/>

Here are some of the highlights:

- Pebble Beach used data from Tagmarshal to set pace of play targets for different times of day, from a four-hour pace for the first group off to 4:55 for tee times at noon and later.
- If a foursome falls more than two shots behind the group in front of them, a player assistant will give the group a pace of play reminder. A forecaddie will be sent to assist the group if it is still out of position after two holes. After three holes, the group will be asked to move ahead, or given the chance to restart their round after the last group of the day.

- The pace of play page also has a primer on how to play ready golf; how to use the new Rules on stroke and distance on balls lost out of bounds; and for keeping the flagstick in while putting, as well as maximum scores by handicap for players to pick up their ball.



2020, his goal is to optimize the number of teams Mountain Branch can host in its weekday golf leagues, which are a steady source of green fees and food & beverage revenue.

“We have heavy league play in summer time, and we’re going to tag each group and gather the data on whether we can go from 24 to 26 or 28 teams in a league,” he says.

Pace of play is still an area the golf staff at Mountain Branch needs to monitor. But by having more information, the golf staff is able to make precise decisions to keep things moving.

“When you get that call from a group saying there’s a slowdown, we can look in real time and see the pace – maybe that group is actually playing faster than the normal pace. That helps us decide whether there’s something that needs attention, or if it just seems that way to one group. Either way, we can deal with reality instead of perception,” Summers says. “Most important, when players come off 18 we see more happy faces. That keeps the staff in a good mood, too, which is why this is one of my favorite things we’ve done while I’ve been at Mountain Branch.”

ningham. “Nothing ruins a good day like slow play – the greens can be perfect and the beer can be cold, but if you’re waiting all day, you’re going to be disappointed.”

In his 12 years at Framingham, Cunningham has learned that the overall time of a round isn’t the benchmark that his members use to gauge pace of play. Even on “slow” days, a round at the club seldom goes beyond 4:30.

“To be honest, our members aren’t looking at how long it takes to play, but rather how much they wait as they move around the course,” Cunningham says. “The call we get in the golf shop isn’t, ‘This round is taking too long,’ instead it’s, ‘I’ve been waiting on every shot.’ That’s what causes frustration.”

Cunningham and the club’s board had been on the lookout for a tool to help them manage the flow around the course, including solutions from golf car companies, when they came upon FairwayIQ. The club was a beta tester for the company’s early service, and quickly found that it was a tool that fit well into the culture at Framingham.

When the pace would slow down at Framingham, it was often a combination of factors – Cunningham likens pace of play to the chaos theory, where unrelated elements can combine to create unintended consequences. That could mean a group of older golfers having trouble finding a ball in tall fescue, while another group struggles with a hole that requires a blind tee shot, while another group has a new golfer struggling to keep up. Suddenly, there’s a traffic jam.

“Having technology that helps you see patterns and two, three or four things happening at once is great for managing pace of play,” Cunningham says. “There’s 150 acres for us to keep an eye on, so being able to watch where everyone is on the course using FairwayIQ allows us to take proactive measures and give players some options to help them get back in position.”

Framingham uses FairwayIQ in lieu of full-time rangers, which provides an instant ROI to offset the cost of the service. The golf staff now handles any pace of play issues directly, and uses FairwayIQ

Taking Control of Chaos

Graham Cunningham,

PGA Head Professional,

Framingham (Massachusetts) Country Club

Located roughly a half-hour west of Boston, Framingham Country Club is a classic old-school New England private club. Fittingly, the club’s course – which bears the fingerprints of Donald Ross, Orrin Smith and William Mitchell, and was restored by Renaissance Golf Design in 2010 – can be a tough test of golf.

“We have quite a few design elements that New Englanders pride themselves on: fast greens with a lot of slope, tight holes lined by trees, rock outcroppings. These are also things that can impact pace of play,” says PGA Head Professional Graham Cun-



Minnesota's Deer Run Golf Course has created a culture based on reliably quick pace of play.

data to explain their on-course visits to members and guests.

In an era when consumers expect immediate service and shorter golf experiences, Cunningham says improving pace of play has helped Framingham retain members and help attract new members, too.

"A couple asked specifically about pace of play when considering joining here earlier this year, since that was something they didn't like at their previous club, and we were able to show them the FairwayIQ system and how it helps," Cunningham says. "We're all programmed for ease of access and not waiting for things. I do know if people come off the course happy and feeling like they played at a good pace, they're a lot more likely to stick around for a beer instead of hurrying home."

Abts, who is now the facility's PGA General Manager. FPF involved having rangers every three holes, with a tee time posted on each golf car, and golfers were informed of the expectations for their pace when they made their tee time, when they arrived at the course, and when they went to the first tee.

"Players were told they had to finish the front nine in 1:55 or they would have to leave the golf course. I would personally meet groups on the ninth tee. If they were behind on pace, I'd give them the option to skip the hole – and I was also ready to give them a cash refund if they'd rather just leave," Abts recalls.

"At first, people went crazy!"

Abts recalls being yelled at by golfers who insisted "the customer is always right," but he stuck to his guns with the support of Deer Run's owners. Within a season, the word was out: Deer Run is serious about pace of play. Longtime customers embraced the change, even during league play, and golfers started seeking out the course to enjoy speedier rounds than other area public facilities.

"IT TAKES A SPINE TO ENFORCE A FOUR-HOUR PACE OF PLAY, BUT IT'S WORTH IT. YOU HAVE TO KNOW YOUR MARKET."

—TOM ABTS, PGA GENERAL MANAGER,
DEER RUN GOLF COURSE,
VICTORIA, MINNESOTA

Embracing Expectations and Enforcement

Tom Abts,

PGA General Manager,
Deer Run Golf Course, Victoria, Minnesota

When Tom Abts took over as PGA Head Professional at Deer Run Golf Club 30 years ago, the daily fee course outside Minnesota's Twin Cities had a pace of play problem. Rounds regularly took more than five hours, which was giving the facility a bad reputation during the golf boom of the 1990s.

Without the benefit of GPS technology or other tools golf facilities can use today to monitor pace of play, Abts set about making faster play a part of the culture at Deer Run. And his main tool was identifying what the facility's core customers wanted from their experience – that, and some tough love.

"We instituted FastPlayFriday (FPF) in 1997, which promised golfers a four-hour round," says

More than two decades later, the legacy of FPF remains at Deer Run. The facility averages four-hour rounds, and the target market is consistently happy with the golf experience. The facility has also carved out a reputation – and valuable marketing identity – as a facility where golfers can play quickly. To Abts, creating and maintaining a culture of expedient pace of play is about expectation and enforcement.

"It takes a spine to enforce a four-hour pace of play, but it's worth it," Abts says. "You have to know your market. Not every course has players who want to play that fast, but that's what my customer wants. We're not trying to be everything to everyone. If you're a beginner and don't play that fast, or want to have a really challenging experience on a difficult course, you're probably not coming here."

Abts has shared his views on pace of play in the *Pellucid Report*, and liked the *MyGolfSpy* article on the subject. He appreciates the new technologies available to golf facilities to help preserve a solid pace. When training staff or talking to golfers, Abts uses an automotive analogy to explain the delicate balance between slow and fast play.

"I promote the idea that a four-hour round is

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equivalent to driving 60 mph on the highway – and a golf course is a one-lane highway,” Abts says. “We want everyone to drive 60 mph, a reasonable speed. People don’t have the right to drive 40 mph and slow up a busy course, nor can they expect to drive 80 mph and run over people. Left to their own, people could drive too fast or too slow. When you give someone expectations and enforce them, it can be done – and we’ve done it at Deer Run for more than 20 years.”

Turning Time into an Ally

Andrew Hedrick,

PGA Head Professional,

The Country Club at Castle Pines, Castle Rock, Colorado

With a well-regarded Jack Nicklaus Signature course winding through picturesque terrain just minutes outside Denver, The Country Club at Castle Pines doesn’t seem like it would need to worry much about competition from other activities for the attention of its nearly 400 members.

But according to PGA Head Professional Andrew Hedrick, the upscale private club is fighting a foe other clubs will find familiar: time.

“Golf is fighting an uphill battle on time, especially in a world where you can walk into Topgolf and have a golf experience in an hour, or have a simulator in your home,” Hedrick says. “Pace of play is a prominent part of the discussion here, and you have to appreciate that members’ time is important. You don’t want pace of play to be a reason people don’t remain members.”

Adding to the challenge at The Country Club that Castle Pines is the setting. The club sits at 7,000 feet, with seven miles of golf car path winding through 500 feet of elevation change and residential areas – and only two holes that run parallel to each other. Policing pace of play on such a rugged and sprawling site is daunting for staff members.

“Before 2017, we were operating blind – we could put two staff members out in golf cars and ride around, but you could go halfway around the course before you got to the trouble spot,” Hedrick says. “We had members asking if we could just pay

more retirees to help manage pace of play as hourly employees, but I don’t think a high-end club should rely on that solution in having sensitive discussions with members during their rounds.”

Hedrick and his staff looked at a variety of solutions, including those offered by golf car manufacturers, before bringing Tagmarshal in for a demo. The club immediately saw the benefit of being able to track groups from the computer in the golf shop, sending a golf professional to the source of the slowdown instead of hoping a ranger happened upon it.

“Telling someone they’re holding up play can be a tough conversation, especially at a private club. You need to have tact, and you need to know the personalities – I can count on our PGA Professionals to do that,” Hedrick says. “Plus, we understand that the group might be playing part of a season-long match play event, or there might be a member hosting three guests on business. You don’t want to embarrass a member in that situation, because this is our business.”

By the Numbers

38

Average time in seconds that a PGA Tour player takes to hit a shot from the fairway, along with 43 seconds from the tee and 50 seconds for shots around the green.

source: Shotlink

The Country Club at Castle Pines has now been using Tagmarshal for nearly three seasons, and the staff is using the data collected over that time to improve the member experience and further the bond between the golf staff and the golf committee. Hedrick includes pace of play data in his annual report to the board, and the golf committee uses the data to communicate with members who are habitual slow players.

The club hosts approximately 23,000 rounds during its short season, and its most avid golfers have cheered improvements in pace. The average round has dropped from 4:20 to 4:04, but more important is the feeling rounds flow more smoothly around known bottlenecks, like the famed par-5 fifth hole, a 650-yard beast with a split fairway.

“Our members expect an optimized experience, which is what we get from technology in so many other parts of our lives,” Hedrick says. “The members love that we’ve invested in a solution that helps them move consistently around the golf course, and they ask about their times. We also have data

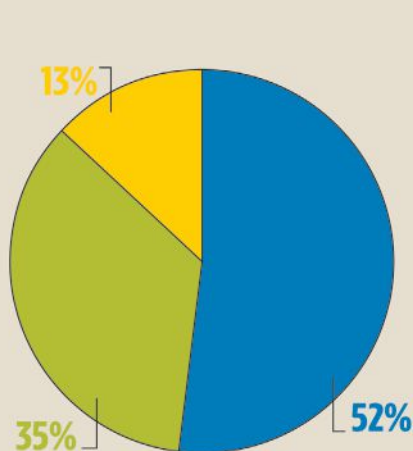
“OUR MEMBERS EXPECT AN OPTIMIZED EXPERIENCE, WHICH IS WHAT WE GET FROM TECHNOLOGY IN SO MANY OTHER PARTS OF OUR LIVES.”

—ANDREW HEDRICK, PGA HEAD PROFESSIONAL,
THE COUNTRY CLUB AT CASTLE PINES,
CASTLE ROCK, COLORADO

The Country Club at Castle Pines Pace of Play

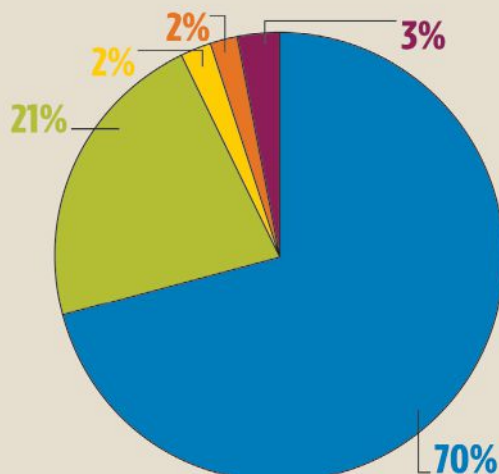
A comparison of pace at the facility in 2017 and in 2018, after implementing changes using data from Tagmarshal:

■ on pace ■ <10 min. over pace ■ 10–20 min. over pace ■ 20–30 min. over pace
■ 30–40 min. over pace ■ over 40 min. over pace



October 2017:

Average round time: 4:09
Rounds on pace or faster: 52%
Rounds <10 minutes over pace: 35%
Rounds 10–20 minutes over pace: 13%



July 2018:

Average round time: 4:04
Rounds on pace or faster: 70%
Rounds <10 minutes over pace: 21%
Rounds 10–20 minutes over pace: 2%
Rounds 20–30 minutes over pace: 2%
Rounds over 40 minutes over pace: 3%

on which players could speed up, and we can have that conversation from a position of being helpful instead of embarrassing them.

“An affluent club like ours expects an upscale experience, and it expects to play in a certain amount of time. You have so many other things that take time, but our members want to make the most of their time here. So if they know they can come out, warm up, play 18 and stay for a drink – and still be home within five hours – they’re going to do that more often.”

play every day, with some days becoming frustratingly slow.

“I had been successful at other facilities using 10-minute intervals, but there was worry that we’d lose inventory and people would be frustrated that they couldn’t get their treasured morning tee times,” Kent says. “But two years later, the move has gone extremely well.”

From a management perspective, Kent says the move to 10-minute intervals has given his staff enough margin to help get slower groups back on pace before affecting the entire course.

“Even though we’ve sped up rounds by 10–15 minutes by spacing out the tee times, you still have a struggle every few days and the rangers need to encourage a group or two to speed up,” he says. “The difference is that at 10-minute intervals, you have a chance to recover. At eight minutes, the problem just compounds itself.”

During peak season, there are days when the prized morning tee times sell out at Hidden Cypress. Golfers enjoy the improved pace so much, however, that they are OK with playing later in the day knowing that it will be a pleasant experience.

“I presented the idea of going back to eight-minute intervals during certain times, but our leadership in the community feels it’s much more important to have a positive experience than have more access to morning tee times,” Kent says. “The homeowners’ board makes that call, and they really enjoy the customer satisfaction. People can plan their day better, and they come off the course in a

Every Minute Matters

Charlie Kent,

PGA Head Professional,
Hidden Cypress Golf Club, Bluffton, South Carolina

Golf is a game of inches, and pace of play is a game of minutes within the game. That’s the lesson PGA Head Professional Charlie Kent has learned in his two-plus seasons at Hidden Cypress Golf Club, part of the Troon-managed Sun City community for active adults age 55 and over.

When Kent arrived at Hidden Cypress, one of three courses in the Sun City portfolio outside Hilton Head, South Carolina, tee time intervals were set at eight minutes in an effort to accommodate avid golfers from the residential community, as well as public play. There was pressure on pace of



New technology is helping PGA Head Professional Andrew Hedrick and his staff more easily patrol pace of play at The Country Club at Castle Pines in Colorado.

better mood.”

Kent is also working to educate Hidden Cypress golfers about ways to maintain good pace of play. He sends a monthly email blast to more than 1,800 core golfers that includes a pace of play tip – for example, he’ll remind his older golfers that the idea of “honors golf” should be replaced by “ready golf,” and that the new Rules allow for leaving the flagstick in while putting. He’s also adding attachments to the bottom of the flagsticks so members can retrieve made putts without having to bend over.

“People love it, and it saves a little bit of time – and with an older community, having one less thing to bend over for helps save everyone’s back, too.”

Keeping Competitors on the Move

Jim Morris,

PGA Head Professional,

National Golf Links of America, Southampton, New York

As the old adage says, there’s golf – and there’s tournament golf. Improving the pace of play during the nervy rounds of tournament golf for the 350-plus members at Long Island’s National Golf Links of America has been a major accomplishment for PGA Head Professional Jim Morris.

While the famed club values a culture of healthy pace of play during daily rounds on its lauded C.B. Macdonald/Seth Raynor layout, Morris saw that competitive events often bogged down at the club.

“We have a lot of competitive events at the club, and members with a high golfer IQ, and their expectations are high,” Morris says. “For these players, one bad pin position can ruin an experience. Pace of play falls into the same category – if it takes too long to play, it ruins the experience and has a real effect on players.”

Morris and his staff brought in Tagmarshal to help identify trouble areas on the course in an

effort to smooth out tournament play. By putting a GPS tracker on one player’s bag in each group, the golf staff can monitor the flow of the entire event and be ready to assist wherever needed.

Tagmarshal’s data also helped Morris create novel solutions to ongoing problem areas. For example, holes 13 and 14 require players to walk around – and play over – both sides of a large pond. In addition to the time it took to actually play the two challenging holes, players also lost time in walking around the water twice.

The data showed the detrimental effect this slowdown had on the rest of the field, giving Morris the idea to provide mandatory golf car shuttles to get around the water between shots. Two long walks have been transformed into 30-second shuttle rides, and pace of play is maintained.

“WE HAVE MORE MEMBERS PLAYING IN OUR EVENTS, AND THEY’RE HAVING A GREAT EXPERIENCE. AS PGA PROFESSIONALS, WE’RE ALWAYS TRYING TO CREATE BETTER MEMBER EXPERIENCES AND INTERACTIONS.”

—JIM MORRIS,

PGA HEAD PROFESSIONAL,
NATIONAL GOLF LINKS OF AMERICA,
SOUTHAMPTON, NEW YORK

“There were other areas that could cause problems, too, but Tagmarshal really let us see the patterns that lead up to issues during tournament play,” Morris says. “We’ve now alleviated the problem, and the response from the membership has been ecstatic. It’s added to their appreciation of our events that they don’t have to take all day to play anymore.”

As a result, National Golf Links has increased the size of the field and number of flights for each of its member tournaments, and all were oversubscribed this season.

“We have more members playing in our events, and they’re having a great experience,” Morris says. “As PGA Professionals, we’re always trying to create better member experiences and interactions, and fulfilling the promise of a fast-playing tournament environment is a great way to do that.”

“Everyone wants to have an efficient and enjoyable time on the golf course, and that’s the best way to compete with all the other things that could draw their attention away from golf.” ■