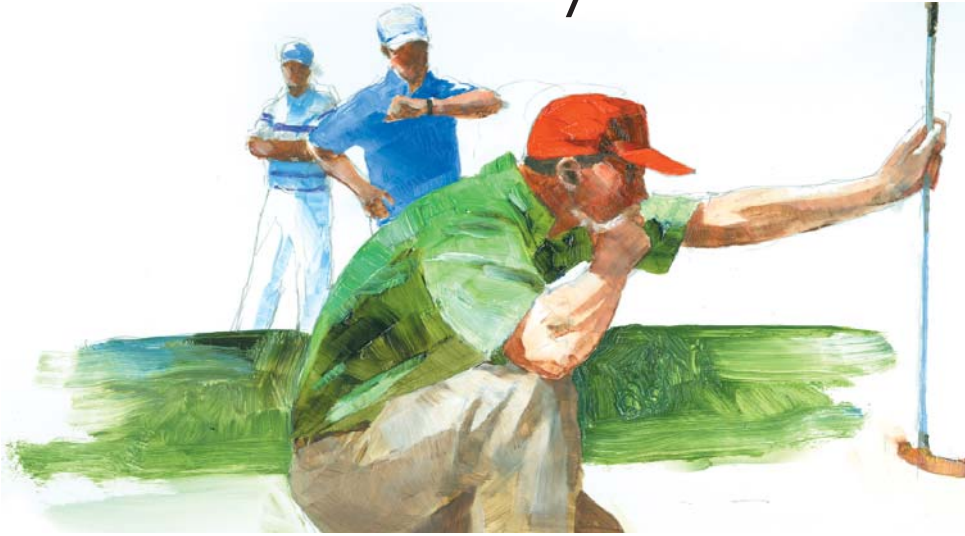


Pace of Play: Problem Solved!



STAN FELLOWS

Slow play is one of the golf industry's biggest problems today. It costs golf courses millions of dollars per year in lost revenue. Many people are not willing to spend five plus hours to play a round of golf on a regular basis.

In our AGA tournaments, we feel it is very important to provide members with a professionally managed event where play moves along at a comfortable pace. We've used several different pace of play policies over the years—but the philosophy has always been that "players must make strokes without delaying either their own play or that of other players." There is no question that our current pace policy has been the most successful in accomplishing this goal, as we have reduced total times from over five hours to just over four in most events. In last year's Stroke Play, the final group finished under four hours, something unheard of elsewhere.

How was this accomplished? Simply. We put the onus of responsibility for pace where it belongs—on the players and their peers. Players are responsible for keeping the pace and incur penalties if they do not. The tournament officials' only roles are to provide information and advice on keeping pace, and to remove penalties when one individual is the victim of another's poor judgment. There

are two simple requirements for players: either play at less than the posted time of play or stay within fifteen minutes of the group in front of you.

Here's a brief synopsis of our current Pace of Play Policy:

- We establish a reasonable pace of play for the tournament course based on distances played, par and reasonable times for players to make each stroke (normally 30 seconds);
- We establish checkpoints on the golf course. If we have sufficient volunteers, we use four checkpoints. More often, however, we use two—one after hole #9 and another after hole #18.
- When a group passes the checkpoint, we have a volunteer who compares the time of completion to the time that we've established as the reasonable pace time. If a group misses the target time at the checkpoint AND is more than 15 minutes behind the group in front of them, the entire group is assessed a one-stroke penalty.
- If the groups gets back into position on the back nine and finishes the 18th hole either within our prescribed time, or within 15 minutes of the group in front of them, then the penalty assessed on the front nine is rescinded.
- On the other hand, if the group con-

tinues to lose time on the back nine and does not finish the 18th hole within 15 minutes of the group in front of them, then they are assessed an additional two strokes—a total penalty of three strokes.

We also do have an appeal process because the unexpected is always expected on a golf course. (Poor play, by the way, is not a valid reason for slow play. Some of the fastest players are not the best, as you are well aware in your own groups).

Players now have an incentive to apply pressure to someone in the group who is causing them to fall behind. If peer pressure isn't working, the group does have recourse—they can bring it to the attention of a rules official. Four-hour rounds in tournaments are now the norm. One professional in the U.S. Open Qualifying at Tucson CC last May (last group finished in 4:11) stated, "This is the best-run event I have ever played in. Why don't you get the USGA to use this everywhere?"

The ultimate impact? The field is protected—the slow players are held accountable—and the majority of the players enjoy a great tournament experience. Pace of Play targets are here to stay in Arizona amateur golf. The majority of the feedback has been positive and, in the long run, everyone benefits.

Want to speed up the play of your tournaments? Try the "AGA-Way." You can find our Pace Policy on azgolf.org. Look in the left hand navigation under "Tournaments" and scroll down to "Pace Policy."

If you would like some assistance in managing your specific pace of play issues, we're here to help. Contact Dave Patterson, Tournament Operations Manager, at dpatterson@azgolf.org, (602) 944-3035 or (800) 458-8484. ■