**READY GOLF**

Introduction

A big issue in golf is slow play.  Novices to the game should be especially aware of slow play, as beginning golfers tend to take more strokes.  There are several ways to speed up play without rushing your game.  One technique is to play “ready golf”.

Basically, Ready Golf means being ready to hit when it is your turn.  It also means if you are ready before others, and you don’t interfere with play, to go ahead and play.  It is a general practice that most golfers follow so that they aren’t playing slowly.

Proper golf etiquette says that the person farthest from the green hits first.  In Ready Golf, the person who gets to his or her ball first and is ready to hit, goes first.  Ready Golf requires thinking ahead, so you are ready to play when it is your turn.  Here are some of the principles that many golfers use to keep play moving.

First and foremost, be reasonable with the number of practice swings you take. This can be a real waste of time.  One or two should be enough.  If you need more, perhaps you should be on the practice tee, and not a course.

Develop a Pre-Shot Routine

If you don’t already have one, work on developing a [consistent pre-shot routine](http://www.deeprough.com/index.php/2006/10/16/developing-a-pre-shot-routine/). Just don’t make it a 5 minute one that involves 35 waggles, and constant regripping of the club. Mine involves lining up behind the ball, envisioning my shot, walking up to the ball, grip, look up, check alignment, look up…hit. It probably doesn’t take more than 20 seconds. And it’s consistent. I don’t spend minutes hemming and hawing over what to do. Not only does it help speed up play, but it will clear your mind, and help you stay focused.

On The Tee

Ready Golf, we often hear, means that the person who is ready at the tee should hit first.  That is simply not true. Ready Golf means that the player with the honors should be ready to hit first.  If that player isn’t ready, only then should someone else hit first.

And always carry an extra ball in your pocket to the tee, in case you need to hit a provisional.  It is much faster to do it right away than to return to the cart and come back.

Play Level Appropriate Tees: I don’t worry about this as much as some people do, but you’re only doing yourself a disservice if you’re a 20 handicap playing off the back tees. But, I’m not going to say that everyone that does it slows down play. If you’re a high handicapper who plays quickly, by all means, torture yourself from the back tees.

Being “Away”

In general, it is wise to have the player furthest from the hole hitting first for safety reasons.  However, if you reach your ball, and it will not cause delay or interfere with anyone else’s shot, go ahead and hit.  Oftentimes players are on opposite sides of the fairway, or not even close to each other.  Also, the use of carts can be a factor.  If you drive up to your ball way ahead of a walker, and can hit without being a safety hazard or slowing  anyone down, go ahead and hit.

On The Fairway

While waiting to hit, all players should prepare for their shots by selecting their clubs, judging the wind, getting yardage and such, so you are ready to hit when it is your turn.

Ready Golf means that the drivers of carts should drop off their partners, let them choose their clubs (take extra ones if required), drive to their own balls, and then get ready to play.  Drivers should not wait for their partner to hit the shot, and then drive to their own ball to make their shot.

All players should go to their balls as soon as possible.  The only time you should wait for others is if your ball is in front of others’ in such a way that you could be hit by another player’s shot.  A caravan of players should never converge unless their balls are all in the same location.

Hint:  walk or drive down the sides of the fairway to reach your ball, determine your club selection while waiting, and then move towards the center to your ball.  You can usually get close to your ball and get ready to play the shot, while players behind you can still make their shots.

Finding Lost Balls

If you hook your tee shot into some deep woods, with lots of underbrush…you’re not going to find it. Yes, I understand the rules give you 5 minutes to look…but the vast majority of people take more than that…and for the most part it’s a fruitless effort. Look for a minute or two…if you seriously think you have a reasonable chance of finding it, sure use your 5 minutes. But, come on…if it looks like a Costa Rican jungle…you aren’t going to find the ball, don’t waste any more time looking for it.

It is important that everyone try to help find a lost ball in order to keep play moving.  But do it after hitting your shot, not before.  It is unacceptable to see an entire group searching for a lost ball, spending the maximum 5 minutes, then watch all of them start the hitting rotation.  The player closest to the pin should be the first to help in the lost ball search.

Another tip is to always hit a provisional ball if your first ball is even remotely suspected of being lost.  This will save a trip back to the tee, which is an ultimate slow play.

Entering and Exiting Greens

ALWAYS, and we mean ALWAYS, leave clubs and carts at the back or side of the green closest to the next tee.   This way when you finish putting you can quickly exit, allowing the following group to hit in a timely and safe manner.

Above all, don’t stand there to write scores down, or to discuss what type of beverage you are going to have when the cart comes around.  Once your group has putted go to the next tee.  There is plenty of time there to write down the scores.  If you have a cart, assign score-keeping duty to players hitting from the forward tees, since they will be waiting at the back tees.  In that way, back-tee players can be setting up while the scores are recorded.

Speeding Play On The Greens

Gimme Putts: Unless you’re playing for $100 a hole, please don’t spend 5 minutes lining up your 18? putt. Tell your playing partner it’s good, and have him pick up. How many times have you watched another 2-5 minutes wasted while the group in front of you is standing in a 5 foot circle surrounding the pin?

Ready Golf means putting continuously if the ball is not in someone else’s line, and if you do not have to spend a lot of time surveying the putt.  If you miss a put by one or two feet and have a clear stance to make the next putt, you should MAKE the putt instead of marking the ball and waiting for another turn—unless it is a tricky putt and you want some extra time to survey it.  In that case, mark the ball and survey the putt while someone else putts.  When it is your turn, walk up to the ball, take your stance and make your putt.

You also need to be lining up your putt while others are playing.  If  you are in someone’s line this may not be entirely possible, but as a rule you can get 90% of the surveying done ahead of time.

While there are not time rules associated with putting, a rule of thumb is to get off your putt within 20 seconds from when it is your turn.  This means you should be able to approach the ball, take your stance and putt within 20 seconds.  Obviously, you can only do this if your survey the putt while other players are putting.  When you putt, you should take your time so you make a smooth, unhurried stroke.  Ready Golf DOES NOT mean rushing.  If you prepare in advance to putt, you can take your time and play Ready Golf.  The last person to hole out should not be the one replacing the flagstick. One of the other players should be standing next to the flag ready to replace it once the last person has holed out.

On tending the flag: stand out of all players lines of putting and be aware of your shadow, it is not covering the hole or in the line of the putting player. Also hold down the flag itself, so it does not blow in the wind and disturb the person putting. Pull it immediately after the person has completed the putting stroke. Flag stick should be out of the hole whenever a ball is being putted from the green. It is the players option when the ball is located on the fringe to leave the flagstick, take it out or have it tended.

Marking your ball: All are on the green. Generally mark your ball immediately. (Be aware of the line of the others putts so as not to walk in their lines.) Do not wait for another player to ask you to mark it. Go directly to your ball and mark it. And, the proper way to mark your ball is to place the marker directly behind the ball. If another player would prefer that you move your mark out of their line, ask them which direction. Mark it first where it lies. Then move it one putter foot length (not the whole length of the putter itself) to the left or right. When replacing your ball, place your putter foot back next to the mark, remark and place your ball in front of the mark between your marker and the hole.

Bunker Play

When entering the sand bunker (from the low side, please so as not to break down the integrity of the design-also do not drive your cart closer than within 20 feet of the bunker), take the rake with you and lie it down near your ball location. This way, when you have completed your shot, the rake is immediately available for grooming and does not require backtracking to retrieve the rake and re-entering the sand.

After a bunker shot where the player fails to get on the green, or leaves him/herself a long putt, don’t everyone wait for that player to finish raking the bunker, go get their putter, line up the long putt, and play.  Once the player hits the bunker shot, the person furthest away from the hole should be ready to putt.  Everyone else should have been preparing while that individual was doing bunker duty.

Farthest From The Hole

There is no reason Ready Golfers can’t play in the order of who is farthest from the hole.  In Ready Golf, the person farthest from the hole should be ready to play first.  There are, however, a few common-sense exceptions.  In a foursome in which one or two players are walking and one or two are using carts, the players with the carts should hit first if they reach their ball first and are ready to play.

When someone hits a shot, but is still farthest from the hole, players should hit before that player if they are ready.  Here are two examples:

If a player hits a tree or some obstruction with a second shot and is still farthest from the hole, the players closer to the hole should hit first to speed up play.

If someone is off the green in a sand trap and hits it furthest from the hole, the other players should not wait for that player to walk around the green to play the next shot.  Play should continue until that player is ready to make the next shot. Nothing is more disconcerting than watching three players waiting on the green while the fourth cleans up the sand, walks to the ball, surveys the putt, and then plays.

Summary

Ready Golf is really all about common sense.  If you can hit, hit.  Use the time when others are hitting to prepare for your shot when it is your turn.  Keep the game moving, and don’t wait to hit just for the sake of honors.  Remember:  the foursome you are following determines the pace of play, not the group behind. KEEP THEM IN SIGHT!