



Deer Run Golf Club
Minnesota USA

INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDY:

Game Innovation:
Fast Play Fridays

OVERVIEW

As Golf Clubs try to attract new people to the game and open their doors to a greater audience, they potentially open themselves up to some conflict. Outside of specific club days, players of all levels compete on the same course at the same time. This is a unique element to the sport of golf and while it is undoubtedly one of Golf's greatest strengths, it can also be one of its most frustrating elements. We've all been there before, stuck behind a group that seems to inspect each blade of grass they walk over. This is followed by the standard 15 practice swings and re-aligning behind the ball, two more practice swings and finally hitting the ball...well, topping it anyway. The golfer walks the required 10 metres to retrieve their ball before starting the process all over again. Meanwhile, you feel yourself losing the will to live.

So how do Golf Clubs balance the need to make new people feel welcome and allow members to play at a pace that lets them enjoy the game? Tom Abts, General Manager and Head PGA Professional at the Deer Run Golf Club, Minnesota believes his club has the answer.

After playing 9 holes in 45 minutes with one of the course Rangers, Tom started brewing an idea "How could we play 9 holes in under an hour yet have some people playing 6 hour rounds!?" He also noted "We weren't racing around the course trying to play fast, it just sort of happened." This is what Tom called his "moment of inspiration." After which, "Fast Play Fridays" was created.

CHALLENGES



IMPLEMENTATION

There were a number of set up elements to consider in order to keep people accountable from start to finish.



EDUCATING PLAYERS

It was of paramount importance to educate players on the rules prior to beginning their round.



ENFORCING THE RULES

It can be a difficult situation that leads to conflict, but for the betterment of the game and the progression of the club, the rules must be enforced.

SOLUTION

Fast Play Fridays set out, not to rush golfers around the course, but to make sure they maintained a regular pace that allowed all golfers on the course to enjoy their round and finish in 4 hours or less.

Golfers are educated on the Fast Play Friday concept three times before teeing off. Firstly before their booking is confirmed, at check-in and again on the first tee. Every golfer has to ride in a cart, there is no walking. The cart has the start time of their round posted on the side. 3 Rangers (Marshalls) are posted on holes 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9. Each marshall makes sure the golfers are keeping pace on their 3 holes. The intent is to have 9 holes of golf completed in 1 hour 55 minutes or less. If on hole #8 it looks like the group won't make their deadline, Tom will meet the group on #9 and ask that they skip to #10 to pick up the pace. On the occasion that the group are too far behind the deadline, they are not allowed to continue and will be asked to leave, receiving a part refund on their round.

The fact that groups have the concept explained three times before teeing off allows Tom the ability to ask groups to pick up the pace or ask them to leave. At first glance this may seem like a rule for the elite golfer but Tom disagrees. For a man that generated 1.7 million US Dollars for the club in just a 6 month period, he knows his target market very well. "My guy is not someone that shoots a 71, my guy likes to ride around in a nice cart... is hoping to break 90 and have a few laughs outdoors with his buddies." Another factor to the success of Deer Run Golf Club is that the course is designed to provide a challenge, but not be ludicrously hard. "Where I think the industry has gone wrong is that a lot of courses are not so friendly, in a number of ways. Too many courses are too hard, and if it's too hard, it takes too long."

RESULTS



POPULARITY

Word got out immediately and Friday became the Deer Run Golf Club's most popular day.



REVENUE

Friday became the club's largest revenue day.



ROUND TIMES

Round times across all days decreased as a flow on effect from Fast Play Fridays. A decent pace of play became part of the Deer Run Golf Club culture.



CLUB EXPOSURE

Deer Run Golf Club received very positive media exposure.

KEY LEARNINGS:

It is imperative to educate golfers as to the rules and have their agreement before teeing off. Tom noted that "Enforcing the 4 hour round needs to occur. Losing 10 minutes every hour turns in to very slow rounds in the afternoon."

CONCLUSION / SUMMARY:

The response from the golfing audience was remarkably positive. When asked Tom noted "It was amazing how well it was received. The word got out immediately, and Friday became our biggest revenue day of the week." There were also some very positive flow on effects as the club itself became known for fast play. Tom quite positively notes, "Our weekend rounds became 4 hour rounds. Fast play became the norm every day. It became part of our culture." Tom said. The innovation was so successful that Tom himself topped Golf Inc's "Most Innovate People." An award given to the 18 most creative risk-takers who are at the cutting edge of improving the golf industry.

Tom also fielded numerous calls from other club owners/managers but laments the fact that it hasn't become a standard throughout America "I was hoping it would become the norm in America. Many people from across the country called me about it, but when I explained how it worked, no one wanted to implement it." The right choice or not, other clubs cannot argue with the success seen at Deer Run Golf Club because of Fast Play Fridays.

Tom is a big advocate for the innovation and states "It's not that hard to do and it will pay incredible rewards. A 4 hour round is not racing, its actually very comfortable, it just needs to be maintained."



PHOTO BY SCOTT COHEN

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