

Parting Shot

How I Became a Ladies' Man

by Ian Hutchinson

When World of Women's Golf magazine was first published five years ago, there were some eyebrows raised when a guy was named editor.

What's the big deal, I thought? After all, I had experience covering the LPGA Tour, its Canadian players and women's amateur golf, so I had the background for a publication targeted at women.

Writing and editing experience, however, was not the issue. It was more a case of attitude. Perhaps ignorance is a better word.

In my own experience on the golf course, forward tees were present only to give men something to get the ball past so they didn't have to reveal their assets or liabilities, depending on the individual. It didn't matter whether a man or woman was at the counter in the pro shop. And there were always the bushes if there was no restroom at the seventh tee.

Preoccupied with my own enjoyment, I never considered the importance of forward tees, restroom facilities and female staff members, among other issues, before joining the staff of World of Women's Golf. It helped that our executive editor is Sandra Post, not only the most successful touring professional this country has produced, but somebody who has experienced and often heard from other women about deficiencies in golf courses.

Before I could write about 'female-friendly' golf, I had to understand what the term meant. But I wasn't the only one. The golf industry as a whole had to realize that in order to accommodate the growing number of women in the game, changes would have to be made.

That was then and this is now. I now know the difference between a skort and a skirt when I read through a fashion story and I'm more aware of what women require from golf facilities. Also enlightened are those golf courses that have made progress over the last five years in making their facilities more enjoyable for women. The 1.5 million women playing golf in this country is too large a demographic for a business to ignore.

I've heard that many women's locker rooms are becoming more spacious with more amenities. There seems to be more females on staff to lessen that "boys' club" atmosphere of not that long ago and many women can find a comfort zone by taking lessons from a female pro. Forward tees are now not only present, but you can often discover nearby ball-washers - and when nature calls, women

don't have to use nature as their backdrop. These are changes I've noticed, but they don't apply to every facility.

One golf course I know of actually ordered players in a high-profile, women-only tournament to start teeing it up on the fairways to keep the pace of play moving, despite having paid an exorbitant price to be out there. Would that have happened with a men's tournament? I think not.

While we've made a lot of progress in making women feel comfortable on the golf course, there are still more steps to be taken. League golf, such as the Executive Women's Golf Association, not only offers women a place to play, but also allows for networking opportunities, especially among the business types, who are now too busy to comply with the restrictive tee times they were once afforded. Scramble events are important for women beginning the game as they offer them the opportunity to compete without the pressure of having to make a great shot every time or having their personal scores recorded.

Many American resorts have introduced kids clubs or day care centres for their guests. That's a good idea for Canadian resorts and public courses. Golf programs for both girls and boys will not only ensure the future of the game, but will look after children and keep them active while mom and dad are out on the golf course.

We have changed and should continue to change. With the growing number of golf courses in Canada, meeting the demands of women and families makes good business sense. For those who continue to resist change, I can only offer these sage words of advice: Evolution, not revolution, is always best.