

THE GREAT DEBATE



Dress Codes: Where do you stand?

One of the more humorous tales of a road warrior who has chased the little white ball around the world, mostly through trees and long grass, came 10 years ago on a golf course just outside of Amsterdam.

We had just teed off and as we walked down the fairway, we noticed a group of men and women standing on the other side of a canal, all dressed in the same tan outfits.

As we got closer, we discovered the tan outfits were actually birthday suits. We found out back at the clubhouse that an adjoining green space was regularly used by people who stripped off to enjoy the sun.

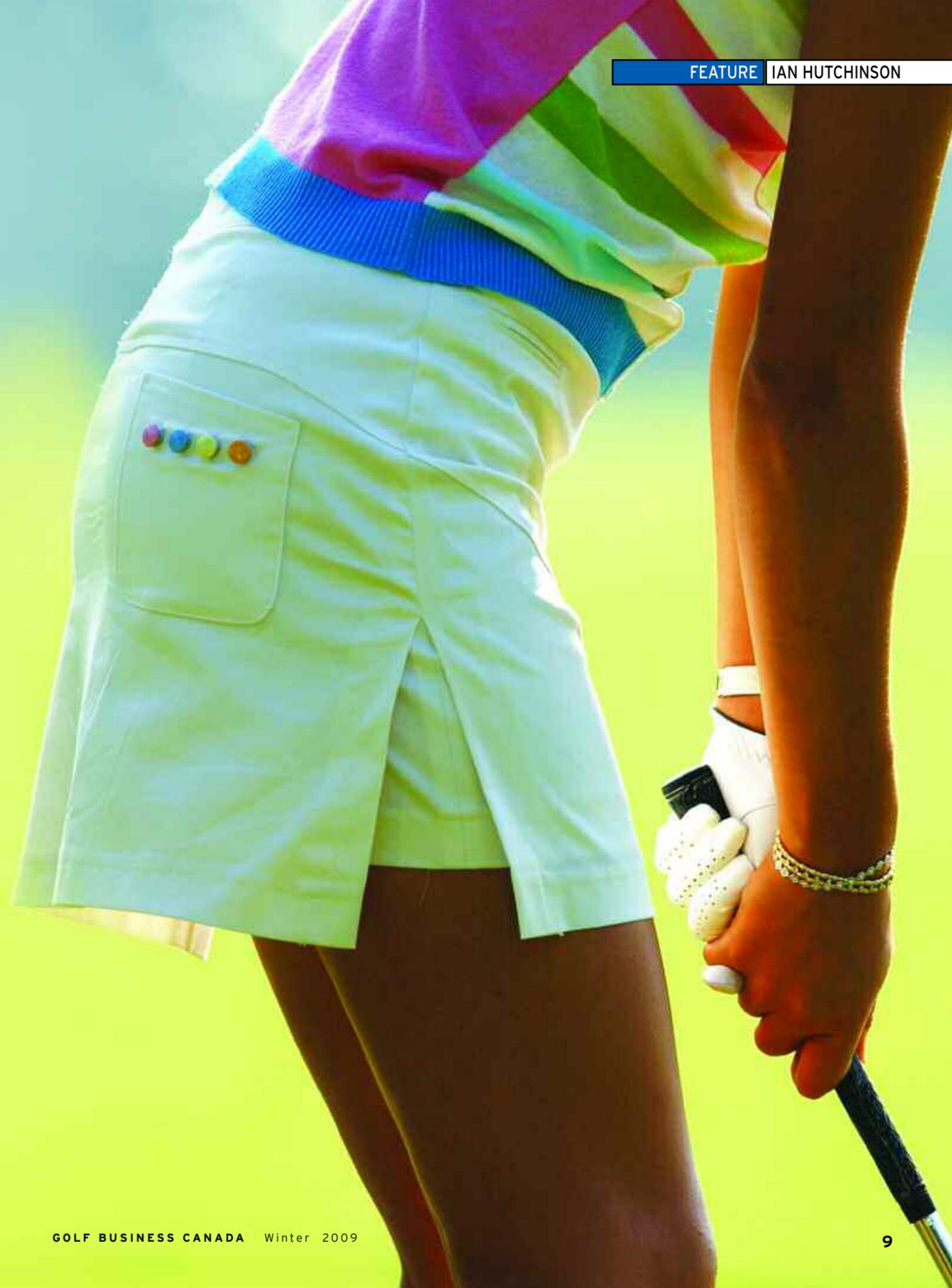
The wandering naked folks were friendly, gave us a wave and even cheered one good shot. We joked after leaving the green that their lack of apparel definitely didn't meet golf's traditional dress code, but since our nude friends weren't actually playing golf, they weren't going against any standard at this public facility.

Oddly enough, many of the more modest people who were playing golf did go beyond the traditional golf attire as we saw a variety of denim shorts and tee shirts. Ironic that they are actually the centerpiece of a passionate debate about dress codes, although who knows? Nude golfers might be an argument for future generations.

DEFINING STANDARDS

As it stands right now, golf is spinning off in different directions when it comes to acceptable attire on the course and in the clubhouse.

Whether jeans, tee shirts, revealing women's wear and edgy fashions are proper attire depends





1906 and 1911 Canadian Open Champion, long time professional The Royal Montreal Golf Club, Charles Murray (from the Charles Murray collection). Photo credit: Canadian Golf Hall of Fame archives.

codes is just too great for some golf operators. Styles change with generations and being heavy-handed in enforcing a dress code can risk slowing the growth of the game.

"I think you run that risk, especially with kids, but it's also one of the greatest things about our game that kids get to learn. They learn about etiquette and rules and those aren't bad things, but there's a fine line," said Alan Carter, director of golf at the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge in Jasper, Alta.

Steve Spratt, co-owner/general manager of the semi-private Falcon Ridge Golf Course in Gloucester, Ont. agrees.

"At our club, we do everything we can to encourage anybody who wants to take up the game, running junior camps or tournaments or whatever else we need to do," said Spratt, adding that appealing to the masses means shaking the stereotype of golf as elitist.

"We're saying the elite is only 10 per cent of the population," he said. "We've got to open it up to everybody. We have schools coming in and we don't mention dress code at all to them. We just want to get the kids introduced to golf."

Falcon Ridge has opened its "Out of Bounds" restaurant as a revenue source inside its clubhouse and the dress code there would be considered out of bounds in past years as denim is allowed.

"It's pretty hard with people ready to pay money for dinner to tell them to take their jeans off," said Spratt, adding that the same holds true in other aspects of the operation.

"We never turn anybody away wearing jeans unless they're really raggedy. We try to ask them next time to wear something more suitable for golf," Spratt said, adding that he doesn't often get complaints about inappropriate attire.

"A private club probably has different parameters than we do, for sure," said Spratt.

There are so many different business models and opinions and tastes in fashion that it's difficult to come down on either side of the fence on this issue. If only it was as simple as it was about 100 years ago when even the most conservative standards of dress on golf courses today would have been considered scandalous, which makes the dress code debate one for the ages and really nothing new.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

In the early part of the 20th Century, men played in jackets and ties and women in long dresses or skirts that modestly hid feminine assets as golfers conformed to society's norms of that era. Carter gets a reminder of golf styles in the early 1900s every time he walks into his office. "I've got a picture that's behind my desk of an exhibition match that took place with the first head professional here, Jimmy Rimmer," he said of a photo taken in 1927.

Alexa Stirling Fraser, childhood cohort of Bobby Jones, two time Canadian Amateur Champion. Photo credit: Canadian Golf Hall of Fame archives.



"He's wearing wool plus fours with the typical argyle type socks. He's got a cardigan sweater on with a tie and probably a long-sleeved shirt on underneath because the guy beside him was wearing a vest with a long-sleeved shirt."

The opinions on what was appropriate back then were strong, but unofficial, and very often different. "I don't know whether they had official dress codes, or whether dress was just accepted at a certain level at that time," said Karen Hewson, director of the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame and Museum at Glen Abbey in Oakville, Ontario.

Instead, she said, golfers were expected to dress according to society's norms, but over the years, that changed along with styles and more liberal forms of sartorial expression from knickerbockers to the mock necks worn by Gary Player and Tiger Woods to the shorts and sleeveless shirt worn by women today.

THE FACE OF FASHION

While we may laugh at the more formal attire of a century ago at golf clubs, the debate for the ages continues today. After

joining the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame in 1989, Hewson recalls clubs requiring women to wear a dress in the clubhouse in the 1990s.

"There were quite a lot of clubs that I couldn't go to unless I was wearing a dress. At those courses, the women could only play golf in shorts or a dress or a skirt and no long pants. I would love to have somebody explain to me how that makes any sense," added Hewson, who wasn't the only woman to feel the conservatism of golf back then.

In 1997, Linda Hipp raised eyebrows with the introduction of her fashion-forward Hyp Golf women's line, which was the predecessor to her Vancouver-based Lija brand and definitely edgy by golf's standards at the time.

"The buyers at that time, I think they saw a change coming, but nobody was prepared to take that leap of faith.

Big Boston Club Asks Its Members to Eschew Shoes With Nails - A member of Brae-Burn who sent the copy of the letter to the "Canadian Golfer," sarcastically observes, "They will be prescribing the colours of our shirts next." "Times Changes, and things with the times," but all said and done, the hoary headed old "hob-nail" will undoubtedly die hard. -1921

Jerry Pate at the 1976 Canadian Open, Essex Golf and Country Club, Windsor, Ontario. Photo credit: Canadian Golf Hall of Fame archives.



on who you talk to in the golf business and among consumers, with differing opinions coming from traditionalists and neophytes, young and old, edgy and conservative or public and private clubs.

Most admit they'd like to see a dress code, but how far do you take it? Is an untucked golf shirt or a backward cap enough of an infraction to remove somebody from the golf course if they refuse to comply? Are the pockets down the side of cargo shorts really offensive to other players?

If those examples are acceptable by your standards, how do you define what isn't acceptable?

Venerable institutions, particularly private clubs, find it important to protect the traditions of golf in respect to dress code, but what exactly are those traditions? Not long ago, many private clubs required knee socks with shorts, a practice that seems to have vanished.

INDUSTRY REALITIES

With affordability such a big factor in golf today and with the economy climbing out of a recession, the risk of losing income or turning people off golf over what can be perceived as stifling dress

The first couple of years were a real struggle for us. We did have a few people who tested us and it was a little bit of a snowball effect," said Hipp.

"They loved seeing Lija at the trade shows because they wanted to find something new and exciting and draw the younger customer. I think people are really coming around to new things," she added.

Geoff Tait runs the edgy Quagmire Golf line with Bobby Pasternak. The line is four years old now, but has much the same story as Lija.

"I found that, in year one, we got a lot of 'no - what are you guys doing', 'what are you guys thinking?'" said Tait. "By year four, there are so many doors open and there are so many more people with open minds."

"They've noticed that this is okay because it is a revenue-builder and it's not the same old golf shirt on the shelf that they've had for 20 years," he added.

GRADUAL PROGRESSION

Resistance to change is not exclusive to golf. In tennis, for example, you're seeing different stylings and colours that are a far cry from the "Wimbledon whites" we saw for so many years in that game, even crew necks and sleeveless shirts for men.

"I'm really curious to see what happens in the next couple of years because I think the same things are going to hap-



"Now, the trend is to make these lines like Lija that are really quite fashionable as well as tennis. You're looking at a skirt that somebody can potentially wear out, using it for multi-sport, using it as a fashion piece."

CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

Change is inevitable in terms of the demographics of the game and from a business perspective as new people coming in to the game seek stylish yet non-traditional pieces that appeal to them and contribute to the bottom line of a pro shop.

Golf courses are apparently listening. In May, a poll on the Canadian golf industry website, www.golfnewsnow.ca asked its readers if they had eased up on their dress code in the last five years. The results indicated a willingness to change as 64 per cent said yes, while 36 per cent said no.

"Things do change," said Joe Murphy, general manager of the St. George's Golf and Country Club in Toronto, one of Canada's renowned private clubs and site of the 2010 RBC Canadian Open.

"They don't change rapidly, but they do change. Reluctance to change is all out of respect for the game and what it represents," he added.

"There are certain things that evolve. Let's take a look at the sock rule," said Murphy. "If you go back 15 years ago when, if you wore shorts, the only socks that were acceptable were knee socks at

pen, that clubs are going to become a little more open to allowing different things on the court," said Hipp, who also has a Lija tennis line.

"I think the buyers at the true private clubs are always worried about maintaining the integrity of the game. That's what they were worried about in golf," she added.

Pam Horwood of the Merchant of Tennis, with shops in Toronto and Oakville and an e-commerce website, says there are still pockets of clubs that still prefer white apparel, but "other than that, it's pretty much a colour game. Really, there are very few pockets of all-white," she said.

"The largest markets in the U.S. - being Florida, Atlanta, California - you're not finding white there," said Horwood adding technical fabrics with U.V. sun protection and anti-microbial qualities are also hot, just as they are in golf.

Another similarity is that tennis apparel, as it is in golf, is being used outside of the respective games with designers such as Hipp coming in with a more lifestyle mindset.

"That's kind of a new influx, having these designers come into the market, so that's putting a real fashion spin on women's tennis," said Horwood, who adds that she plays golf as well as tennis.

The weather was for instance excessively hot at Hamilton when the International matches were played, but the U.S. team without exception appeared on the tees knicker-bockered or flannel-trousered, booted and be-shirted and be-collared and be-tied in the smartest style. Their appearance was most favourably commented upon by hundreds in the galleries.
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most private clubs. Now, we've evolved to having the ankle socks and they're widely acceptable in most private clubs."

THE MODERN GOLFER

How dress codes change over the next 15 years has become a regular debate in the golf industry with several factors contributing to what may become a more rapid evolution.

Murphy says the PGA Tour plays an important role in men's attire. "They're always well-dressed. There's proper attire, there always has been. It's interesting over the years how some of the styles have changed," he said.

There are other factors, including the move to more casual wear in offices and the rest of society. "There's a new wave of members that like to dress that way. They dress in a very expensive pair of jeans with a nice shirt and can't quite understand why that would not be acceptable in the clubhouse," said Murphy.

"Those are the sorts of things we review periodically," he added. "I don't think we're so stuffy that we would never look at it. If it makes sense and it's within the spirit of the game, I think sure, things can change."

Younger styles also do not apply only to teenagers and 20-somethings anymore. The difference between golf courses now compared to previous decades is the activity levels of older golfers who are staying in better shape with many of them enjoying a younger look to their apparel.

"You're watching 65-year-old guys walking in here with J. Lindebergh on," said Carter.

With so many outside influences affecting golf fashion, probably more than any previous generation, one set of rules does not fit all.

St. George's, for example, has a standard of dress that doesn't allow for non-golf corporate logos or denim and regulations regarding hats, shirts, pants, shorts, socks and shoes for both men and women. Murphy says there is rarely a problem with enforcing the rules on the golf course.

It does not seem likely, however, that the departure from the regulation skirts will become very general in Canadian feminine golfdom. As one prominent player succinctly writes: if the idea is to draw attention to a shapely limb, why fluttering breezes and non-pleated skirts are much better looking than knickers, and the larger number of women golfers will not supplant them by anything so unnecessary and unbecoming." Thus knicker tastes differ among the fair sex and in the meantime some wear them, and the great majority don't.
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"It seems to be much easier to police the dress on the golf course. It seems to be instilled more in people than perhaps the clubhouse," he said.

"I don't believe that they would purposely come and put on a pair of jeans to play golf. I think when it comes to the course, there seems to be a much clearer understanding of what's required," added Murphy.

"Private clubs really just uphold those standards and make it across the board for everyone, so you're not getting a variety of dress like the hat on backwards or the cutoff shorts or the jeans," he added.

"Really, when you look around, it's not really part of the standard of golf itself. I'm not sure that private clubs themselves make up any of the rules. They just probably uphold them more than, perhaps, some of the public facilities," said Murphy.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

However, the insistence on appropriate attire may soften if you're dealing with a diverse clientele of hotel guests that may be local or from as far away as Los Angeles, New York or even Europe, according to Carter.

"Our big key is that we'll tell people no denim of any kind. Beyond that, we may recommend collared shirts. We'll say appropriate golf attire and, if they come



Paula Creamer: adidas





Sergio Garcia: adidas



within the realm of that ball park, then we're going to be okay," said Carter. "If somebody ends up needing to go out in a track suit, that's probably acceptable in our realm. Essentially, we're looking at people not going out there wearing jeans and inappropriate stuff in that family. It's hard. In rural Alberta, that's what they wear. In fact, that's what they're most comfortable in," he added.

Not only is it difficult to turn away hotel guests, it is also difficult to single out the odd person at a tournament for his or her attire, according to Carter, who estimates that the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge puts through over 7,000 tournament rounds a year.

"What's really my issue here? There are 144 of them out on the golf course and one of their guys is in a pair of jeans – who's he going to offend?" said Carter, who said he will mention the dress code to that person.

"We might recommend that, 'Sir, next time you come by, just to let you know, we do have a policy of no denim.' If I matched him up with a foursome, there would be people who would be offended by it if we let it go. That's not what we want to happen. His three buddies from his office – well, different story," he said.

INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

While dress codes may vary from golf course to golf course, Carter likes the idea of easing newcomers into the game through basic education, not only on dress code, but also rules and etiquette. He points out that several golf courses in larger centres hold such programs. Golf associations can also be involved or pro shop staff can also point out basic information that newcomers need for their transitions into the game.

"It's intimidating," said Carter. "They have no idea as to 'Where do I go once I park my car? What do I do now?'"

To those who lack the courage to break away from the so called tradition it may be a relief to know that our late Royal Governor General, the duke of Connaught, while playing over the Royal Ottawa golf course, almost invariably played without a coat in warm weather. His example may surely be followed by those who have heretofore allowed their adherences to what they considered "good form" to obscure their common sense.

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If something goes wrong and they get snapped at right away about what they're wearing, that will deter them from going to play golf again."

One set of rules does not fit all in fashion and, therefore, the same holds true for dress codes in golf. The first mistake is thinking that this is a debate at all because the only opinion that counts for a golf course operator on this matter is your own. You can only worry about your own world. Policy can only be decided based on your course's mission statement and its demographics.

Just remember that the police may have something to say about your policy allowing birthday suits on the course.

**quotes in circles: From the Canadian Golfer. Supplied by the Canadian Golf Hall of Fame and Museum.*



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