



Tradition VS. Progress

A great dilemma for golf has always been Tradition vs Progress.

And so it is with dress codes. Just as with match play to stroke, caddies to golf cars, steel spikes to soft, private clubs to public, persimmon woods to titanium, white male to diverse demographics, and 5000 yards to 7000, there are always two sides to every debate.

In our feature this issue, Ian Hutchinson profiles the current status of golf's dress code dilemma. Times have changed rapidly in recent years, and the marketplace continues to feel more competitive, all of which puts pressure on golf course operators to re-evaluate their policies on dress code with more frequent and careful focus.

From a purely business angle, the trend would certainly appear to be that the golf course should accommodate the golfers' preferences for what she or he wears, as much as possible. Particularly in times when we all claim the need to grow the game, to remove barriers to entry, to attract target markets such as women and juniors who tend to be more fashion conscious, and to remove the stigma that golf is still that stodgy old boys sport. Why dictate on socks, collars, sleeves, jeans, skirts, shorts or hats backwards if the paying customer prefers more trendy, comfortable or multi-purpose clothing. Make the customer happy, and your business becomes more successful, sounds simple enough.

But as Hutchinson notes, catching your attention with his nude Amsterdam example, some reasonable guidelines are still required. And the standards for those guidelines should, understandably, be higher in the private club market and at the higher end public facilities. Just as fine dining restaurants may dictate jacket required, preferring an upscale image to match their menu quality, their service, décor, pricing and clientele, some golf clubs are best positioned with a similar image to cater to their own clientele. Certainly a member owned private club has every right to establish its' own dress code, given that it is actually the customers who own the business.

As for the need for tradition, opinions will vary on how important this may be today, but there is certainly legitimate value within the heritage of the game and its' traditional high standards of respect and honour. Most other sports would do well to borrow some of golf's moral equity. Our Parting Shot article by Scott Simmons, comments on these values and upholding the traditions of the game, one of the cornerstones of the RCGA's mandate for 114 years.

So as you read this issue of Golf Business Canada, be thankful that men no longer play wearing 3 piece suits and formal hats like Old Tom Morris, and that women are now enjoying fashion forward golf apparel that combines comfort and style, and kids think it's pretty sweet to wear a TaylorMade hat backwards while they crunch their 300 yard drive past yours; but cherish the traditions of the game that got our industry to where we are today, proudly the highest participation sport in Canada...we can't be too far off the mark with our dress codes!

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