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Is America Destroying The Game Of Golf ?

The Golfing Controversy No One Wants To Discuss (For our facilities with golf courses)

America loves golf. It's evident by superstar status of a number of players as well as the wide array of gadgetry available. The technological advances in the equipment are simply stunning. New clubs enable the golfer of today to hit the ball farther and with more accuracy than at any other time in history. Yet, with all of these boosts and advantages, amateur golf in America is the slowest in the world and continues to slow down. The question is, why has the game slowed down so much and what can be done about it?

"Slow play has become a universal curse in American golf and is talked about on every course in the country," says W. Eric Laing, self-proclaimed "grumpy old Scotsman" and author of *America! What Have You Done To The Auld Game?* (Neos Limited). "America is the only country in which the average amateur game cannot be played in four hours or less, but no one wants to address this unspoken gripe.

With over 50 years of experience around the game, Laing is engaged in a campaign to restore the playing of 18 holes of amateur golf to a three-and-a-half hour/four-hour timeframe. "Americans are exporting this disease to other countries to the detriment of amateur golf everywhere," says Laing. "The disease is so rampant that there is a danger that golf will lose a great number of keen amateurs because they don't have the time it now takes to play the game." What bothers him the most is the effect this slower game has on the keen amateur golfer. "The ardent amateur is the most-affected," says Laing. "After a lifetime of struggling to lower his handicap, why should he be the one to suffer because of the bad manners of other players?"

As basis for his argument, Laing cites an existing rule in both the USGA and the R&A rulebooks. "I am asking the American amateur golfer to pay attention to Rule 1, Subsection 1 and for course managers to cause the same to be strictly observed for the advantage of all players using the course," says Laing. He continues: "I don't understand why course managers refuse to enforce the paramount rule; it would make them more money, because a quicker game ensures that more rounds of golf can be played."

In his book, Laing makes an iron-clad accusation against the "ignorance and mismanagement which have led to the total demise of a 'quick eighteen' on American courses." Though full of amusing anecdotes and cartoons, Laing's book makes a serious case for all those golfers who have been forced to endure the negative impacts on their enjoyment of the game. "It is simply a matter of manners and conduct," Laing says. "It wouldn't cost a penny to change it all."

Laing blames televised tournaments for influencing the conduct of today's golfers. "How the pros play on television is not how the amateur should play," says Laing. "Why won't a major tournament figure explain that to amateur golfers? All it would take is for someone important to say it to make it stick."

He is cynically frustrated that no one in professional golf circles will admit this publicly and fervently hopes that one of the golfing "superstars" will come forward publicly in support of his plea. He despairs of ever seeing a documentary on the Golf Channel about speeding up the game.

Various golf personalities in the media have completely shunned him and his message so far, but he absolutely refuses to give up or go away. Laing sent copies of his book to dozens of professional golf figures and journalists and has yet to receive any kind of response or acknowledgement. Despite his complaints, his own love of the game remains undiminished and he will not rest until he helps to restore the enjoyment of 'a quick eighteen.'

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