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It's kind of crazy that in this day and age we have something called the women's tees. Three reasons: It's prejudiced towards women, it slows play, and it does little to grow the game. But there is a solution. The industry should consider embracing a gender-neutral system by using numbered teeing stations instead of colors.

Most courses have four sets of tees. Some even have five. By adding two to three additional tee boxes and numbering them from 1-7 (1 being the tips and 7 being

the forward tees), golfers would have a greater opportunity to play a course that fits their game. Most women would be playing the course between tees 5 (the current "ladies" tee) and 7. Many high-handicap men would play from tees 4 through 6 without the stigma of being called a bunch of names that have female connotations.

Some course operators are already on the cutting edge. At Saratoga National in upstate New York, there's no mention of gender on the scorecard as it pertains to the tee boxes. What's more, the cards include a "Suggested Handicap for Choice of Tee" guideline: Professional tee (handicap of 0 to 2), Championship tee (handicap of 3 to 14) and so on. Rather than playing the forward tees, women with handicaps of 0 to 14 are encouraged to play the Preferred Plus tees, as are men with handicaps in excess of 29. The scorecard also politely instructs golfers to "Please play the tee that suits your game."

Meanwhile, Billy Casper Golf trains starters at their courses to suggest to golfers on the first tee that they play from a location based on their handicap. It's explained to the players that a particular tee box will provide the most enjoyment based on their handicap, and will help them experience the course the way the architect designed it to be played.

Similar procedures can be implemented everywhere quite easily. If a person doesn't have a handicap or they're a beginner working with a pro, the pro can give them a card that will tell the starter what tees they should play. This process will lead more people to take lessons so they can play farther back. More lessons create more revenue for clubs. The better a player gets, the more he or she plays, which translates to more green fees, a better pace of play and a greater sense of inclusion for women.

The best thing about replacing the colored tee system with a numbering system is the cost. All that's required are a few tee markers, maybe changing some monument signs or having them re-engraved, and reprinting scorecards.

If other countries have successfully grown participation among women and younger generations, why can't the United States? It all starts with going to a numbered tee system, and ensuring marshals explain and enforce the benefit of playing from the right tees. The net result is rounds go up, lesson revenue grows, and women feel like they belong, which increases their participation. **FB**



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