



Paceman

YOU SAY THE PACE OF PLAY at your course has driven you to the brink of tennis, that your four-hour round takes five hours plus, that the turtle dopes in front of you make Bernhard Langer look like Secretariat?

Take heart. There's hope—and his name is Bill Yates. Disguised as a mild-mannered consultant for a metropolitan firm, he fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and golf as it should be played.

Yates and GOLF MAGAZINE have been joined at the hip since 1993 when we ran "Pick Up the Pace," a series of articles aimed at attacking slow play. One of the central elements of that campaign was a GOLF MAGAZINE concept called "Pace Ratings," in which we asserted that every course in the world should be tagged with a time—a precise number of hours and minutes in which a foursome of golfers can reasonably complete 18 holes.

The USGA, recognizing our brilliance, quickly adopted the idea. Today, thousands of courses throughout the country have Pace Ratings, and *The USGA Pace Rating Manual* is part of every savvy club manager's library.

But Yates takes it a step further. "It's great to know what the standard should be," he says, "but it's equally important to identify the reality at each course—the time people actually take to play it. Then you determine how to close the gap."

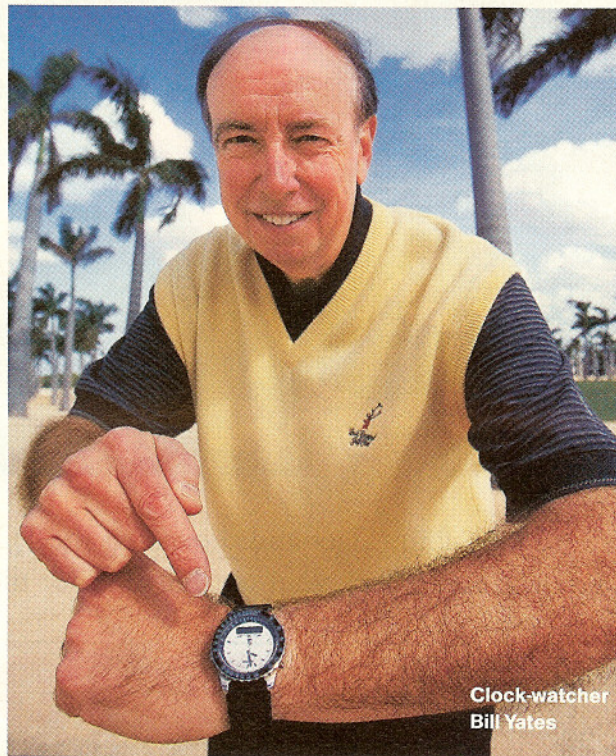
That's what Yates does. For the past decade, he has spent his spare time analyzing the flow of play at courses all over the country. In the process he has identified five factors that contribute to slow play.

1) Policies and practices. This includes everything from starting-time intervals to the use (or misuse) of rangers.

2) Player behavior. In other words, dawdling, bad cart management, not

being ready when it's your turn, and general dopiness.

3) Player ability. Yates has found that while poorer players need more



Clock-watcher
Bill Yates

time getting to the green, it's the low handicappers and pros who are slow to get up and down. "No wonder pro-am rounds are interminable," he says, "they combine the worst of both worlds."

4) Maintenance practices. Want to make your course play half an hour slower? Grow the rough and hide the pins.

5) Course Design and Setup. The length—especially the distance from greens to tees—along with the severity of

hazards and speed/contour of the greens sets the bar for everything else. Long, hard courses never play fast.

For about \$3,000, Yates will pay you a three-day visit and tell you how to get things moving. He has already worked his magic at a number of high-profile sites, including Amelia Island, Coeur d'Alene, Cog Hill, Kemper Lakes, Poppy Hills, Wild Dunes, and yes, Pebble Beach, where

he has helped reduce the once notoriously slow pace—slogs of up to six hours—to an average of about four and a half hours.

"One of the major problems at Pebble was the logjam that occurred at the par-three seventh hole," says Yates, who relieved that situation through an unlikely ploy. "We moved the tee markers back at holes two, four, and six," he says, "while also enforcing a strict interval of 10 minutes between tee times." Now, groups actually take a bit longer to play the first third of the course, but they

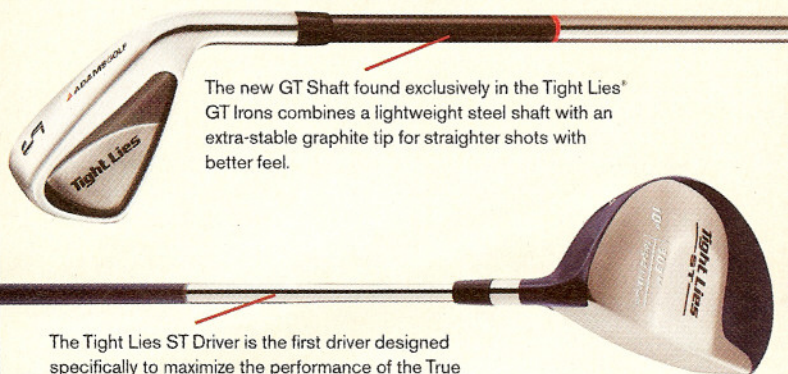
space themselves out better, so there's little or no waiting at picturesque number seven—just enough time to take a photograph.

Last summer we sent Yates across the pond to answer a question: Do the Brits really play faster than we do? This month—just in time for the British Open and linksland course vacations—he presents his findings (page 78), which may surprise you.

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WHAT'S INSIDE

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Yates's base camp in Great Britain was St. Andrews, where he pace-rated the Old Course at three hours and 58 minutes. "It can be played much faster and often is," he says, "but 3:58 is the time for a foursome of players on a full golf course."

The officials of the St. Andrews Links Management Committee didn't know quite what to make of Yates until the day he hauled out a pad with the copious hole-by-hole time calculations he'd made for the Old Course.

"Hmm," said one of the managers, "I see your system says it should take one hour and ten minutes to play our first five holes." Turning to his assistant, he said, "What do we reckon the proper time to be?"

"Seventy-one minutes," was the reply. Yates had proved he knew what he was doing.

But the key moment came when the discussion turned to the effect that the sequence of holes—the rotation of par threes, fours, and fives—can have on speed of play. According to Yates, the worst possible start for a course is a par five followed by a par three. "You go from a hole that can hold three groups to one that can hold only one," he explains. By contrast, the best start—in fact, the best 18-hole sequence—is the one at The Old Course.

"What you have here is the perfect mirror route," Yates told his Scottish colleagues. "Perfect mirror route?" they said.

"Yes," said he, "not only are your fives and threes ideally spaced, but look at the sequence of pars for the 18 holes: 4-4-4-4-5-4-4-3-4-4-3-4-4-5-4-4-4-4. This is one of the rare courses in the world where, when you fold the scorecard in the middle, the two nines match up, par for par."

"Good Lord," said his listeners, "we had no idea."

Indeed, most people never notice the things Bill Yates finds. The Scots were sufficiently impressed that they've retained Bill's services. At this moment, our man is back in the Old Grey Town of St. Andrews, rating the New, Jubilee, and Eden Courses, and helping the Home of Golf to pick up the pace.