



Talking in the 19th Hole

DRIVER. I grew up on a golf course where there was only one golf pro, and there was no marshal or starter. My first formal job as a golf pro was at the Vallescondido Golf Club in Atizapán, State of Mexico, where there were several pros, two starters, and two marshals. I was fortunate to work in Valle and learn under the guidance of pro Jesús Ochoa Maravilla and general manager Rodolfo Loa.

The Vallescondido golf area's operation is exemplary, and I have not known a club that is so efficient in its services. In my opinion, the most complicated jobs in the golf area are marshal, starter, and head pro. The easiest job is to be a pro assistant. Today we will talk about the marshal functions, leaving for another time those related to the rhythm of the game and the supervision of players and caddies during the game.

In Vallescondido, Mario Correa, the marshal, checked the course before the players began to play at 7 am to make sure it was in optimal condition. Golf course checking is one of the main activity's marshals must perform. Let's see what they should check:

- Teeing areas.
 - Check that the teeing areas are well leveled, firm and well-cut. That the grass is healthy and supports the player traffic.
 - Check that the tee markers are in place and the condition they are. The marshal is responsible for its maintenance, which includes cleaning and painting.

The marshal places the marks 5 to 7 yards apart, a minimum of 4 yards if the teeing area is small. Placing them further apart increases the chances that the player will inadvertently play from outside the teeing area.



The marshal places the tee markers, keeping in mind that the rules stipulate that the teeing area is two club-lengths, so they must be placed at least two clubs of the back of the teeing area. The marshal must ensure that tree branches, shrubs, billboards, etc., do not interfere with the player's swing, both right-handed and left-handed. Players must have enough room to make a full swing comfortably.

- The marshal checks that the teeing areas are mowed on the days established in the maintenance program and ensures that the tee markers are repositioned correctly.
- The marshal checks that the teeing areas are free of other grasses and diseases.
- The marshal places the accessories like trash containers, seed & soil bottles, sand containers, ball washers, water dispensers, etc., so that they do not interfere with the game.
- The marshal collects the broken tees, cigarette butts, glasses, branches, etc., and puts them in the trash containers. Garbage collection is usually done by maintenance personnel, in which case the marshal makes sure it is done. In other clubs, the marshal is responsible for picking up trash. In both cases, if a trash container is full, even spilled, the marshal should pick it up and take it away.
- The marshal makes sure that the seed & soil bottles and sand containers have sand to fill the divots. The marshal is responsible for the ball washers having soapy water and a towel. The marshal should have a protocol for changing the water in the ball washers and keeping a record. It also takes care of its cleaning and maintenance. The marshal fills the water dispensers with water and makes sure they have water throughout the day. Also, it takes care of its cleaning.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the clubs have removed the ball washers and water dispensers.

- The marshal rotates the position of the tee markers to optimize the use of the grass. We will see this topic in detail in another newsletter.
 - The marshal checks that the divots are repaired according to the maintenance schedule. If the marshal finds some divots too deep, he should fix them to improve the teeing area's image. The teeing areas most damaged by divots are those of the par 3s.
 - The marshal checks that the yardage markers on the ground are mowed and clean. Also, check that the tee yardage signs are clean.
- The greens.
 - Generally, the maintenance staff is in charge of making the holes; even so, the marshal must know how to do it.
If the maintenance personnel change the holes, the marshal checks that:
 - Holes are located at least five yards from the edge of the green and at least one yard from old holes.

- The holes are located so that if you hit from the four cardinal points of the green, the ball can be stopped at one putt (the club) from the hole.
- The holes are not placed on steep slopes where the ball can roll faster and faster.
- Three or four feet around the hole, the putt is more or less flat.
- If the green has multiple platforms, the hole should not be placed within one putt (club) from the edges of the step dividing the platforms.
- That the flags and cups are cleaned.

If the marshal changes the holes, he must comply with the previous points. The marshal must keep track of the rotation of the holes.

- The marshal checks that the hole is in good condition. If necessary, refine the edges of the hole. Also, check that the hole cup is in good condition.
- The marshal checks that the flagsticks are in place and that the green flag is clean and in good condition. Check that the accessories, placed in the hole to avoid touching the flagstick when retrieving the ball from the hole, are in good condition.
- Checks that the color of the flag corresponds to the position of the hole on the green.

On some golf courses, flagsticks are removed from the green at the end of the day because there is a risk that they will be stolen, but in most clubs, it is not necessary, much less on the greens near the clubhouse. Due to the pandemic situation, players do not remove the flag, so the same should be for the staff.

- The marshal checks and repairs the ball marks on the green. Especially after a kid's tournament.
- On greens with edging grooves around the aprons or fringes, the marshal checks that the edging groove is well marked and that the fairway grass is not invading the green.
- The marshal checks the green conditions in general: contamination of other grass, diseases of the grass, wear, speed, ants, etc.
- The marshal checks that the slopes and entrances to the greens are in good condition. It is common for utility carts to climb into these areas, compact the soil, and wear down the grass. It is also common to find excessively wet or muddy areas around greens.
- The marshal identifies trees whose excessive shade limits healthy turf growth.



- The fairways.
 - The marshal checks that the fairways are mowed according to the maintenance program.
 - Identify dry areas with little grass and hard.
 - Identify very humid areas. Excess moisture can be caused by water leaks, sprinkler failure, poor drainage, etc. Mark the area if necessary. It also identifies the areas where the ball tends to embed in its pitch-mark.
 - Checks that the divots are filled in the landing areas of the tee shots.
 - Identify grass diseases.

- The rough.
 - Checks that the grass level is playable or is at the height authorized by the Committee.
 - Identify dry and very wet areas such as the fairway.

 - The trees.
 - Checks that no fallen branches and trees are affecting the game.
 - Identify trees whose excessive shade affects the grass on the fairways and greens.
 - Identify branches and shoots of trees that are too low to interfere with the player's swing and harm spectators.
 - Identify, and with prior authorization, fix and mark young trees. If the Committee wants to prevent young trees' damage when a player plays golf, it may designate them as a no-play area. Young trees should be identified by stakes, tape, or in some other way.

The marshal keeps track of the trees that are identified as young trees. When they are grown and no longer need protection, the identification stake or tape should be removed.

 - The marshal checks that there is no accumulation of loose impediments that make it difficult to find or play the ball, for example, leaves, seeds, acorns, dead insects, etc.

- The bunkers:

- The marshal checks the condition of the bunkers: texture, humidity, and depth. It also observes that there are no: landslides on the walls and slopes, animal excavations, floods, loose sand around the bunker (especially on the fringe and green), wear of the grass caused by the bunker rake, etc.
- The marshal checks that the bunkers are raked according to the maintenance schedule. If the marshal finds a bunker with footprints, he should rake them.



- The marshal checks that there is at least one rake per bunker and that they are in good condition. The number of rakes per bunker depends on the size of the bunker. There is not a perfect answer to the position of rakes. While recognizing that rakes' positioning is at the Committee's discretion, it is recommended that rakes be left outside bunkers in areas where they are least likely to affect the ball's movement. However, a Committee may decide to position rakes inside bunkers to make it easier for maintenance staff to cut fairways and bunker surrounds.

The marshal keeps a daily check on the number of rakes in the bunkers and should have more in his equipment inventory.

- The bounds.

- The marshal checks the boundaries of the golf course. Make sure out of bounds stakes are in place and visible. The distance between stakes can vary, but ideally, it should be possible to see the base of one stake from the next to determine if a ball is out of bounds. In general, the stakes should be spaced no more than 30 paces apart to allow players to see each other easily. It is essential to check that shrubs, trees, or the like do not hide the stakes or make it difficult to see between one and the other.
- If the boundaries are defined by a line painted on the ground, the marshal makes sure the lines are well marked. The marshal is responsible for cleaning the stakes, maintaining them (painting), and replacing them when necessary.
- The marshal watches that the neighbors respect the boundaries of the golf course. Check that the neighbors do not plant bushes and trees or place furniture within the course. If the Committee authorizes them to do so, the marshal checks that they do not increase the course's difficulty.

- The penalty areas.
 - The marshal checks that the stakes of the penalty areas are in place and are visible. Lines and stakes defining the edge of a penalty area should be placed as near as possible along the penalty area's natural limits, for example, where the ground breaks down to form the depression containing the water. This will ensure that players will not be forced to stand with the ball significantly above or below their feet or in the water after taking relief. Consideration should be given for both right-handed and left-handed players.

The marshal positions the stakes to be moved and at a distance that a line of sight can be drawn between them. It also ensures that the lines are well marked.

- The marshal checks that in the penalty areas, there is no accumulation of garbage.
- The marshal checks that the lifebuoys are in place and good condition.
- Abnormal ground conditions.
 - Animal holes. The marshal checks the golf course for holes made by animals, such as mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates.
 - The ground under repair. The marshal marks the parts of the golf course defined by the Committee as ground under repair. The margin of a ground under repair should be defined by stakes, lines or physical features. The marshal also checks actions caused by maintenance personnel that are not by default ground under repair, for example tree bowls, ruts made by a tractor, and old hole plugs that are sunk below the putting green surface.
 - Temporary water. The marshal checks that there is no temporary accumulation of water on the ground's surface (such as puddles of rainwater or irrigation or the overflow of a watercourse). In cold weather, the marshal checks the course to determine its playability, depending on the amount of natural ice or snow on the grass.
- Obstructions.
 - The marshal checks the conditions and locations of movable and immovable obstructions. Note: Immovable obstructions are considered an abnormal course condition.
 - The marshal checks the conditions and location of the yardage markers. Also, check that the markers are at the correct distance.
 - The marshal checks that the golf course signs are clean, in good condition and correctly placed.
 - The marshal checks that the posts, stakes and ropes, which are placed for multiple purposes such as directing the traffic of the carts, areas under repair, etc. are in good condition.

- The marshal checks that the cart paths with artificial surfaces are clean and in good condition. It also checks that there are no compaction areas next to the roads caused by the carts, especially at the height of the teeing areas, landing areas of the tee shots, and on the greens. The marshal places posts or stakes with ropes to control this situation.
- The marshal checks that the bridges are in good condition, depending on the type of bridge, it may include the handrails, anti-slip tapes or materials, the state of the wood or materials, etc.
- The marshal checks that the benches are clean and in good condition.
- The irrigation system. One of the highest costs of a golf course is water, and it is everyone's responsibility to take care of it.
 - Sprinklers. The marshal checks the sprinklers for leaks. Also, check that the grass is mowed around the sprinklers, so they water well.
The marshal checks that the sprinklers have the yardage marker.
 - The marshal must be trained by the greenkeeper to handle the irrigation system's stopcocks and thus solve leak problems.
- Course marking.
 - Course marking and renewing it as needed is an ongoing task. A well-marked course allows a player to play by the rules and helps to eliminate confusion for players. For example, a player may not know how to proceed if a pond (penalty area) is not marked or if he or she is unable to determine if a ball is in bounds or out of bounds.
 - The marshal maintains the course marking following the rules of golf and local rules.
 - Dropping zones. The marshal marks the dropping zones established by the Committee. Also, check that the area is well marked.
- Cleaning the course.

The marshal checks and cooperates with the cleaning of the course. Collect papers, cans, glasses, branches, etc.
- The bathrooms.

The marshal checks that the toilets are open, clean, and have paper, soap, etc.
- Walkers, runners, and people outside the club.

If walking and running on the course are allowed at the club, the marshal supervises that walkers and runners comply with the regulations. For security reasons, remove outsiders from the course; for this, he can rely on the security department.
- The equipment and work materials.

- The cart. In most clubs, the marshal uses a cart to do his job, but some do it by bike or on foot. In some clubs, the responsibility of cleaning and maintaining the cart is the marshal, and in others, it is the responsibility of the cart area. In both cases, you must:
 - Wash or clean the cart, leaving it ready for use.
 - Charge the cart battery daily.
 - Check the battery, tires, brakes, steering, suspension, etc.
 - Report any anomaly.
 - Keep a log of preventive and corrective maintenance.

- The marshal, during his trips to the course, must carry in the cart:
 - The radio for communication. You must make sure that it is loaded and have it identified with a mark.
 - The regulation of the golf area.
 - The rules of golf.
 - Local rules.
 - Checklist.
 - Time chart.
 - Pens
 - Pencils.
 - Score cards.
 - Repair divots.
 - Seed & soil bottle.
 - Rake.
 - Broom.
 - Mallet.
 - Rope to define OB's.
 - Brush.
 - Water.
 - Towel.
 - Garbage bag.
 - Cans of white, red, yellow and blue paint.
 - Marking wand (accessory to place the paint can).

- The marshal in your warehouse should have:
 - Tee markers.
 - White, red, yellow, and blue stakes. (25 of each color)
 - Cans of white, red, yellow and blue paint.
 - Rakes.
 - Cups.
 - Flagsticks.
 - Green flags.
 - Signs.
 - Water jugs.
 - Hole cutter.
 - Ropes.
 - Shovel.

- Continuous supervision.

We saw that the marshal in his first round of the morning checks that the course is in good condition, but not only the players in the morning have the right to a course in good condition. Because players and maintenance personnel change course conditions, for example, they move tee markers, yardage markers, stakes, etc., the marshal must make rounds throughout the working day to verify that the course remains in good condition.

For the trips to be of maximum use, it is recommended that the marshal use a checklist, which includes the topics to review that we have seen.

- The division of labor.

There are many tasks that the marshal can perform, but these vary from club to club. The head pro and the greenkeeper must define what the responsibilities of each area will be.

- Communication.

The head pro and the greenkeeper must establish communication and operation protocols about the course's supervision carried out by the marshal. The marshal must know who to contact to resolve situations in which he requires support. Good communication saves time and work. The club manager must ensure that the golf area and the maintenance area work as a team.



The marshal must know the days and times when the maintenance team performs the different cultural tasks planned by the greenkeeper:

The marshal is the head pro's hands and eyes, and are other hands and eyes of the greenkeeper to check and improve course conditions. A lot depends on the marshal's work that the players leave their round of golf satisfied. The golf course checking of the marshal should be a priority of the head pro. **FORE.**

Mateo Melgar Ochoa – Golf Pro
www.handy.golf
www.youtube.com/jugargolf
mateomelgar1969@hotmail.com