

"A Shot Across the Bow"

By Jim Apfelbaum and Barbara Puett

Confrontation on the golf course may take on a whole new dimension with the passage of a concealed weapons bill. Perhaps it's appropriate, then, to address a common situation that is not only disrespectful, but potentially dangerous.

Let's get this straight right off the bat: Hitting into the group ahead will not make it play any faster. Sending a warning shot across the bow, a "wake up call" to teach them a lesson, will not promote good feelings or faster play. More likely it will upset, or even possibly injure. At the very least, it needlessly ups the ante of tension. It will definitely not teach anyone a lesson. Remember, lessons are for the practice range, not the golf course.

By the same token, hitting the ball back to the offending party is similarly not going to make any friends. It just escalates the unpleasantness, setting the stage for another incident.

The key to consider, as you wait for the group ahead to clear, is what is in front of them. Is the hole ahead open? If so, you've definitely got a grievance. But if they are keeping up with the group ahead of them, you are momentarily gridlocked.

Hitting into someone may indeed be unintentional, but even if it is your very best shot, a fluke, that is small consolation to the person who's been hurt. The apology should be sincere and prompt—the quicker the better. The first time it happens may be considered an accident. There is no excuse for hitting into someone a second time. Period.

As you debate whether the group ahead of you is out of range, you can: 1) use the opportunity to take your practice swings (all the better to be ready when they clear), 2) let a shorter hitter play first, 3) look for markers in the fairway

to help decide whether it is, in fact, safe to play. Should there be any doubt in your mind, err on the side of caution.

Even if someone isn't hurt by, say, a ball rolling up onto the green on which they're putting, consider other consequences. The sound of a ball landing behind someone about to putt is certainly noticeable. The putter, now interrupted, will stop. He will look up to locate the distraction. He *and* his partners will look around. Conversation will begin, followed by analysis and commentary. Is this really speeding up play? Hardly.

There is a glint in the eyes of certain players who seem to smell blood when playing behind players of lesser skill. Often their eyes are bigger than their stomachs. But it can happen to anyone. Even Bobby Jones once inadvertently hit into the group in front of him.

The moral here is not to take the law into your own hands. Marshals and pros are there to deal with "situations." The pro should definitely be apprised of any real unpleasantness. It's part of his job. In the worst possible scenario, follow up with a letter to the manager or pro, specifying the date and time of your round. This establishes a record. If there is a golfer callously endangering other people on the golf course—and it happens again—needless to say, the court will look upon documented incidents in a new light, should it ever come to that.

John Daly certainly learned there is no stock in hitting into players. It can only lead to problems, and we know golf provides enough challenge without any help from us. ●

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