

GOT'CHA

by Tom Abts

The other day, I played golf at Palmetto GC in Aiken, SC. It is not a famous place, though it is the second oldest golf club in America. Being so old, it's gone through a lot of transformations, but it is still the same basic course and clubhouse that it was in 1892.

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed it. The golf was ridiculously difficult - though a short course, every shot had to be precise, and the chipping and putting were impossible if you were in the wrong places. But it wasn't maddening, because you knew that's what the holes were designed for - it wasn't a result of bad course architecture, the holes were designed to put a premium on strategy and finesse.

The club had the greatest atmosphere in the world - everyone was relaxed and friendly. The members had wonderful manners - manners born out of respect and consideration. Some snooty clubs have members who use manners as a form of intimidation - not at Palmetto GC; they use manners to make others feel welcome and comfortable.

I've found that sense of hospitality and good manners to be pretty typical Down South. I suppose it goes back to their Antebellum times of emphasizing gracious living, but I also think it's result of losing the Civil War. I've run into very little arrogance down here - I don't mean that they aren't confident, but they seem to be more humble than up North. With that sense of humility, they seem to be less perfectionist and less uptight.

For example, on the Palmetto GC website, they say that they don't have any rules - but they expect people to act with respect and consideration for the club and its members - in other words "don't be a jerk."

Too often, people use rules not to ensure civilized behavior, but rather to use the rules to catch somebody making a mistake and to make them feel bad - a power play. Sadly, we all know people who use the Rules of Golf to play "got'cha." There's big difference between someone who knowingly cheats and someone who makes an honest mistake.

At the beginning of every season, we have a Rangers meeting where I emphasize the 3 C's: Communication, Courtesy, and Common Sense. The role of the Ranger is not to be a Nazi trying to nail golfers for screwing up - it's to police the course with Common Sense to keep play moving, protect the golf course, answer questions, and help as needed.

We unfortunately have had Rangers who relished the idea of golfers screwing up so that they could nail them - they loved the power trip. Did it matter that the golfer made an honest mistake? No - these Rangers wanted to play "got'cha".

These are also the same people who use the Rules of Golf to play "gotcha" or the type of people who use the fine print in contracts to play "got'cha."

I find much less of this "got'cha" mentality Down South ... deals are made with a handshake, manners are to ease living with each other, and life is to be enjoyed.

At Deer Run we have a beautiful golf course and a wonderful neighborhood. The cart paths wind through the course and neighborhood. Obviously, some people would like to use them as walking paths - unfortunately that could be very dangerous, so we try to keep people from using the paths for a stroll. But, it's not to play "got'cha."

Sure, we have people who want to police Deer Run like a prison and who want to enforce the Rules Of Golf like Nazis, but we will not allow those driven by arrogance and mean-spiritedness to ruin a wonderful game and a fabulous neighborhood. Common sense, respect, and good manners should always rule the day.