

Tee to Green

Ten Secrets to a Successful Golf Tournament

Guest Advice
Tom Newton



It's time to plan that special golf tournament. We all know how to organize events, and golf tournaments aren't that complicated — but how do we make sure it's an event to remember? Use the following tips to make sure your participants will talk about your tournament long after it's over.

1 Know your Motives

The most important thing you can spend your time doing is clearly establishing your goals and letting them guide your planning.

If it's a charity event, the focus is on pre-tournament efforts to raise money.

For employee events, maximize the fun factor.

Customer appreciation or business development tournaments are all about image and getting the right people connected.



Pick your format — stroke play, best-ball, scramble, Callaway, etc. — based on the experience level of your attendees and your event goals.

2 Match the Format to your Players

If you're inviting skilled players, create an individual stroke play event to appeal to their competitive interests.

For a mixed group of generally good players, play a team best-ball.

With a wide variety of skill levels, go with a scramble or Callaway format so everyone can feel successful.

If team building's your goal, integrate nontraditional elements to involve nongolfers. For example, use a tennis ball on one hole, or have team members help each other putt while blindfolded. These experiences can be great metaphors for discussions about business challenges.

3 Get the Right Date

Start planning early; most of the best venues schedule tournaments at least a year in advance.

Weather: When are you most likely to find good weather? Check

the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration's website (www.noaa.gov/climate) for the weather history of any city.

Schedules: What conflicts might impact your participants? Keep in mind trade events, meetings, holidays, college games, etc.

Budget: Often, weekdays are less expensive and easier for booking tournaments.

4 Choose the Right Venue

Remember your goal:

- Are we looking for fun? Pick an easy, wide-open course.
- Making it memorable? Get on a good course. (Consider reserving a top course right after a well-recognized tournament.)
- Competition and challenge? Learn about the courses' history and slope ratings.

5 The Forgotten Few

The biggest challenge in creating a successful golf tournament is dealing with participants' levels of skill and interest in the game. If your event includes some with little interest in golf, consider a parallel event. Wine or scenic tours, shopping trips or other sporting events can help nongolfers feel included. These activities can be available to spouses or guests of participants also.

6 Image Factor

Any tournament worth doing is worth doing well. A good golf course, quality food and cool prizes are essential for success. (Readers may e-mail me for a free budgeting outline.)

Create a snappy name for your tournament and send classy invitations with all the details — location, date, arrival time, format, prize descriptions, meals, special guests, etc. Convert the same information, along with a list of who will be golfing with whom (i.e., pairings), to a printed event agenda/guide.

Have all your helpers dress in outfits that reinforce the event's branding, and consider having valets welcome participants with a chauffeured golf cart ride.

7 Get 'em there and Keep 'em There!

Manage your participants. Help them arrive on time by publishing an event start time rather than the actual tee time. Hold them at your post-tournament event by promoting a prize drawing or award announcements at the end.

8 The All-Important Prizes

My wife always tells me her ladies' golf group is all about the lunch. For golf tournaments, it's all about the prizes. Make the tee prizes special and unique. Participants will soon forget about the round, but they will remember the event every time they use your gift. Always try to incorporate sponsors, who can often donate prizes.

9 Tap your Resources

Build a planning team within your organization and delegate preparation and day-of-event responsibilities. More feet on the ground will add up to success.

Don't overlook the value of building a relationship with the golf pro and club manager at your tournament site. They are trained in creating successful events; their input and support can make the critical difference for you. ▶

▶ 10 Make it Special

Avoid the usual long drive, closest-to-the-pin stuff. The same people usually win these. Create unique awards such as the highest and lowest score on a randomly drawn hole, the longest putt, best outfit, oldest set of clubs — you get the idea.



Helpers can dress in matching outfits that reinforce your event branding, or in the traditional white coveralls as did a caddy at this event.

Invite local celebrities from the media, sports teams or the business community. If they love golf, they'll appreciate a good excuse to play.

Use a loudspeaker to announce your pairings, and pick an announcer with a little flair.

If you want to give away apparel, consider personalizing it with participants' names and/or company logo.

Nothing says golf like a good bagpiper — why not bring one in? It's guaranteed to make the event feel special.

Or arrange for a chair massage therapist to keep everyone relaxed in places where groups of players tend to stack up.

Perhaps a personal video and swing tips from the pro?

Then finish with a bang! A surprise visitor, an unexpected gift or souvenir — make the last thing they experience something they will talk about the next day. At a recent event at Bandon Dunes, for example, participants received an autographed copy of "Dream Golf: The Making of Bandon Dunes."

Be different — go bold for your next tournament!



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Tournament Terminology

For everyone who admits to having a slightly — ahem — *sub-par* understanding of golf jargon, here's a list of the terms you need to know before planning your next tournament event.

Alternate Shot — Tournament format in which teammates take turns playing each subsequent stroke.

Best-Ball — A golf competition in which the better score on each hole for two, three or four players is the single score for the team.

Callaway Handicap System — A system of creating "fair" handicaps for a one-time event in which many players do not have verifiable or established handicaps; usually designed with the assistance of the club pro.

Calcutta — A wagering event for team-play tournaments in which the right to bet on the winning team(s) is won in a pre-tournament auction.

Chapman — A tournament format for two-person teams in which each player hits a tee shot, then players switch and hit their teammate's ball. Following the second shot, the team plays only one of the balls (of their choice), alternating strokes, until the hole is completed.

Course (Slope) Rating — A rating system that evaluates the difficulty of a course. Slope ratings range from 55 to 155; the higher the slope, the more difficult the course plays for non-scratch golfers (who have a handicap greater than 0) — aka bogey golfers.

Handicap — A golfer's playing ability relative to par, as defined by the Golf Handicap & Information Network's rating system.

Match Play — Competitive scoring in which competitors play to win individual holes rather than total strokes for all holes.

Scramble — A tournament format in which each team member hits a shot from the tee and the team members then select the best shot and all hit their next ball from that location. This continues until the ball is holed. Shots from each location count as one stroke for the team.

Shamble — A tournament variation of a scramble in which team members hit a tee shot on each hole, the best tee shot is selected, then each team member completes the hole with his own ball from that chosen location and records his subsequent score for the team.

Stableford — A point, rather than a stroke, system of scoring. Each player's score is based on points earned: Par = 0 points, Birdie = 2, Eagle = 5, Double Eagle = 8, Bogey = -1, Double Bogey or worse = -3.

Stroke Play — Simply totals each player's strokes for competition with opponents; also known as "medal play."

— Compiled by Tom Newton.

