

# Open Book



From day one, members of Cherry Hills CC became passionate viewers, and users, of the club's new online tee-time reservation system—and they've stayed glued to it ever since.

By Joe Barks, Editor

**C**ontrol is at the core of pretty much everything golf professionals seek to achieve—control, when trying to teach the game, of the many moving parts of a golf swing; control, through working with their clubs' superintendents, of course maintenance and improvement projects that ensure optimal playing conditions; and control of pace of play, once everyone's out on the course, to make sure all golfers have the same enjoyment of their rounds.

It's not surprising, then, that losing control of these and other things that can contribute to a positive golfing experience is always one of a golf pro's biggest fears. And perhaps nothing says "control" to pros more than a club's tee sheet, which they rely on to be able to serve as the gatekeeper to their course and which, when managed properly, is a vital tool for helping them avoid a lot of problems upfront.

So to many pros, the notion of giving their golfers direct and unimpeded electronic access to the tee sheet can at first sound like not only a sure way to lose control, but invite utter chaos.

As the son of a PGA professional, for-



**When to play is just one level of valuable information provided to members and staff by the online tee-time center of Cherry Hills CC (pictured above).**

mer player on the PGA Tour and then a long-time head pro himself, Clayton Cole, PGA, could certainly understand, relate to and admit to having trepidations over the thought of scrapping the time-honored tradition of taking reservations in person or by phone in the pro shop and keeping a manual tee sheet, to instead go to electronic scheduling.

But Cole wouldn't have had such a

successful career—which included serving as the Head PGA Professional for Dallas (Texas) Country Club and as the Vice President of Operations and PGA Director of Golf for the Lakeway Company in Austin, Texas, before becoming the Head PGA Professional in 1991 at Cherry Hills Country Club in

Cherry Hills Village, Colo., outside Denver—without showing a willingness to be receptive to new concepts, while at the same time often questioning the "accepted" way of doing things.

And by the mid-2000s, Cole says, the drumbeat for a better way to record and manage tee times, along with many other functions related to player and event scheduling, had just become too loud and persistent to ignore.

"The conversation [about electronic scheduling] kept coming up [at Cherry Hills] in Golf Committee meetings and also at the Board level, as something we should look at as an added member con-



**John Ogden (left) continues to enjoy and enhance the benefits gained from the introduction of online reservations at Cherry Hills by Clayton Cole (right).**

venience,” Cole recalls. “At the same time, within our golf operations we were becoming more aware of how much of our own time was being tied up by taking phone calls and dealing with people in the pro shop to schedule [tee time] reservations, and how this was keeping us from providing full and prompt service in other important areas. So I felt I had to look into the kinds of online scheduling systems that were available.”

**Obvious Choice**

As Cole began his research, one system, ForeTees, quickly stood out. “It was clear from its design that [ForeTees] understood the unique requirements an online system needs to have for private clubs like Cherry Hills, to accommodate the different categories of memberships and other special designations of our players,” he explains.

While Cole saw that the custom-designed and user-friendly features of the ForeTees system would greatly reduce any concerns about “losing control of the tee sheet,” he still carefully mapped out a rollout plan to further ensure smooth, problem-free implementation. “We made the decision to get the system in the fall, but not introduce it until the spring,” he says. The months in between were dedicated to an intensive communications and member-training effort that Larry Aspenson, ForeTees’ Western Regional Director, credits for a “very fast start,” with 70% of Cherry Hills’ tee times booked online from the first day the system went live in 2006—one of the highest figures ever seen for such an introduction, Aspenson notes.

“The big reason [Cherry Hills] has done so well is how they prepared their members,” says Aspenson. “They made sure to provide plenty of educational opportunities, with meetings for the entire membership and also through separate, smaller sessions for groups like ladies and seniors, as well as always providing one-on-one tutorials as needed or requested.”

In all communications about the system, either in-person or through the club’s newsletter and on its website, it has been stressed how it is fair and objective (a lottery feature is used

fashion, its use at Cherry Hills, where some 27,000 rounds are played annually, has kept growing steadily, while “problems” have continued to decline from a level that was virtually non-existent to begin with. “There were so few complaints [in the first years of use], I was amazed,” says Cole, who retired as Cherry Hills’ Head Pro Emeritus in 2008 (he is now a partner in an Aurora, Colo. club consulting firm, Cole and Scott).

Cole was succeeded by John Ogden, PGA, who now serves as just the fourth head pro in Cherry Hills’ distinguished 72-year history (the club has hosted three U.S. Opens, two PGA Championships and several other major amateur, senior and women’s tournaments; it will host the 2012 U.S. Amateur and was recently awarded the 2014 BMW Championship.)

Ogden first worked at Cherry Hills as an assistant for Cole, before becoming head pro at the Country Club at Castle Pines in Castle Rock, Colo. After Cole told Ogden of the system he was putting in at Cherry Hills, Ogden soon implemented it at Castle Pines as well. “The [ForeTees] online demo sells itself,” he says.

“It’s the best decision I’ve ever made as a golf professional,” Ogden adds about going to online reservations in general, and ForeTees in particular. “From an operational standpoint, it easily saves you and your staff 100 calls a day [ForeTees’ Aspenson puts the average number of calls a club will save at between 10,000-20,000 per season].

“It also captures all kinds of valuable data that helps us be more efficient in every part of our operation—communicating about frost delays and weather, cart management, caddy operations, even food and beverage, through new features that [ForeTees] keeps adding like dining reservations,” Ogden adds. “We can even break down member use by age group—and I can tell you, there are a lot more of our older members using it than anyone thought. If we took it away now, in fact, that might be the group that would be the most upset.” **C&RB**

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