



# IT'S HIS GAME, NOT HER GAME: EXPLORING THE GENDER GAP IN GOLF

If you've hit the links lately, you might have noticed something:

**There are far more men than women golfing.**

Sure, a lot of progress has been made since the sport's beginnings more than five centuries ago, but a gap remains.

In fact, just **24%** OF GOLFERS ARE FEMALE.<sup>1</sup>

## So what's keeping women off the course?

New research by 18Birdies and Fusion Hill reveals that women view themselves as participants, not as golfers.

In other words, golf is something they do under the guidance of someone more experienced, not something they feel comfortable or passionate about "owning" for themselves. This lack of confidence means they're missing out on what makes golf fun, engaging, and dynamic—the very reasons so many men love the sport. Unlike men, women often lack the social network that's key to golf as well.

### WOMEN WHO GOLF FIND THEMSELVES SOMEWHERE ON THIS JOURNEY:

#### SOCIAL BEGINNERS

Many women are introduced to golf by their significant other, who often becomes a de facto coach. When they're just trying out the sport, they can be intimidated and frustrated due to their skill level, even though they find it socially fun.

#### DEDICATED BEGINNERS

Having learned the basics, a Dedicated Beginner has decided that golf is "for me." She may take lessons and set goals for herself as she seeks to achieve a certain level of mastery. She may not golf as much as she'd like, however, because she lacks the social network of players at her level.

#### DORMANT GOLFERS

For many women, work and family commitments take precedence over golf. Young mothers in particular often find themselves in this stage of the golf journey. Once their children are grown or they approach retirement, they may pick the game up again and become Lifestyle Golfers.

#### LIFESTYLE GOLFERS

Lifestyle Golfers have prioritized the game and built their schedule and social life around it. They train seriously, compete, and track their handicap. These women have a genuine passion for the game and tend to be older with a significant amount of free time.

## SO WHAT'S KEEPING WOMEN FROM GOLFING?



#### Lack of time

Due to traditional gender roles, moms may feel guiltier than dads prioritizing golf over family needs. Also, while golf is often associated with business for men—thus increasing their opportunities to play—for women their career may get in the way of golf.



#### Current skill level

Women often come in with a lower golf IQ than male beginners simply from less general exposure to "sports talk" in everyday life. They often feel less confident because they're playing with more experienced male golfers, and they even feel the pressure of representing all women on the course.



#### Lack of support

Most women learn golf from a significant other who is relatively advanced, thus from the start, golf is "his thing." Women often have fewer friends who golf and, since golf isn't a traditional social activity for women, they have difficulty building their golf network.



#### Cost of play

Many women say golf is an expensive sport in terms of greens fees and investing in equipment/clothes especially for those who golf socially and infrequently.

**But don't worry!  
It's not all doom and gloom.**

## OUR RESEARCH UNCOVERED A VARIETY OF WAYS TO BETTER ENGAGE AND RETAIN THE FEMALE GOLFER BY HELPING HER:

**Improve level of play to boost confidence and independence.**

**AND**

**Expand her golf world to increase excitement and ownership.**

Check out our step-by-step recommendations below!

### 1. PULL BACK THE CURTAIN ON GOLF

#### Current mindset:

Golf is a black box—what's the point in even trying to learn?

#### Ideal mindset:

Sure, there's a lot to learn, but I'm confident I can get there—everyone's gotta start somewhere, right?

★ **COMMUNICATE THAT THOUGH THE GAME IS COMPLEX, EVERYONE IS CAPABLE OF LEARNING; NO ONE IS JUST BORN A GOLFER.**

### 2. SUPPLY HER WITH THE RIGHT RESOURCES

#### Current mindset:

I feel like I'm winging it—where's the 12-step plan?

#### Ideal mindset:

I have a clear improvement plan in place and I know where to go for help when I get stuck.

★ **PROVIDE A CLEAR ACTION PATH—MAKE THE PROCESS LESS SCARY, MORE MANAGEABLE WITH ENGAGING, DIGESTIBLE RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING PLAY AND CONTENT TAILORED TO UNIQUE NEEDS, SKILL LEVEL, AND LIFE STAGE.**

### 3. MOTIVATE HER TO OWN THE GAME

#### Current mindset:

I definitely wouldn't call myself "a golfer."

#### Ideal mindset:

Yeah golf is his game, but it's my game too!

★ **HELP TRACK PROGRESS WITH HARD METRICS LIKE RECORDING SCORES AND DRIVE DISTANCE, OR SOFT METRICS LIKE INCREASING PLAY FREQUENCY.**

### 4. EXPAND PLAY IN HER EXISTING CIRCLE

#### Current mindset:

I only golf with my significant other.

#### Ideal mindset:

Golfing with my girlfriends is a hoot!

★ **ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO INTRODUCE THEIR FRIENDS TO GOLF AS A FUN WAY TO SOCIALIZE AND BE ACTIVE—IT'S JUST AS MUCH "FOR THE GIRLS" AS BRUNCH OR YOGA.**

### 5. INTRODUCE HER TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

#### Current mindset:

Golf is an activity we do from time to time.

#### Ideal mindset:

There are so many ways to enjoy golf beyond the course.

★ **INTRODUCE THEM TO THE LOCAL GOLF COMMUNITY VIA FUN LOW-STAKES EVENTS TO HELP THEM FIND THEIR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY.**

### 6. CONNECT HER TO THE LARGER GOLF WORLD

#### Current mindset:

I like to play, but watching golf puts me to sleep.

#### Ideal mindset:

I'm not a superfan, but I cheer on my favorite pros and follow exciting tournaments.

★ **GIVE THEM A REASON TO CARE—CREATE INTEREST IN THE PROS WITH PERSONAL, RELATABLE STORIES.**

#### Sources:

The findings detailed in this document are based on primary ethnographic research conducted by Fusion Hill on behalf of 18Birdies in Spring 2018.

Additional sources cited:

1. National Golf Foundation.