

Watch Your Language, Please

By HARRY ROBERT

No golfer worthy of playing the ancient and honorable game would think of violating its rules, and few who violate its etiquette keep their playing companions. But there is another phase of golf quite as important to many of us which in recent years has been getting foul treatment.

I refer to the language of golf, which is in danger of being distorted beyond all original intent. No game has a richer language of its own but, unless we cling to its accuracy, it seems to me, it must eventually become meaningless. It is all very well to say language is what we make it and I subscribe to the colloquial quite as much as the next man. But this does not authorize the transformation of words into completely different definitions. You simply can't do that and have them retain their sense.

My pet abomination is the present usage of bogie to represent a score of one more than par on a hole. More than 90 per cent of golf writers and players use it in that sense, yet the word simply doesn't mean that.

Bogie (sometimes bogey) means bogie, period. Not one more or one less than anything. It has a meaning entirely unrelated to par since (and this may surprise some of those bandying it about so loosely) it was part of golf terminology before par was devised.

Bogie is the score an average good player — but not a champion — might be expected to make on any golf hole if he plays it well. In some cases it happens to be one more than par. In many more it is exactly the same.

Originally, I suppose, since I am not that old, score cards carried only bogie. I do remember that 25 years ago or more, most cards carried both par and bogie. Bogie corresponds roughly to women's par, which has supplanted it in score cards today. If the hole was not too long and tough, par and bogie were the

same. If it was a back-breaker, bogie was a stroke higher, for a man need not be a world beater to score bogie figures.

I was genuinely surprised, while working on this article, to come across a score card, not so many years old, from the Seaview Golf Club at Absecon, N. J., near Atlantic City. It contains both par and bogie. It can be noted on this card that on seven of the holes bogie is one more than par, but on the other 11 the two are the same. Thus, bogie is allowed an extra stroke on a little less than 40 per cent of the holes and I would say this proportion is pretty much average. I don't know if Seaview still clings to this custom (I hope so), but if it does, its cards should be made required study for all golf writers and recommended reading for all golfers.

Shades of Colonel Bogie

To rifle such a word of its original meaning is to strip golf of some of its romance, for bogie is one of the legends of the game. It derives from a mythical figure, a Colonel Bogie, apparently one of those retired British colonial officers who pop up in so many English novels. I suspect he was a gruff old boy, rather touchy about his game, which he no doubt developed on jungle courses. At any rate, he supposedly stalked the links by night, shooting his sound game by the light of the moon. Bogie was the score the ghostly colonel made, and the better-than-average golfer pitted his skill against this shadowy opponent.

That, of course, was long before par was devised; and the late Bill Flynn, well-known golf course architect, used to share my allergy to the irritant and remark forcefully:

"I'd like to know how anything can be one more than something that didn't come into existence until later."

Today golf articles glibly refer to every score of one over par on a hole as a

How Bogie Compares with Par

| SEAVIEW GOLF CLUB | | | | | | | | | | Bay Course | | | | | | | | | | Date _____ | | | |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------|-------|----------|-----|
| Holes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | OUT | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | IN | Total | HANDICAP | NET |
| Distance | 360 | 435 | 460 | 370 | 300 | 396 | 185 | 305 | 520 | 3331 | 360 | 234 | 326 | 391 | 415 | 200 | 405 | 110 | 465 | 2909 | 6240 | | |
| Par | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 37 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 34 | 71 | | |
| Bogie | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 40 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 38 | 78 | | |

bogie, and they have even come to calling a score two strokes over par a "double bogie." This is insult added to injury, for if a 5 on a par 4 hole were a bogie, then certainly, if language is to have any meaning at all, a "double bogie" would be a 10. But I suppose we shall soon be reading of "triple bogies," and who knows what next.

Another thing that used to annoy Bill Flynn was to read:

"He shot a 68 which could just as well have been a 63."

Breathes there a golfer with soul so dead who never to himself hath said: "I could easily have saved ten strokes." Your score is the score you make. You miss some putts, but you make some, too.

"It could just as well have been a 75, too, couldn't it?" Bill used to remark.

I have also read reports that "he put together rounds of 36 and 33 for a 69." If anyone ever does put together rounds of 36 and 33, it will be a greater feat than Ralph Kiner hitting eight home runs in one game or a halfback averaging 80 yards for every carry throughout a football game. What the reporter meant, of course, was that the golfer had nines of 36 and 33. But a nine is not a round unless it is so stipulated or is on a nine-hole course, for a round is a tour of the complete course, and Gertrude Stein would say a round is a round is a round.

The Truth About "Links"

In the United States, by the way, very little golf is played on links. The British

have many golf links but ours are mostly courses, links being the patches of connecting turf and sand along the seaside.

It is amazing, too, how few golfers seem to know the meaning of dormie. Many a disconsolate tournament player has remarked to me near the close of a match that he was dormie, when he sincerely wished he were. He knew the score but not whereof he spoke, for the player who is dormie is he who is UP as many holes as are left to play, not the one who is down. Belief in the opposite seems almost universal.

One thing more. That gentleman to whom you gripe about the condition of the course is not the chairman of the "greens" committee. His is, if we would be exact, a singular position. The impression is widespread that his committee has only to do with the putting surfaces. But it is the green committee, and, as in my own name, an "s" is superfluous. Its domain is all that is green; to wit, the entire course, not just the putting greens. The house committee has to do with the club structures, but we don't refer to it as the "houses committee."

To some these may seem trifling complaints, but I submit they are important if golf is to conserve its full heritage. If terms like bogie and dormie can be twisted into other meanings, so, too, may others. And a generation of golfers yet unborn may some day be unaware of the true meaning of bunker, birdie and even — perish forbid — jigger.