

SIMPLER GOLF AND MORE FUN

by

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I TAKE IT as a premise that the purpose of playing golf, which is, after all, an essentially unnecessary human activity, is to enjoy, firstly, the fresh air, the exercise and the scenery; secondly, the company of one's friends; and thirdly, the singular, if indescribable, challenge involved in maneuvering the ball into the hole in as few strokes as possible.

Championships and tournaments have their role so long as they take their place within this pattern and remain basically good fun. When an Australian paper belittles "Toogood insulted by golf judges," because the championship committee adjudges his opponent's ball to be in casual water, the game, to me, is no longer worth the candle—or not at least that sort of candle.

If the original premise is allowed, we are entitled to ask, "What is the best form in which to play golf? What is the kind of golf which will give most pleasure to most people at a price which most people can afford?"

The advocates of simpler golf, of which I am one, though I do not go so far as Mr. Tom Simpson, feel that the vast changes in the game over the past fifty years, and particularly over the past twenty, have carried us too far away from the original game which spread like wildfire first over England and then over the whole of the United States. That does not mean, as our opponents suggest, that we wish to go back to the days of the gutty and the rut-iron.

Length and "Trappings"

My own view, which is all I am putting here, is that the essence of the game is as good as ever, but that the scale, or if you

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MEN'S HANDICAPS FOR CHAMPIONSHIPS

Effective in 1955, handicaps submitted by amateurs as a basis for eligibility for the Amateur and Open Championships must have been computed in accordance with USGA Golf Handicap System for Men (1953 edition). Either basic or current handicaps will be acceptable.

While the USGA has long maintained a handicap qualification as a basis for eligibility of amateurs in these Championships, it has not previously specified the method by which these handicaps should be computed.

like it, the dimensions, are no longer ideal. I criticize (1) the length of the present game, both in distance and time taken, and (2) the over-elaborate nature of the "trappings" now considered necessary.

Let the reader consider impartially his own ideal length, in both senses. 4,000 yards? 6,000? 8,000? After all, you can have it any way you like. For the ordinary Sunday morning round, how long? Two hours, three hours—or four hours, as in America?

It ought to be we who decide these things. As it is, it has been the makers of balls and clubs whose changes, unsolicited by the ruling body, have totally altered the character of the game.

My own ideals are roughly as follows: an average of 6,200 yards, with perhaps 6,500 for the championships (at present 7,000-plus); 72 a rattling good score at 6,200 yards for a first-class amateur (at present about 68 at that length); 2-2¼ hours for a single, 2¼-2½ for a fourball;

two rounds in a day, with plenty of time for lunch, to be within the normal capacity in time and energy for the week-end club player, even in winter.

Adjustment of the Ball

Adjustment of the ball could effect this tomorrow. I know that changes in clubs have had a great effect, too, but the ball is the one common factor that can easily be adjusted.

I will repeat, if necessary ad nauseam, that, if some manufacturer invented a "longer" football, the Arsenal and the rest would not adjust all their stands to fit it. They would tell the manufacturer what he could do with his "longer" ball. Yet we meekly alter 30,000-odd holes to fit changes in the ball which we have not asked for! Judged by any impartial standard this must be ridiculous.

No wonder it irks a golf architect like Mr. Simpson. He spent his earlier days designing courses and his later days trying to alter them—in many cases an impossible task. Even so, many remain out of date. Robert Trent Jones once told me that he regarded almost every bunker at Sunningdale as out of date. To the better players hardly a single true three-shot hole remains in Britain, by which I mean a hole where, if you miss one shot, you are really hard put to it to get a five. Wonderful drive-and-a-good-iron holes are now a drive-and-a-pitch, flattering enough to human vanity but what a loss to the game!

For this I blame the ruling body over the last thirty years, not the ball manufacturers, whose job is to sell golf balls. Shorter courses mean shorter balls, and shorter balls mean thicker covers. The other day in one round I opened two and split one. Four balls for one round. A thicker cover would have reduced golf ball sales by 75 per cent!

Now what about the "trappings?" I remember the day when a young London amateur carried, or caused to be carried, twenty-two clubs. Clearly grotesque. The ruling body stepped in and limited it to fourteen. The principle of limitation is therefore accepted. Is fourteen the right

number? Personally I think that eight would be ideal. The professionals would show infinitely greater skill with that number and the handicap man would play as well or better. Since the manufacturers have such a grip on the game in the States, no world agreement could be reached on this point and I do not labor it. We might consider, however, whether unilateral action on our part in Great Britain would not be a good thing for the game in the end.

Cost of Upkeep

The bigger the course and the greater desire to eliminate luck at all costs—another trans-Atlantic importation—the bigger the cost of upkeep. Hoylake now, according to Guy Farrar, costs £3,600 a year for eighteen holes. I wonder what it was in the great days of John Ball, allowing in full for changes in the value of money? You cannot, I think, as Mr. Simpson advocates, limit clubs' expenditure in this direction. They would not stand for it, and rightly, but a reduction in the scale of golf would do it automatically.

Human nature being what it is, it is no use saying "you don't have to have fourteen clubs." If the other boys have cricket bats with three "springs," you lose face, or used to in my day, if yours only has two. Anyway, clubs are now sold in sets. James Braid produced a shorter set, with the old-fashioned names instead of numbers. Strangely, coming from so great a man, it was still-born. So fourteen clubs it remains, with a big uncarryable bag to carry them in and a trolley for the uncarryable bag and another £1's worth of ludicrous little "hats" for the £4-a-time wooden clubs—and now the Americans have produced a set of "hats" for iron clubs too!

Absolutely none of this seems to me necessary to fulfill in full, for every class of player, the original purpose of golf as set out in the first paragraph of this article. Indeed, to me, it greatly detracts from it. If we agreed to reduce the scale, only slightly, we could all have fewer miles and fewer hours, more golf and more fun, and all for much less money. That is what I at least mean by simpler golf.