

IT'S YOUR HONOR

Stroke and Unfair Distance!

TO THE USGA:

Within the past two years I've:

a. had my first experience in managing a city having a *municipal* golf course.

b. made a sustained attempt to get a little skill in playing golf.

To me, as to all hackers, the appreciation of reasons for several of golf's rules has come slowly and only in personal encounter with situations in which they make sense. By this tortuous process I've become resigned to—even a protagonist of—the wisdom on which most of them rest. I would have you know, however, of my dismal failure to perceive the logic (if there is any) which produces respectability for your drastic out-of-bounds penalty.

This rule seems repugnant to logic and equity on two counts:

a. the penalty is disproportionate to the fault, in contrast with penalties which a player sustains for comparable faults in similar situations, within the same game. A poor putt, pitch or chip need result in adding only one stroke to score—or none, if the recovery is one which I achieve as often as I win the Irish sweepstakes. With an out-of-bounds banana or hook, however, I'm thrice lacerated. I lose my stroke, lose my distance, whatever it may have been, and must prostrate my self-respect and score before the double-jeopardy of having to use another stroke, just to gamble on regaining the distance already travelled!

Now comes the most galling insult, added to an already grinding injury. I'm denied the chance to belt out a moral-building recovery. What more conclusive testimony to the human spirit's instinctive rejection of this hideous "stroke-and-distance" sadism can be conjured than Porky

Oliver's poignant and tragic flailing during his Gethsemene on the 16th at Cypress? Except for the sheer happenstance of position, what difference is there between the banana ball which floats, horrifyingly, over a boundary fence and one which floats gracefully into a little old one-stroke-penalty water hazard? I claim there's no difference except your capricious rule.

b. The penalty is inequitable between courses. The difference of two or three strokes in course ratings isn't remotely commensurate with the contrast between the jeopardy to out-of-bounds penalty of one course, when it's compared with another. The course on which I play most frequently, for example, offers such risk on its third, fourth, fifth, sixth, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth (both sides) fifteenth, and sixteenth holes. (I've been out-of-bounds on all of them—sometimes twice). I've played on courses with about the same rating, on which you'd need the assistance of a rugged carrier-pigeon to get your ball out-of-bounds.

In bowling, the player doesn't lose a couple of pins, or his right to roll another ball, because he hooks his first one into the gutter. Loss of what he could have done with the first ball is considered sufficient penalty. In tennis, the server gets a second chance, if his first serve is out. I'm not suggesting "mulligans," but I submit that the viewpoint merits emulation. I know you'll find this comparison odious; but I find only "crapping out" in a dice game attended by so severe a penalty as is imposed on the down-trodden duffer who innocently slices at the wrong time.

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