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Opening Extract from...

The Grumpy Golfer's Handbook

Written by Ivor Grump

Published by Portico

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The Grumpy Golfer's HANDBOOK

This book is dedicated to Hetty Hopkinson – cheaper than David Leadbetter and quicker to judgement.

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The Grumpy Golfer's HANDBOOK

Ivor Grump



PORTICO

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INTRODUCTION

Somebody once said that golf and sex are the only two things you can enjoy without being any good at them. The big difference, of course, is that you know when you're really bad at golf because you have a scorecard to record your score on... and taking that kind of thing into the bedroom is never going to be much appreciated. Especially if you try and get her to sign it afterwards. (That might be one of those rare occasions when you think you scored an eight and your partner is keen to put down a four.)

Golf is a game that appeals to the obsessive compulsive side of men, their love of collecting statistics, and also their love of waving big clubs around. Sigmund Freud would have had a wonderful time analysing today's golf magazines and the kind of golf ball adverts that promise a penetrating trajectory and a "soft feel".

Because it's so important to them, men take golf very seriously, and that is why when it all goes wrong, as it inevitably will, they get particularly grumpy. Women are far too sensible to let golf affect them like that. As my daughter once said to me – "it's only golf, Daddy".

Even at an early age I knew I was destined to be a grumpy golfer. At 18, I was actually quite good at the

game, club junior champion, a single-figure handicap with an assured touch around the green helped by a very trusty putter. Then one day my girlfriend Sally decided she wanted to accompany me on a round to see if this young "hotshot" was all he was cracked up to be. I wasn't sure this was a good idea. In fact, I was wary right from the start; even before she refused to carry my clubs down the first fairway (and at that age I could only afford eight). I knew that under scrutiny, the first poor shot or unlucky bounce would have me spitting the dummy, no matter how hard I tried to reign it in. My calm lasted till the fourth hole which was a long par-5 with a blind shot to the green at the bottom of a hill. I tried to make the green in two – way too ambitious – and sent a 4-wood into the valley below. When I heard the clatter of wood I knew I'd hit the dead elm trees to the right of the green and let out a sustained stream of expletives. Exit Sally towards the clubhouse: "You're such a child!" she said and sat under a tree for two hours reading *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, while I finished my round.

With age I've got worse not better. The teenage years made way for an angry young man, to an angry young man with children who didn't have the time and then a grumpy man who thinks he should be a lot better if only he had time to practise.

Through these pages you will share the joys, or otherwise (and mostly otherwise), of the many and varied grumpy golfing incidents from my career, plus

those shared by my friends, relations and fellow club golfers.

The more perceptive reader might detect a scintilla of criticism of Americans and their attitudes to golf and I'd like to reassure anyone reading this book who hails from God's own country, that the sentiments expressed are only a bit of light banter and I'm only joshing with the stuff about Phil Mickelson and Boo Weekley. I'm sure in the case of the latter something *would* show up on an electroencephalogram, not just a message saying: "I'm not home right now."

If there is one particular chapter that I should direct you to, it's the one on Advice to Foreign Golfers. This, I feel, could make a real difference to golf tourism in the UK. In fact, I am going to suggest to the publisher that they try and syndicate it to a Japanese golfing magazine so that when their readers visit these shores, they are fully acquainted with our little foibles, our common courtesies – particularly the bit about interacting with slow female golfers. The Japanese are quite diligent in their observance of etiquette and I believe if they took some of these lessons on board this could mark a real watershed between our countries.

There is also a chapter where I've elected some golfers to the Pantheon of the Grumps. Naturally this is headed by our own marvellous Monty who can multi-grump from almost any part of a golf course. Whereas some just get a bit edgy on the tee or a bit cranky around

the green, Colin can get grumpy from the moment he steps onto the practice ground. Which is good, as there are too many irritatingly controlled professionals in golf, which is a game sent by Beelzebub to test our resolve. As I think you'll gather from these pages, mine is normally tested by about the fifth stroke of the afternoon – somewhere between the first tee and the start of the fairway...

Ivor Grump



GOLFING WOES

The Nudge

The nudge is that excruciating beginner's mistake when you address the ball a little too closely and it bobbles forward off the tee. If you're playing with a friend then it's a given that you can replace it on the tee peg without incurring a stroke. Unless you've got money on the hole, at which point you might begin to see the monetary value of your friendship.

I like the golfers who, on the tee, assuredly whack the ball on the top with a downward motion, confident that as the clubhead is not going forward they won't incur a stroke penalty whatever happens to the ball.

Nudging in a competition is more costly, but by and large it's either a beginner's mistake or a facet of the Tourette's Syndrome golfer involuntarily twitching at the wrong ****ing moment, ****ing!

Away from the tee, nudging becomes less accidental and more deliberate, but we'll come on to that later.

The Hook

The hook is actually a lot better than a slice in that you can actually hit the ball a long way with a hook. I don't mind hitting long, loping hooks every once in a while, especially if they go as far as someone else's straight drive and don't end up in a badger's sett. I've always found that it's very easy to work out why you hook, because if you've got your feet in the right place, then you must be turning the clubface over before you hit the ball. This twisting of the clubface reaches its most profound expression in the snap hook. A snap hook happens so quickly that you don't have time to yell "Fore!" However, if there are ladies waiting to tee off, you do get to witness a scene of utter carnage on the Ladies' tee which is 40 yards further forward and to your left. With any luck a parked trolley or a strapping buttock will keep your ball in bounds and maybe even bounce it back on the fairway.

Of course, if you want to wind a deliberate hook around the corner of a dog-leg and set yourself up in the appropriate closed stance, then Grump's Third Law of Golf will dictate that you hit the sweetest, straightest shot you will make all afternoon...



Grump's Third Law Of Golf

Whenever you take an adapted stance to 'fashion a shot', i.e. bend the ball right to left, scoot it low, or try to get a lot of height, then the ball will always go unerringly straight and on a normal trajectory.

The Slice

Slicing a ball can be a nasty habit to get into. On the archetypal links course it could put you in the sea nine times unless you were meteorologically savvy enough to go out only when there was a strengthening onshore breeze.

Natural slicers love the wide open prairies of new golf courses and the lack of confines that parkland fairways afford. Not for them the narrow strictures of the 12th hole at Wentworth or the 18th at Augusta (though doubtless 'having a bit of a slice' isn't going to be the biggest barrier to playing either of those two courses).

I always put the slice down to one of two things: it's either a laziness in the stroke, where the golfing genie that sits on my shoulder just can't be arsed to straighten the clubface in time. Or it's a crisis of confidence in the downswing. 'I know I mustn't slice on this hole, there's a lake over there, it's deep, there are piranha, that's your lucky golf ball, your round's going really well, don't b****r it up with a slice now, you cretin'.

I mean, that's an open invitation to slice. It's like when I meet an attractive young woman showing a lot of cleavage. I know that if my eyes focus anywhere below her forehead then they're going to be dragged downward like a divining rod that's just discovered the Queen Elizabeth reservoir beneath it. I keep my eyes up for as long as I can, but a woman's cleavage has its own gravitational pull. And the second your eyes get wrenched downwards she looks at you pityingly as though you were the Uncle Ernie character from *Tommy* the musical (the part that Keith Moon played who liked to 'fiddle about' and wore a raincoat).

So in these intimidating circumstances I am likely to hit a great fat banana split of a slice. And there's nothing I can do about it. Because if I alter my stance and deliberately aim to the left, then Grump's Third Law kicks in which will ensure that I hit a perfectly straight shot out of bounds to the left.

The Shank

The shank is a nasty reminder that golf can hurt sometimes. Like the complete duff, it usually happens when you try and belt the logo off the ball. You swing harder and wider than you normally would and the heel of the shaft makes a clanging connection with the ball sending it scuttering along the fairway while your club vibrates with all the sustain of a vintage Gibson Les Paul.

This vibration is gleefully transferred up the shaft to your hands in a kind of Tom and Jerry stylee. The seismic effect of a shank can plague you for the rest of the hole. Longer in cold weather. It's not as bad as hitting a tree with a golf club, but at least you know there's a possibility of the tree coming.

The Air Shot

An air shot from the tee is even more embarrassing than a nudge or a duff. Thankfully these days there is an almost believable excuse at hand. With the rise of Big Bertha drivers it's quite common to see golfers swinging a small (titanium) bungalow on the end of a graphite shaft. To whack the ball successfully and not excavate a small trench in the turf, they need lofty tees the size of six inch nails. When I first saw them on sale in a golf shop, it was one of those 'I don't quite believe it' kind of moments – like watching Alistair Campbell getting "tired and emotional" on television. Balancing a ball on top of one of these tees must require some kind of training at the Chinese State Circus.

Anyway, swing and miss and you can come out with the quite plausible, "Doh, I thought I was swinging with the big driver…" Unless of course you *were* swinging with the big driver.

Air shots in the rough, especially deep rough, have little or no stigma attached. There's hardly an Open

Championship goes by without an air shot from somebody who thought they might find their way out of the middle of a clump of heather. Usually John Daly.

Air shots on the fairway are harder to explain away. Air shots on the putting green? You might as well get your coat and transfer your golfing prowess to a sporting venue that deserves your level of skill, i.e. putting through a windmill into a clown's mouth.

The Duff

You can hit duff shots, have a duff round, but a good old-fashioned duff is a hefty club/ground interface where mud flies. I'm defining a duff as when you aim to hit the ball 300 yards and end up hitting a divot 30 yards and the ball five. Duffs are particularly frustrating for a golfer who normally makes a good score and can break 90. For those that are riddled with the duff, then it's not frustrating, it's their *modus operandi*, the way they get round 18 holes.

In fact 'riddled with the duff' sounds like it ought to take its place somewhere in Samuel Pepys' diary:

May 7th, Lord's Day
Up betimes and met my Lords Sandwich and Sir William Coventry and very merry, too. They enquired if I would take a game of golfe with them, but I confessed I was riddled with the duffe.

Duffs happen when golfers sense a moment of glory, the chance to hit a majestic shot that belies their handicap and gives a sense of true golfing genius. And then they go and blat the clubhead into the turf.

The duff happens because golfers have a rush of blood to the head. They get excited and lift their head in anticipation of seeing the ball hurtle arrow-straight up the fairway or shoot down the throat of the flagstick.

*See also The Fluff/Duff Recovery (Page 74)

The Thin

This is the yang of the duff's yin. Whereas the duff is too much ground and very little ball, the 'thin' is too much ball and no ground at all. Thinning is most prevalent around the green where a delicate little chip is required.

Instead of popping the ball up onto the putting surface, the thinner hits the ball midships transforming his pitching wedge into a 2-iron. The result is that a 15-yard lob is transformed into a 50-yard small bazooka round, scattering your unsuspecting playing partners who are preparing to putt out on the green. A golfing friend thought he would have a major lawsuit on his hands while playing up to the 18th green of an unnamed golf course (but it's in Kent, not far from Ashford). The clubhouse bar overlooked the 18th green and hence most times of the day there was an audience to impress. It had been very wet, so he thought he could fly it straight at the

pin with a sand wedge. He took a full swing of the club, looked up as he swung through, hit the ball midships and sent it at head height straight into the clubhouse window. (Sadly all the golf balls he'd ever lost didn't flash before his eyes as this happened). It was to his great relief that the club's owners had foreseen the likelihood of such an occurrence and he discovered that it was a plate glass window.

Yips And Yippers

Forgive my lack of empathy but I have no time for yippers. Anyone who can get spooked out by a short putt has lost their sense of proportion. Yippers are all mummy's boys. "Are you gonna miss the nasty ickle putt then." Get a grip of yourself man!

For most of us, the titanic struggle is to get to the green in the first place. When you're on the green you're home; what's the worst that's going to happen there? On the odd occasion you might four-putt (and to be fair, I have putted into a bunker before), occasionally you'll three-putt, a lot of the time you'll two-putt and every once in a while you'll only need one putt. What's so pant-wettingly scary about that?

The blue blanket for yippers is the long broom handle putter. Having one of those is like wearing incontinence pants over your golfing trousers. It's a very public admission of psychological frailty.