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THE LANGUAGE OF GOLF

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ABSTRACT

If you are thinking of taking up golf this article will be a great introduction for you. If you digest the lessons in this you will halve the number of lessons you will have to purchase from your golf professional. You will learn how golfers speak to one another on the green; you will learn most of the vocabulary surrounding the basically simple idea of hitting a small ball into a distant hole. Hopefully reading the article will take away some of the mystery you might encounter when out on the course. You will learn of the wide variety of competitions in which you can compete with your fellow golfers and finally you will dip your toe into the waters of the history of golf when you discover the names and types of clubs that the golfers of yesteryear used. Don't be put off trying the game.

"Fore" is what golfers shout when they wish to draw attention to themselves from the players in front of them. Don't get this wrong because golf requires players to be honest but it is said jokingly that golfers shout fore, take six and record a score of five. However a paper on the Language of Golf could do a lot worse than start with a paragraph on expletives because in the popular imagination the image of the angry golfer dies hard and this is not without some justification. The golfer who was never been angry with himself has never lived and not infrequently that anger spills over into the utterance of expletives against any person or animal on or off the course which irritates the irascible sportsman. Comparably it is on the road that the showing of anger has certainly not decreased in the 20th and 21st centuries. However unlike "road rage" golf rage, at least in the professional game has probably been somewhat tempered by the prevalence of the all-seeing camera for the recording of skilful play and any newsworthy display of feeling. More than most other sports golf gives ample

opportunity for the display of many emotions and social skills besides displays of anger.

There is much opportunity for golfers to show their fellows sympathy for medical complaints and ailments so much so that in Seniors golf at my club we call the first four holes "the medical holes" and personally we feel we could have done better if we are still discussing aches and pains and the like by the time we reach the nineteenth hole. To balance the anger and frustration it must be said that the majority of golfers have a good sense of humour – apart from anything else it helps your game if you can laugh or at least smile at your own and others' silly mistakes. A friend of mine would often say "I always carry a spare sock in case I get a hole in one!"

I have divided this paper into five sections: *The Language of the Green*, *The Techniques & Psychology of Playing Golf*, *The Course*, *Competitions* and finally *The Clubs*.

I shall begin not on the first tee but on the green because that is where emotions reach their peak.

As expletives are a part of everyone's vocabulary, golfer and non-golfer alike, I shall assume that the reader is already familiar with them and drive straight ahead to the Language of the Green.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE GREEN

The green is the closest mown area of the course and forms an arena the main point of which is the hole. The hole is four and a quarter inches in diameter and at least four inches deep. It needs to be repaired if it is damaged e.g. by a pall pitching full-toss on to its edge or lip as the edge is known as. Sometimes a condition known as "crowned holes" occurs. This is when the actual hole is seen to be slightly higher than its immediate surroundings. It is sometimes alleged to have been caused by the "greenkeeper" when he has withdrawn the "hole-cutter" from the hole, but the greenkeeper normally stands on a purpose-built board when he cuts a new hole and then this does not happen. The more generally accepted explanation for a "crowned hole" is when the pin has been in the same place for a long time and the weight of many golfers putting out have depressed the area surrounding the hole. In the hole is a flag-stick or pin to indicate to the players on the course where the hole has been cut. The greenkeepers vary day by day the position of the hole both to avoid excessive wear and tear on a particular area of the green and to pose a variety of challenges to the golfer. Wear and tear on the greens is caused by pitch-marks and spike marks from the golfer's shoes. A golfer is allowed to repair pitch-marks with his pitch-repairer but not spike marks. Some clubs rule that golfers must wear "soft" or plastic spikes which are judged to do less harm to the surface of the greens than metal or porcelain spikes. Golfers are very conscious of the quality of the green's surface between their ball and the hole. An opponent is very unpopular if he/she stands or walks "on his/her line", which is the line along which he/she is intending to putt. Similarly to be noticed in a player's "line of sight" can be very unpopular. This happens if on the green, or anywhere on the course, an opponent, usually behind, moves or catches the eye during the player's backswing. It is to be hoped that such

explanations will go some way to explain to the non-golfer why golfers perhaps more than most sportsmen/women emphasise the importance of etiquette. Golf requires much concentration and high precision performance. No one likes to be put off at the crucial moment and it is not easy to halt one's stroke once the backswing has begun.

Greens vary hugely in shape size and slope. Some clubs, including the famous St Andrews, have a few double greens which are very large greens with two pins used by golfers on the same course playing different holes. The stroke used on the green is called "the putt". It is not illegal to use a lofted iron on the green instead of the more usual "putter" if distance or conditions call for it, but this very, very rarely happens. Greens also have varying speeds according to the dryness of them and how closely they have been mown. The speed of a green is measured by a "stimp-meter". This is a sloping instrument down which a ball is rolled and then the distance measured as to how far it rolls before it stops. Readings are taken in two opposite directions and then an average is taken. The result is the reading indicating the speed of the green. When greens have more than one level the levels are known as tiers. So sometimes the greens are two-tiered or three-tiered. Golfers have a phrase to describe luck. When one is particularly lucky or unlucky the comment would often be made "Oh, that is the rub of the green".

Parts of the green are described as "the heart", "the back" or "the front". Rather obviously the heart refers to the middle area of the green. When golfers aim for the heart of the green they are more often than not playing a percentage shot because such a shot gives them the largest margin for error, left, right, back or front. The back of the green is the area furthest from the tee and the front is conversely the area nearest to the tee. Greens can be said to have *give* in them – the softer the green the more "give" there is. Some golfers like very soft greens so that their "hard" balls designed to help them achieve maximum distance from a shot will stop. Golfers, particularly professional golfers, like to get back-spin on the ball which takes effect when the ball lands on the green. Back-spin is achieved through skill, using the correct ball and having a feel for the firmness of the green. Before the golfer takes his putt much skill is required in "reading" the greens. In this process the golfer decides on what line and at what speed to play the ball. The faster the ball is hit the less need there is

to allow for the ball to deviate from the line on which it was hit. Unless a green is perfectly flat the green will have an uphill or a downhill slope or “borrow” (i.e. slope from left or right) or a combination of all these factors. As one approaches the green from the Fairway there is an area almost but not quite as well mown as the green itself. This is known as “the fringe” or “the apron”. When the ball lands on the green it will usually leave a “pitch-mark” unless the ground is very hard. All golfers repair pitch-marks with their pitch-repairers and this process is known as “gardening”.

Now here are a few remarks about play on the green. There used to be a rule that meant that if your opponent’s ball was between your ball and the hole it was left there and this was known as “a Stymie”. Nowadays the opponent who has a ball in such a position can be asked to pick the ball up and to mark it with a ball-marker – a little disk that has a small spike on it that can be pushed into the ground. If the man/lady putting so requires it the ball-marker can be moved a putter-head or two left or right until the putt has been made. The ball-marker is then re-placed in its original position. Most times there is play on the green ball-markers will be used. The placing of a ball marker also allows the golfer whose ball is being marked to dry and/or clean his/her ball and then replace it in its original position. As has been suggested the golfer has to determine the pace and line of a putt before he/she executes the shot and players develop more or less elaborate methods of attempting to make this process more scientific. If a golfer misjudges and/or “mishits the putt” so that the ball does not reach the hole but stays short his companions may very likely annoyingly remind him that “never up is never in” or “half way for kids”. “Sinking” a putt means the same as “holing” it. If for whatever reason a player decides to use two putts to sink his/her putt thus hitting it slightly short of the hole and making sure he/she does not hit it too hard and then if he/she missed the hole he/she would have a long putt back – this cautious or prudent play would be known as “lagging up”. There is a safety-first saying in match-play “if you’ve got two putts for it, take two”. One of the finer points of putting is to understand the meaning of the phrase “the professional side of the hole”. An “uphill putt” is generally considered easier to judge and execute than a downhill putt (partly because you can hit it more firmly and this can help with the confidence in picking and finding the right line), so in some

cases “professional side” of the hole might be below the hole. On the other hand if the borrow is from the side it might be considered professional that if you do miss the hole with your approach at least the ball is left on the side of the hole from which the borrow slopes towards the hole and not away from it. Sometimes – more often than any golfer would like – the ball struck towards the hole hits the edge or “lip” of the hole and spins out. If the ball spins round through 360 degrees it is known as “a horseshoe”. If a ball at the last minute drops in from the side of the hole it is known as taking “the side” or “tradesman’s entrance”. A green is often “defended” by bunkers which are there to trap the approach shot which is slightly inaccurate. These are known as “greenside” bunkers, which can either be “grass bunkers” or “sand bunkers”. Bunkers are sometimes just called “traps”. Greens may be described as “well-guarded” if they are surrounded by several hazards. If a golfer chips the ball directly either from a grass bunker or not into the hole and thus does not have to use his putter on that hole, this is known as scoring a “ferret”. This shot is known as “a golden ferret” or “a gritter” or “gritty” if it is made from out of a sand bunker. If a putter putts his ball faster than is strictly necessary and the ball strikes the back of the hole firmly before dropping into the hole this is sometimes known as dropping like “a rat down a drain-pipe”.

The difference between “medal” play and “match” play will be explained in the paragraph on Competition. In match play particularly in a normal “friendly” match it is customary to concede an opponent’s short putt. What is judged as short enough to concede depends upon the green, the conditions, the relative skills of the players and the state of the match. Any putt of two feet in length or under is usually considered to be “a gimme”. To hit a ball to within a “gimme” length is known as hitting it “stone dead” Sometimes players are more generous than that. However if the putt would decide the result of the match or if the receiving player has already received a stroke on that hole through the handicap differential or if he has shown him or herself to be very fallible with short putts the distance of putts that are conceded might be less than two feet. Generally speaking however a circle with a diameter of approximately four feet is known as “the ring of friendship” and within this, in match play, putts are normally conceded.

The good preparation of greens requires a lot of work from the greenstaff. They have to hollow – tyne the greens and “feed” them. They also have to monitor the amount of water the greens receive, which is now usually done with the help of automatic and programmed sprinklers. The staff also have to ensure that the greens and the “cups” are looking and performing at their very best for the most important fixtures on the Club’s calendar. The “cup” is really another word for the hole and the inside of the cup can be painted white which makes it easier for the putter to focus upon it. When the dew is on the ground the greens are cleared of dew by greenstaff wielding a brush before the start of play. Then as always there is the close mowing of the greens and the Head greenkeeper and the Greens Committee Chairman will have agreed on what height to have set the mower’s blades. When there are puddles or “standing water” or other extreme conditions, it may yet be possible to keep the course and the holes open by using temporary or smaller and less-manicured alternative greens.

THE TECHNIQUE AND PSYCHOLOGY OF PLAYING GOLF

Golf lends itself to aphorisms etc... Mark Twain famously said “Golf is a good walk spoiled”. Sir Winston Churchill said “Golf is a game in which you try to hit a small ball into an even smaller hole with implements singularly ill-designed for the purpose”.

Much ink has been spilt on the production of manuals instructing the would-be golfer on how to play golf. No one finishes a round of golf without a measure of desire to improve his/her game. The technique and the psychology of golf are closely intertwined. It is one of the abiding fascinations of golf that there is so much scope for variety in the responses made by players accepting the challenge of playing a round of golf. A round incidentally is normally eighteen holes. Every golfer in fact makes a unique response to the challenges of a demanding and difficult game. However there are two main trends in the possible patterns of response to the challenge of “why did I make that mistake” and “how can I play better”. Some players will emphasise the psychological side like saying “I am relaxing too much”, or “I am forcing and trying to hit the ball too hard” or “I am too pleased with my last shot and am over-confident” or “I am put off

by the waiting, I am impatient and trying to play too quickly”. There are a huge number of the variants of these psychologically connected diagnoses. From a personal point of view it must be said that there are four psychological essentials to a happy and successful round of golf – “A vision of excellence, A cocoon of concentration, Motivation and A glimmer of hope”. (Similarly it is often said of cricket that the three essentials in batting are “Knowledge, Skill and Concentration”).

But in golf there is another emphasis altogether and possibly the one favoured by the more experienced and more advanced golfer. That would be to emphasise what technically was wrong with a shot. Like “I lifted my head” or “I had too steep a backswing” or “I teed up too high” or “I took my eye off the ball” or “I gripped the club too tightly or too loosely”. If I were to list all the technical tips in the golfers’ vocabulary you would never have to read a coaching manual again or have another lesson from the professional. In fact improvement in golf depends upon both aspects mentioned. Improvement depends on an appreciation of the psychology of the game both within oneself and within the context of the match or environment in which one is playing, but improvement also depends on an understanding and a putting into practice of the techniques of swinging a club and hitting a ball. So much for the general introduction to this section, now for the explaining of some of the golfing language.

A game of golf begins on the tee or teeing ground, which is an area of well-cut grass – in fact only the green is more closely cut. A golfer used to tee up (i.e. place his ball) on a pile of sand but now little wooden or more often plastic pegs are used. The golfer places his ball on the tee and then takes up a position known as “the address”, that is to say he plants his feet in what he/she hopes will be an appropriate distance from the ball and an appropriate distance apart. The “alignment” of the feet is also crucial to the straightness or the line of the shot which the golfer wishes to play. As basic to success as the correct position of address is the grip of the club. This is not a coaching manual nor can it re-place a lesson with a professional and there are many varieties of grips to choose from. Suffice it to say here that one of the most common grips is the Vardon overlapping grip named after the great Harry Vardon. This grip is designed to ensure that both hands work together as one instead of independently. So if you are standing correctly,

gripping your club correctly and aligning the club face correctly all you have to do now is hit the ball. The first shot from the tee is known as “the drive” and is most often at least for the longer holes played with a wooden club. That is a club with a wooden head, although as will be described later “metal woods” are almost now universal.

If a golfer swings at a ball and misses it altogether, this is known as an “air shot”. If one hits behind the ball it is sometimes said that one has hit “the larger ball” (I.e. the earth) first. This is also known as “hitting it fat” or “heavy”. If you do not strike the ball in the middle but on the top half this is known as “topping” or “thinning it”. The ball will travel with a very low trajectory and sometimes this will be known as “a good runner” as the ball, although imperfectly hit may travel quite a long way. A poor shot is known as a “duff shot”. There is a strong temptation to lift your head before you complete the follow through of a stroke in over-enthusiasm to see where the ball has gone. So one always has to remind oneself to “keep one’s head down”. If one hits the ball well it can be described as making “good contact” or “hitting the ball out of the meat” or “out of the screws” which referred to the screws in the face insert of old type woods. The inserts were made of ivory or ram’s horn. If one needs to be exceptionally accurate on a shot it may be described as threading it through “the eye of a needle”. During high winds golfers say to themselves “into the breeze swing with ease” or “better not harder into the wind”. If in strong winds golfers hit the ball very high they may claim to be hitting the ball “above the wind”. One has to “allow for the wind” and sometimes “the wind gets the ball”.

When one receives the advice to “keep one’s head down” it is really the suggestion that one must keep one’s eyes on the spot where the ball lay, when it was stationary, until after the ball was struck. Most straightly hit shots are hit “from inside to out” that is to say one imagines a line that the ball is aimed to take it straight ahead. One continues this imaginary line backwards and on the backswing one tries to take the clubhead backwards inside that line. Hence a shot can be said to played “from inside to out” or “from outside to in”. If one plays the ball from outside to in the ball will probably be “sliced” that is to say that the ball in flight will veer from left to right. The direction the ball flies will also depend crucially on the direction in which the club face is pointed at the address

position. A deliberate slice In order deliberately to curve the ball is known as “a fade”. The opposite to “a slice” is a “hook” and the opposite to “a fade” is “a draw”. A similar shot to a slice is a “push” and a similar shot to “a hook” is a “pull” and crucially these shots may depend on the exact direction in which the club face is pointing at the address position. You are advised to ask a professional about the subtle differences. An extreme and unpredicted slice is known as “a shank” and usually occurs when one is using the more lofted clubs. To the average golfer “shanking” can be a nightmare as one is not always sure on how to cure it. Sometimes a player will deliberately “aim off” that is deliberately aim to the left or right of the pin or direction marker. In choosing the desired trajectory for a shot one is said to be choosing “the shape” of the shot.

On a “blind hole”, that is a hole where one cannot see the target a stranger to the course will need advice on what “line” to take and sometimes an aid to this will be in the form of a “direction marker” which is one of the most useful objects of “course furniture”. A “swing” is the central attribute of every golfer’s game. A backswing can be described as being “steep” when the clubhead is taken backwards upwards quite quickly or steeply, or if the clubhead is kept low for longer on the backswing it is said to be “a flat” swing. Often a professional will advise the player to seek to have a “low and slow take-away” or start to the backswing. According to how hard one wishes to hit the ball one can have “a full”, “a half” or “a three-quarter” backswing. If one does not know which club to take in order to achieve the desired distance one is said to “be between clubs”. It is fairly obvious what the phrases mean but most “full” shots require “a hip and shoulder turn” or “pivot”. When the wrists are brought into play at the top of the backswing this is known as “breaking the wrists” or “cocking the wrists”.

After one has struck the ball the player will “follow-through” and this will normally be in “the direction of the pin” or in the direction of the line which one wishes the ball to take. Before every shot the player must decide on the line of the shot and imagine where he wants the ball to land or “pitch”. “A pitch” or “chip and run” shot is a shot where one imagines to ball to fly in the air for a certain distance and then run along the ground. From the tee the distance from the teeing ground

over the “rough” or “water” is known as “the carry”.

There are various terms used to describe the play of a ball on a slope. The word used to describe anywhere on the course the position of the ball is known as “the lie” of the ball. If you have a sloping lie the lie is either an uphill lie or a downhill lie. An uphill lie is easier to hit because it is easier to visualise and execute the stroke. If it is a sideways slope one plays with ones feet either “above the ball” or “below the ball” and the coaching manual will advise you how to make the necessary allowances. If your feet are below the ball one of the best tips is to play with your hands less near the top of the shaft.

The bounce of the ball on the course can be described as “good” or “bad” or as “hard” or “soft”. If you make a mistake or you are unlucky and your ball ends up in the trees or bushes you may have to play out sideways.

As mentioned above when you address the golf ball “the stance” is important. Normally the feet are aligned at right angles to the direction in which one is hitting the ball. As you become more sophisticated you learn to “open the stance” or “close the stance” In the “open stance” the leading foot is drawn back a little from the normal line of address and in the “closed stance” it is the back foot that is drawn back slightly from the normal line of alignment. A similar use of the terms “open” and “closed” is applied to the clubhead and the phrase is known as “opening” or “closing” the face of the club. Adjusting the angle of the clubface can be used to guard against either a hook or a slice.

Now for some of the more common phrases that golfers use in describing the psychology of the game. Quite a few of these phrases are also used in other human endeavours. To play conservatively or defensively means much the same thing. The opposite is to play aggressively. There is a lot of time for human interaction in a round of golf and golfers often speak of “talking a good game”. Another saying is “Beware the injured golfer” as it not infrequently happens that a golfer who admits to being physically or medically below par scores and competes surprisingly successfully. When ones ball is off the fairway and in extreme rough or among trees or obstacles, one talks about “damage limitation” and not “compounding the mistake” both of which are self-explanatory. When a mistake has been made it is good advice to “take the medicine” and not try and pretend that the worst

has not happened. Then again golfers often talk about “stopping the rot” and in match play they aim not to “haemorrhage” holes i.e. to lose a succession of holes. When one has a good spell this is often referred to as “a purple patch”. All too often though this does not last and to use a different metaphor “the wheel comes off”. Sometimes one is given the advice to “use one’s stroke on a hole” that is to say when according to the stroke index and your handicap you receive a stroke on a hole do not attempt to play in a way that would suggest that you don’t need it. Similarly “to play within oneself” means to avoid being too ambitious. The opposite might be described as “going for it”. In a partnership it is the aim of every individual “to come in on a hole”. If only one of the pair is playing well he/she can be said to be “carrying” his/her partner. If you win or lose a lot of holes in succession the term is “on the trot”. When playing well one is said to be “focussed”, or “in the groove” or “switched on”. Often in a game there can be seen to be or to have been a “turning point”, or maybe one gets the chance to deliver “a killer blow”. Similar phrases emphasising how hard and cruel and competitive golf can be are phrases such as “putting the boot in” or “rubbing it in”. As in most sports golfers have been described as “psyching out an opponent”. If one bucks a trend and improves one’s level of performance it may be described as “finding another gear”. If in match play one gets a lead of one hole or more it may often be described as “a one hole cushion”. If one errs to the right and with the next shot over-corrects and hits the ball too far left this is called “military golf” because “Left, right, left, right” is a common command to soldiers on the march. If you “walk in” it usually means that for whatever reason you are “giving up before completing the full course”.

THE COURSE

All golf holes begin at the tee, which is a closely mown area of flat turf suitable for the insertion of a tee peg on which the player places his ball before driving off. The “furniture” on, by or near the tee usually includes a notice giving the number and name of the hole, the length of it, the distance its number on the stroke index, from which the golfers work out the giving and receiving of strokes. On many golf courses this notice will also include a diagram of the hole. There are also tee

markers of different colours according to whether the tee is a Championship, Medal, Competition, Boys' or Ladies' tee. Very often there are "tidy boxes" on the tees for putting broken tee pegs etc in. If the fairway and/or the green are below the altitude of the tee the tee will be described as an elevated tee. If the opposite is true a green may be described as a plateau green.

The rest of the hole consists of rough, fairway, water hazards and sand or grass bunkers all of which are self-explanatory. From the tee the golfer usually has to negotiate a patch of rough or longish grass or other features and this is known as "the carry" as has been mentioned. Bunkers are divided into fairway bunkers and greenside bunkers. Some courses have "pot" bunkers which are usually fairway bunkers – they can be fairly small but may also be quite "deep". Nearly all bunkers have a "face" to them which is a bank which has to be cleared by the golfer if he is to make progress towards the green. Sometimes because of an unfortunate lie of the ball a golfer will elect to play out sideways or even backwards from a bunker and this may be true when a golfer tries to extricate him/herself from other rough or bushes or trees. The way the ball is lying may vary considerably even on the fairway and the player may have to adjust to an uphill, downhill or sloping lie. Allowances have to be made according to whether one's feet are above or below the ball at the address position. The rough may be described as semi, light or heavy. The higher the rough grass is allowed to grow the greater will be the obstacle to the golfer and the more will balls be lost or hard to find. In recent years in order to keep the speed of play high the rough has generally been cut shorter than it used to be and the fairways are not so clearly defined.

When the course is dry and the surface firm there will be more run on the ball than when the soil has been softened by rain. The run of the ball is affected by the frost too. Especially when the ground is hard the bounce of the ball may be pronounced.

One of the least attractive golf phrases to a golfer is "out of bounds". If you hit a ball out of bounds you have to put another ball down and count a penalty shot. Sometimes the out of bounds limits are areas outside the perimeters of the golf course but they can also refer to areas within the perimeters of the course but areas not usable when you are playing a particular hole or holes.

There are various types of golf courses. Most courses are owned by the members and known as "Members Courses" and are eighteen or more holes, but there are numerous nine hole and thirty-six hole courses and there are some anomalies like the delightful Blackwaterfoot course on the Isle of Arran which is only twelve holes. If the course is not owned by the members it may be owned by the District Council or by a private individual or a commercial company. There are also so-called "Pay and Play" courses which may or may not also have club members. There are "Par 3" courses sometimes otherwise known as "Pitch and Putt" courses. Popular now and sometimes occurring on their own without an accompanying course are "golf ranges" and most courses designate an area as a "Practice Ground". There are "Links" courses, which are on the coast and inland courses. There is also terminology to describe the particular characteristics of a course. There are "tight courses" and "forgiving courses", "hilly" or "flat" courses. Quite a lot of courses have water features or "water holes". If there are bad weather conditions or other unhelpful factors a course or hole may be said to be "playing long". Golfers are always encouraged to do "the gardening" which means particularly repairing pitch marks on the green or re-placing divots. When two balls are lying close to one another on the fairway they may be described as "Flanagan and Allen" because "Side by Side" was one of their hallmark songs.

As has been said courses comprise usually nine holes, eighteen holes or thirty-six holes. On the longer courses the courses are often laid out in "loops" of nine holes so that the first and last holes of each nine hole section are near the clubhouse which is convenient if you want a variety of options as to where you start your round. If there is a bottleneck at the start of one nine-hole you can try to start from another loop of nine and so on.

If, for whatever reason, usually extreme weather, it becomes necessary to close the course while golfers are playing a klaxon is sounded to make public the decision. Within the clubhouse the Captain has a bell which he can ring if he wishes to make an announcement. There is also a designated Captain's Chair, which only he can sit in.

COMPETITIONS

The biggest misnomer in the vocabulary of golf is “the friendly”, because all golfers are competitive animals who above everything else want to win. Unlike many sports one can play golf on one’s own and this practice has received encouragement in the wording of the 2008 edition of the Rules of Golf. Golfers usually play in twos, threes or fours and these may be single sexed or mixed. “Match play” is when individuals or pairs play one other hole by hole on “a better ball” basis. This may be used in “friendlies”, competitions or team matches. In contrast to match play there is “Medal Play” or “A Stableford”. In medal play one counts up the total number of strokes used to propel the ball around the course to arrive at a gross score. To calculate the net score one just subtracts one’s handicap. In a “Stableford” (named after the man who invented it) competition the player applies his handicap allowance to each hole on the course according to the relevant stroke index. If the player’s net score for the hole is par the score on his card is two points, with one point for a bogey and extra points for every stroke under par which he takes; i.e. a “birdie” or “one under par” is three points and “an eagle” or two under par is four points. A score of four under par is called “an albatross”. Don’t ask the derivation of these words because it is not available but it is known that the word “caddie” which is the title of a golfer’s playing attendant comes from the French “cadet” as any good dictionary will tell you. Normally there is a maximum number of clubs which a golfer can carry and this is fourteen. But for variety sometimes competitions are arranged in which the maximum number of clubs allowed is less, say four or five.

All golfers have a handicap which is a figure indicative of a player’s skill and shows the number of strokes above par (or, for the experts, below par) by which in a medal round for example one adjusts one’s score. If you have a handicap of ten and your gross medal score is eighty-two your net score is seventy-two. Not all competitions allow the full handicap but perhaps sometimes three-quarters of handicap is stipulated. In match play before the start of a game players compare their handicaps and, if appropriate, give or receive strokes. Match play can be played between individuals or pairs and the score is calculated on a hole by hole result according as to which competitor(s) have the better score at each hole. In singles play the full

difference between the handicaps is usually calculated but in doubles it is usually three-quarters of the combined difference. That is that if a player with a handicap of eighteen is playing a player with a handicap of six the lesser player will receive from the better player twelve strokes and there is information on the score card and on each tee to show at which holes the strokes shall be taken. In some team matches, usually mixed golf matches, in addition to the usual stroke differences “bisques” are added to one side or the other before the match starts. For example in a gentlemen versus ladies match it may be decided beforehand that the gentlemen will gallantly give the ladies a set amount of either one, two or three bisques. In addition to the strokes given and received according to the handicap differences “a bisque” is an extra stroke which can be taken at any hole in the round providing it is claimed before play commences on the subsequent tee. Players who are believed to have a false handicap in that they play better than their handicap suggests are colloquially known as “bandits” or “sharks”. A player who plays off a handicap of nought is known as “a scratch player” and competitions or matches or leagues in which handicap differences are not taken into account are known as “scratch competitions”.

A “qualifying” competition is just that a competition in which you have to do well to qualify for the next round or a more major competition.

Etiquette is very important in golf and “calling players through” is done for a variety of reasons and means that a group of players playing a game pause their game to allow the group behind to overtake them in the playing of the round. “Slow play” is a term used to describe games which are taking an inordinate time. If professional players in competition are observed to be playing exceptionally slowly they may be put “on the clock” which means that they are timed and may be penalised.

For several months of the year most clubs introduce “winter rules” and “preferred lies” which means that you can pick up, clean and replace your ball if it is lying on the fairway and often means that you can act similarly for a ball that is plugged in the rough except that the ball must be dropped and not placed. To the non-golfer the Rules of Golf may seem pernickety but the dedicated golfer accepts the detail of the rules as a necessary part of the nature of the game and all is made well worthwhile by the overall enjoyment he/she

receives from playing in a beautiful environment with good company a game of skill and intriguing and ever-varying challenge.

Sometimes during a season a club will run an “eclectic score” competition, which means that you can submit more than one card and count the best score for each hole that you have scored on any of the cards throughout the season. Typically thus a player would hope to score birdies on all or most of the holes.

Another form of competition is “the Texas scramble” which usually has a shot-gun start. In a typical one of these a shot-gun or maroon is fired centrally on the course so that play can begin on all tees in use simultaneously. These are usually team competitions and in a team of three for example each player plays every shot until the ball goes in the hole, but after every shot one ball of the three is selected and the three players play their next shot from the position that the chosen ball was in. Some very low scores can be achieved by teams in this form of play.

Golfers use many ingenious ways to add variety to competition. Some of these ways involve gambling for stakes either by the hole by the stroke or by the round.

An example of this is if a group decide to play “ooslums” and “woodpeckers”. You score an ooslum and win, say, fifty pence if in a par three hole you drive the ball onto the green and get your par. A woodpecker is if you hit a tree but your ball bounces back onto the fairway and you still get a par; there can be fifty pence agreed for that. Failing to get your par after the ooslums and woodpeckers are in operation can cost you fifty pence.

As has been said honesty is all-important in golf because, for example, not every shot is monitored and golfers have been known who will nudge up or improve the lie of the ball illegally. To ease the pain and frustration that golfers feel when they hit an errant shot a habit has crept in the U.S.A. when if off the tee for example you hit a bad drive you can declare it “a Mulligan” and play another shot without penalty. This is not prevalent and it is to be hoped that it does not spread. It can only happen in social golf.

A lot of golf competitions are arranged to raise money for charity and these are often Pro-Ams or Celebrity-Ams in which professionals or celebrities team up with amateurs.

Sometimes the rules of golf allow a player to take “relief” which means that a player can pick the ball up and either drop it or place without incurring a penalty stroke.

There are three common ways of playing four-ball golf. There is “four ball, better ball”, when each of pair plays his/her own ball and the scores of the best balls on each side are compared at each hole. If after playing a hole a player on each side scores a four then the hole is said to be halved and so on. The second kind of four-ball play is “foursomes” in which each pair only plays one ball, taking alternate shots. Finally in “greensomes” both players in a pair drive at each hole and then select which ball they will use and play alternate shots thereafter until they have holed the ball. A “hole in one” is much coveted by golfers and if it occurs in a competition it is customary for the successful golfer, who will have struck his ball from the tee straight down the hole, to treat everyone in the bar to a free drink.

In a so-called “bogey” competition each player counts his score against the par score on the card, so that a birdie or a net birdie would have to be scored if a win is to be marked against a particular hole and the player who has the highest number of wins or the least number of losses to par wins the competition.

The player who drives off first in a golf match is said to “have the honour” and the player or players who have won the previous hole have the honour on the next tee. There are three main ways in which three-ball games are scored and they are “split six points”, “in the chair” and “one point for a win”.

A form of competition not often used these days is a “flag” competition. In these each players carries a small marked flag with him/her and they have a pre-calculated allowance of strokes. When each competitor has used up his allocated allowance of strokes he places his/her flag by the green on which the allowance has been used up. The player whose marked flag is furthest down the course is declared the winner.

This slightly old-fashioned form of competition brings us appropriately to the final section of this article, which is a brief introduction to the terms that used to be used to describe golf clubs.

GOLF CLUBS

A driver has always been known as a driver, but here is a list of clubs with their modern equivalent:

Brassie	two wood
Spoon	three wood
Baffie	four wood
Cleek	one iron
Mid-iron	two iron
Mid-mashie	3 iron
Mashie	4/5 iron
Spade Mashie	6 iron
Mashie-Niblick	7 iron
Niblick	9 iron
Track Iron	Wedge

“The rutting iron” was a club used for getting out of difficult lies. To-day we have moved from hickory shafts to steel shafts and to the lighter carbon fibre shafts. The late Gary Adams of the Taylor Made Golf Co. invented the “metal wood” so that now for the teeing clubs and the higher value “woods” light metals are used instead of woods like persimmon which itself had superseded beech. Another club which has come into fashion fairly recently is “the rescue club” an all-purpose club, a sort of mixture between an iron and a wood.

There were also in the early days three types of putter – the “driving”, “the approach” and “the green” (Baddiel). This brings us nicely back to where we started as the first section was on “The Language of the Green”. If you have patiently read this article from start to finish you are probably not a golfer because most golfers are pretty impatient beings, which sometimes may only mean that they are impatient to get to the nineteenth hole if they are “only here for the beer”. Having said that it is true to say that the social life of golf clubs now is much less centred around alcohol than it used to be. Never allow unfamiliarity with the language of golf put you off from trying your hand at this very special game.

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