

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE 4

by
Goblin

"There's a lot to be said for ten yards of semi-rough . . . before the real lost-ball country."

HOW ROUGH THE ROUGH?

MOST of us may prefer not to think about the rough much of the time. It is one of those things one really wants to have nothing to do with.

This does not alter reality, though; and most of us spend a good deal of time getting very closely acquainted with it. I'd go so far as to say that there is no man in Hertfordshire who knows the rough on my home course better than I do. I could tell him about all manner of little rabbit holes and baby holly trees he goes through life happily, oblivious of!

It may be an odd thing to choose to write about for this rather august journal; for, after all, the rough should, and sometimes does, come last in priority in the maintenance of a golf course. But it really can be important, and there are signs that modern trends have again begun to show their thoughtless faces in the treatment of it.

Skirt length.

The classic and hackneyed remark about the length of a woman's skirt (that it should be long enough to cover the subject but short enough to be interesting) just about sums up the job rough has to do on a golf course. From the point of view of the man who watches much good golf all over the country, and out of it, and who plays much bad golf himself, a sort of philosophy of rough forms in the mind.

Its first purpose, of course, is just to be there. It stands, or should stand, as part of the strategy of the hole, consciously in the player's mind as he stands on the tee, or addresses a shot to the green. It should, as a matter of opinion, be

thickest near the most foolhardy or greedy line up the hole, and thicker just short of the green than level with or past it. The look of it should therefore proclaim its nature—though there are limits to which this can be managed by anyone but Inscrutable Providence.

Never enough.

Here, of course, we come up against one of the inescapable problems of course maintenance. There are never enough men and enough time to do the job ideally. If there were, rough could be cut regularly, and kept at the length and thickness prescribed by the needs of the individual holes. As it is, the rough will inevitably be cut a bit shorter than ideal when it is cut, and then left until it is a good bit longer than ideal before it is cut again.

Surely, though, it is not inevitable that this necessity of time and labour should be carried as far as it is on many courses; so that the rough is butchered right to ground level, breaking its mat and texture, and then left to grow up spindly and uneven, so that the extent of the penalty for a shot into it varies rapidly from one foot to the next.

Heather country.

This can be particularly deplorable in heather, where too tight cutting can lead to scrubby nasty looking up-growths with something like a spoon-lie in between them. The ideal treatment for heather, where the ground is at all level, is to use an old set of gang mowers, set as high as possible: to produce in time a tight, even mat of heather shoots, into which the ball buries itself effectively

enough to demand a recovery shot and no ambitious stuff, but in which the wretched thing can always be found with minimum delay.

Butchery.

Another thing which can ruin a hole is too tight cutting of rough between fairway and the real jungle country. It is fair for a player to expect the penalty for an off-line shot to be graduated according to its sin. If he goes off the fairway and gets into the fair, thick rough, then he has no complaint; but if he goes off the fairway and sees his ball bound right through what *was* rough, until recent butchery, and end up right in the thick bushes bordering the hole, then he has a grievance. There's a lot to be said for ten yards of semi-rough (but not too butchered down) followed by a bit of thickish rough, before the margin of the real lost-ball country itself. Fairness and just deserts are important.

Opinion can always vary, though, about little scrubby bushes. Some think they belong wherever they grow, and if a man is in the rough at all he should

be prepared to take the chance of one. This is rather an alibi than an argument. The point is that rough should give a fairly consistent penalty between one spot and the next; and unless some little new bushes can be easily grown into a largish patch of tough hazard *which adds something to the hole*, it is much better to cut them out all together within ten yards of the fairway. There are probably few things more spoiling in golf than a drive which bounds only just off the fairway into an unplayable lie in a little bush not more than a foot high.

In general, rough is quicker and easier to deal with where the ground is reasonably level. And in case anyone doesn't yet know it, a machine like the Wolsley Swipe can be invaluable for knocking off anthills, levelling ridges and ruts and clearing unwanted bushes and small trees. Where it has gone before, the old gang mowers can easily follow up.

Rough, in sum, should offer a lie you deserve to get, not one which is merely, as your opponent hypocritically observes: "*Rough luck, old man*".

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