

NO RECORDS

by PATRICK SMARTT

It is almost habitual with many people to write to the papers, describing some incident or feat and ending with the query: "Is this a record?" It is seldom so, but it is popular with editors, leading as it does to correspondence from others claiming to have done better.

Thinking on this, I started to reflect on the best part of 50 years playing at golf. No records, save on some small colonial courses, but over that space of time one experienced some unusual happenings.

I once ran a professional's shop. For the benefit of students of the Rules of Golf, let it be known that I received no remuneration. It was an act of friendship to a good friend, a professional at a small club on the south coast of Natal in South Africa. His wife had to go into Durban for a serious operation. It was a most interesting two weeks, enhanced by his entrusting me to continue his lessons. Perhaps he was rather overwrought. He has since made his name as a coach, and we still correspond—usually disagreeing on some technical point!

Thus I have been at the buying and the selling ends of golfing equipment.

A hole in one, in addition to being a fortuitous combination of skill and luck, has contradictory rewards. It costs the amateur an outlay in drinks to members. His professional counterpart, at a nominated hole, can collect a considerable sum. That I have never been in the position of dispenser, I prefer to attribute to luck rather than a smear on my ability. It has, anyway, prolonged the lives of several bank managers. Unless I have been playing on the course at the time, I have made it a rule to refuse adding to the expense of the poor man who has holed in one.

I believe that some mathematical boffin has calculated, presumably for his own amusement—it is of little interest—the odds against such a piece of luck. I have witnessed four "aces", as

modern language has it. One of these was through the medium of television, and the perpetrator Tony Jacklin. Since writing the first draft of this piece, the "Box" has produced another, at Royal Birkdale in the Open of 1971. And that means that I have seen five. The odds against that would surely drive our boffin into a mental home.

I have one better for him. A course holed in one. From the first tee on the Crowborough Beacon G.C. a member sliced his drive over a hedge and into the cup on the 18th green. Is this?—well no—I seem to have read of a similar peculiarity somewhere. Probably in the Golfer's Handbook.

Luck is predominant. I was present when someone playing a short hole across a valley bisected by a stream, saw his ball strike the narrow planks forming a bridge, bounce, trundle up the slope to drop into the hole. It has a semblance to another, when the ball never left the ground and finished in the hole. Golf it was not. Or was it? Once the element of luck is expunged we no longer have A GAME, and there is little point in playing.

Is it not curious that the holing of long second shots, requiring a more difficult club, receives no acclamation nor celebration. I have holed a full brassie (No. 2 wood), and my opponent contented himself with: "Silly blighters for luck." And luck of course it was. In Jersey (I have told this one before in a book) a full No. 2 iron found the bottom of the cup. I was playing solo, young and enthusiastic, and on my return to the Club House I told the steward of this with some pride. He came from Scotland. His reaction was: "Ooh, Aye." He did *not* say "Och".

I have told elsewhere of a green on which, in the last century a competitor took 156 putts. It is an authenticated event, it occurred on a course in Sussex, an instance of which it is superfluous to enquire: "Is this a record?"

Birds being killed in the air by a golf ball are commonplace. In a rather

unusual colony, British Honduras, in the 1920s my ball holed out after rebounding from a domestic duck. The bird, after a period of shock, recovered.

There is a touch of "Dad's Army" about the following incident. During the last war, a unit of the Kings African Rifles known as the Independent Companies had moved up to a camp beyond Nairobi. Each company was destined for a different post in the Northern Frontier District. I commanded one of the companies and, the night before we were to move to our respective destinations, a signal arrived from G.H.Q. recalling me for some other duty. The colonel of the battalion which had been host to our motley during our brief stay drove me to the station the next day. He was an old peacetime friend, younger than I, and had by 1940 become accustomed, more in sorrow than in anger, to the eccentricities of

we amateurs. We were, I suppose, pretty "Independent".

Nevertheless, his face was a picture when he saw among my baggage six bags of golf clubs (one of them mine). The remaining five, the property of other officers, were to be dropped off at various stations in Kenya. There were no "Whitehall Damn it, sirs" about. It was probably a record. It was most certainly typical of the British; an example of the wide attraction of the game, and close to the sentiments of Bud Flannagan's: "Who do you think you are kidding, Mr Hitler?"

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