

HORSES FOR COURSES

by Patrick Smartt

RE-READING once again, Jacklin's absorbing book on his life, it was interesting to note his comparison of American courses with those to be found in these islands.

He makes the point that bunkers should be fair at all times. He develops that argument by describing some of ours as steep-sided horrors, long outdated, and from which there is virtually no escape in one stroke other than playing out sideways, or backwards.

Apart from bringing home to those of a much earlier golfing generation the change in outlook of the modern competitor (or one of them), this opens up some questions.

As Professor Joad, on the Brains Trust programme, used to say with the utmost regularity: "It depends on what you mean by . . ." In this instance, fairness.

In modern thinking an undulating fairway produces unfair bounces. Is it too naïve to ask if the ball kicks the wrong way every time? As for playing a ball lying on an up, or down slope, most players of amateur county class would expect to cope adequately with these—from experience alone.

On a number of our "outdated" courses, recoveries from these antique coffins have been seen on television. The impression is that most of them end up leaving the player with a holeable putt. That is, from greenside bunkers, and with a **sand-wedge**. The impossibility of playing a long second from them is granted. To the surprise of many, one of the American women professionals, in the Colgate tournament at Sunningdale, was seen to attempt a wood from sand. The ball struck the bank. Her caddie's thoughts would be interesting.

Harry Vardon, his contemporaries and later generations had to cope with them. Their sole instrument for recovery was the niblick, a club without a flange to

slide it through the sand. Despite this, John Henry Taylor went round Royal St. George's, Sandwich, in 69, knowing he had to do so. To be trite, it is the same for everyone. The deep bunkers are there—punishing—and it is an old axiom that it is the man who makes the least errors wins.

That was before the term "Scrambling" had been invented. Which may be defined as keeping the score within reasonable limits, when not striking the ball as well as normally. Into that can be read the wish to reduce punishment, without decrying the skill shown in getting out of trouble.

Another question begs. Trees are now in fashion on new courses. There are many on the old inland clubs. Does a ball lying against a trunk, or in the roots, offer a more amenable chance for recovery than from those sanded depressions? Furthermore, with the introduction of water "traps", they are not bunkers, mostly in America to the relief of one ancient, are we now to expect a water-wedge? It is difficult to see what design this would take, within the provisions of Rule 2. "Form and Make of Clubs". A noted coaching professional was asked the correct stroke from water, and is reported to have said he did not know.

Inevitably it will be argued that an amateur cannot understand what it is like playing for your livelihood. It is only necessary to have watched some Open Championships, and seen the haggard faces of some of those in contention to have a fair inkling.

A player anxious to win the Amateur of any of the major golf countries, is under heavy strain. He is not called to play 72 holes medal, but by the time he has reached the final he could have played that number. Whereas in this formula a disastrous hole does not wreck

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his chance, the course cannot attack him by holing long putts or chip shots as a human opponent may.

Perhaps the idea of "fairness", whatever that may mean in golf, is the key. That master of writing about golf, the late Bernard Darwin, when writing on that subject posed the question: "Do we wish to descend to the bloomless heights of Chess?" I quote from memory.

Reflecting on what has been written—the opinions of an oldster—one wonders whether the passion for startling scores, some of it due to promoters with an eye on the gate-money, and a proportion to the publicity they receive is responsible. The public has been brain-washed into expecting returns under 70. An obvious way to get these results is to make conditions easier.

But, after due acknowledgement has been made to improved clubs and balls,

improved technique (?)—do they hit them any straighter than Vardon or Taylor?—and making allowances for the different conditions, are the 69s any better golf than the 74s of those two?

Professionals' tournaments today are a form of entertainment, and the cast (the competitors) know they have to produce brilliant figures. There are two sides to that. To win demands low scoring. To be in a position to demand appearance money, the performer must produce the goods. It is natural, therefore, that he does not regard heavy punishment for a wayward stroke amiably.

That is but a soft impeachment. It has to be accepted that the golf of today, and yesteryear are two different games.

Finally, not without pleasure and pride, it can be claimed that our long outdated courses, with their steep-sided horrors of bunkers, have yet to allow an inferior player to win the Open.

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