

FRIGHT

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All of us have suffered fright on a golf course. Fear of winning, fear of a good score when facing the last few holes, fear of missing a putt. Even driving off the first teeing ground in front of even a meagre group of spectators can intimidate some.

Others are encouraged by onlookers. That is often a matter of pride. A desire to show them you can play the shot. It is nowadays put down to the adrenalin flowing—the meaning of which is not within the knowledge of this ancient one.

Inquisitive as ever where the mind controls the player, why is it that a certain hole, no matter the course, defeats the player? There will always be some hole that one would rather not tackle. J. H. Taylor has a strong dislike, forcibly expressed, of the Road Hole at St. Andrews in the days when it was more fearsome than now. Why should it be that a hole we have played countless times suddenly strikes terror into the soul?

Perhaps one or two disastrous errors lodge in mind, and confidence evaporates. It becomes a spectre, approached with a sinking heart.

There is little purpose in trying to get the player to relax, to concentrate on a smooth swing. He has conditioned himself to expect doom. The shaft feels as if it were made of concrete; the head feels like one of: "The Old Oaks of England."

It can be any hole, but the last, if the score is useful, causes the most casualties. The player gets an attack of the 'must' fever. Must have a five here. Must have a good drive. Must have a good second. Must lay the approach dead. The root cause is the sequence of the hole. The player is 'riding a finish'.

Onsets of fright seldom concern an entire hole. They nearly always involve the drive. The mind centres on a particular bunker, beckoning emphatically, or a carry. The cause is close to the chicken and the egg, which starts what?

As a very junior official in a small colony, whenever H.E. the Governor happened to be playing immediately ahead, it did not matter which side of the fairway he was, I either hooked or sliced in his direction. Eventually I took care, under no pressure from him, either to start before or two matches behind him. Had he been straight, I might have learned accurate driving earlier.

Living on a course at which several holes call for a carry over deep ravines, used by smugglers from the coast in days gone by, it has become obvious that these disturb the handicap player more than anything else. As he stands on the teeing ground, that gorge expands in the mind's eye far beyond its actual width.

The player's antennae, or if you like, his radar has ranged on a spot which should not come into reckoning. These holes do not pose the question of playing short, or going for the carry. It is questionable if they are more than 100 paces from the man standing at address, and perhaps 30 yards from bank to bank. If the ground were level there would be few mishaps. In some respects that fright is understandable, but not the sudden mental block after playing confidently for years.

A player may be a reasonable judge of distance when it comes to estimating his second stroke or an approach, but present him with a carry of the kind described, and his morale descends to the depths—like his ball.

No doubt a 'trick cyclist' would provide an answer. Personally, I found there was only one cure. Take a dozen balls, metaphorically roll up one's sleeves, and like a boxer enter-

ing the ring take on that hole. Usually the match is over before all dozen balls are struck. The knock-out, as it were, comes sooner than expected. Two victories have been achieved. Over oneself and over the carry.

A number of years ago, when I was a club secretary, I was approached by three elderly members (now paying where I hope there are no carries), with the complaint that the carry over gorse and heather at the last hole was unfair. My plea that it was about only 150 yards, which at a short hole would not worry them at all, was met with disbelief.

In the end we all tramped down to that teeing ground, the harassed secretary—several years past his half century—carrying a No. 5 iron. He proved his point, and the old gentlemen played happily ever after.

Which goes to prove that wrong impressions are easily formed. Let no one suggest that the average club member should indulge in pacing out the distance for his second shots. He might, however, ease his mind if he stepped out some of the carries that have deranged his mind when gazing upon them.

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