

## “THE GREAT ALONE”

WE are as a race sometimes over critical, influenced by the criticisms to be read of the performance of our players when engaged in international events. Thereby increasing the pressure on them.

Criticism, my dictionary tells me is: “Judging of merit ....”. Any reader will know that at times, reporting and criticism are married. Inevitably, selection committees are the target for those who deem their acumen to be superior to that of experienced players, some still active, some in retirement.

It happens in golf. I write from the experience of knowing well the opinions expressed by club golfers, and a fairly good guess can be made which papers they read, or for that matter the magazine they peruse.

Tony Jacklin is an example. Because at an early age he achieved the double of the Open and the American Open, he was hailed as one of the greats. That was deserved. Ever since, reports or references about him concentrate on his failures. Failures there have been. Is it desirable to make these the target? For the time being is it not sufficient to say he was not among the leaders? The list of scores will tell us all we want to know.

It can be said that he altered his mode of living rather widely and quickly. A large house and a highly expensive car were seized upon as good copy. His

BY PATRICK SMARTT

recent departure for the island of Jersey made the headlines. I do not remember Guy Wolstenholme being the subject of reproach when he took up residence in Australia.

Henry Cotton, once established, had a fascinating car, with large, ringed snakes crawling out of the bonnet. I suspect that car still has a corner in his heart. He too, was now and again the dartboard of disapproval, not because of his play. That was beyond question. There were several others (Walter Hagen) to whom the game has meant riches. The salient point is that it called for many years of unrelenting toil before they reached the top.

Therein may lie the secret of Jacklin. The road was a short one, but it is a long lane that has no turning.

The student of the historical ‘greats’, contending against a lesser number of international players as is the case today, knows that they did not always win when they competed. Bobby Jones did not. Palmer, Nicklaus, Player and Trevino do not always supprime. But for the intervention of the war, Cotton would have numbered among them. they were not subjected to derogatory remarks on these lapses. If, indeed they were lapses.

Before the days of television, golf was



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well covered in print, but the press concentrated on successes. The reading then was in the main, leisurely accounts of the leading players (including several famous amateurs) with little comment on their mishaps. As Burton Stevenson wrote: "The only things worth remembering about a great man are his greatnesses; his littlenesses are of no importance."

That is not to suggest that defeats should be ignored, news is news. There are times when it is difficult to escape the impression of a vendetta against a player. The senior, experienced writers on the 'circuit' do not transgress in this manner.

Cameras are the main bugbear of the competing professional. Hogan held a strong dislike of them. In appearance, the epitome of the phlegmatic was Bobby Locke. Yet, I recall him taking exception to the 1949 Open at Royal St. George's. Nobody made any comment about these two. Tony Jacklin during a European championship, was the target of

opprobrium for his attitude to persistent photographers.

The tournament professional is working, playing, in strictest sense, is an euphemism. A fact too often disregarded by the spectators. At such times the golfer is the loneliest person in the world. There he is, alone with his God, who may or may not be in a testy mood, on a tightly mown sward. The centre of a circle of people, the silence electric, while he concentrates on directing the ball into a cup 4½ inches in diameter. Thousands of pounds may be involved.

It is then that a tiny noise, blowing a nose, the click of a camera, the scratch of a cigarette lighter or match, impinge on taut nerves like a sudden clap of thunder. None can fully know the pressure he is under. There is, though, a temptation to ask the more acid critics, the verbal as well the writers, in the words of Robert Service:

"Have you ever been out in the great alone ...?"



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