

STROKE FOR COURSE VALUE

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Smarrt

I recall, some years gone, when watching "The Putter" at Rye, to have seen Roger Wethered play a monumental recovery stroke at the last hole.

Fully to savour the moment, it is to be remembered that we were on the 18th and so witnessing a close-fought match. Still capable of driving the ball a long way, he had hooked away into the sand among the dunes. Standing on tall ground, looking down at him it was clear that a high and powerful shot was needed if he were to reach the fairway. To play such a stroke demands perfection in striking. A tea-spoon full too much sand spells disaster.

He took the ball clean with what I think to be a No. 7., it soared up and away to finish on the green. The onlookers at this meeting are connoisseurs of the game, there was a second or two of astounded silence.

It was after the return of my numbed senses, the thought intruded: "He couldn't have done that on my home course." This was no querulous local bias, but one of fact. That ball would have been lost, of if found, unplayable because you cannot swing a club in thick gorse-whins, for those north of the border.

This simmered in the mind, for at the direction of my committee I was fighting for an extra stroke on our S.S.S. rating for course difficulties. The reason being the gorse. In those days there was a narrow strip of heather, not the growth from which to recover easily, between the fairway and the jungle. It could stop the ball running into trouble.

In the S.S.S. scheme is written: "An addition to the basic Standard Scratch Score. . . will be made only for courses of *exceptional* difficulties other than length." This raises the question how exceptional difficulties are defined, and where does one meet them? In the days before there was an S.S.S., and any claim for an extra stroke beyond thought, I could lead you to a short hole surrounded by pineapple plants sharp as spears; another blind over a bungalow, blind over a railway viaduct. A green perched on a

anthill, the sides like those of a pyramid. To which may be added the circumstance that the greens were constructed of a hard mud base, covered by a thin covering of sand—no stop.

These circumstances were to be met with at tropical clubs. Our attitude was, there is the hole, there are the problems, lets to it. To avoid that cliché 'it was the same for all' is impossible. I can sense some saying that it was a travesty of golf. Over a thirty years contact with the game in hot countries, I came across one or two players who refused to play on those courses. This conceited attitude rebounded upon them. When after the customary two and a half years of duty, the first half of their four months home leave was spent in trying to recapture their game.

Every golfer has a preference for, or antipathy to a certain type of course. There are more than one well-known professional who dislikes links, not as might be supposed because of the strong winds, but the ill-defined areas of the fairways. Trees, bushes or heather, mostly absent from links, give them an avenue down which to drive. In short, and it is understandable, they like to have a road map. My own preference, of minimum interest, is the links, caused by a sense of tradition and history. It is pleasing to record that view has been passed on to some youngsters of my acquaintance.

There is a sneaking feeling the tight lay-out, such as was my home course already alluded to, may have an inhibiting effect on the freedom of the swings on the young, turning them into defensive players.

As expected we did not get our extra stroke. Golf is a game and should be treated as such. But, I cannot get away from the opinion that the golfer should have room to swing, even to chip out sideways. As I no longer play, that can be said without prejudice, although it goes against tradition.

On the other hand, none of us could have produced that stroke by Roger Wethered.