

Sandy McDivot finds himself in the dishonourable company of world golfers

Turning a blind eye?

I was watching TV the other day and made my usual choice of tuning in to the BBC. I do this because there is this theory that they do not interrupt programmes with adverts. This is of course complete absurdity as the BBC delights in spending our licence fee on adverts. The only difference is that all these adverts are about themselves.

One such commercial you may have seen extolling the virtues of the corporation showed a renowned female British athlete claiming that she had asked God that morning to give her wings to help her in the race. "And he did," she claimed. Amazing, God actually gave her wings!

So that morning I decided not to ask the good lord for a pair of wings but merely if he would be so kind as to give me a half decent putting stroke for the monthly medal that afternoon. And he didn't. In fact at the risk of blasphemy he replaced my usual uncoordinated effort with something that had more resemblance to a brain convulsion.

However, after reflecting on my misery I concluded that if God had indeed granted me my request I could well have been contravening rule 14.3 on receiving artificial assistance and could therefore be accused of cheating.

But going back to the subject of highly tuned female athletes, I spotted the Lady Captain playing on the 2nd green a while ago when on morning switching duty. As I had some trivial matter in which to discuss with her I approached the green and stood at the side waiting for her to putt. Due to her fading retina and the low set morning sun directly behind me I realised that despite looking towards me she had not a clue I was in the vicinity. Then to my amazement and with her partner aimlessly thrashing about in some distant bunker, she picked up her ball and moved it several feet closer to the hole. Now faced with this situation of flagrant cheating by the Lady

Captain there are three options a greenkeeper has.

1) Approach the Lady Captain's partner and inform her that the most respected member of her section has just committed the ultimate sin and should be banished from the club.

2) Quickly and quietly withdraw and forget all you have seen.

3) Go to the Lady Captain and casually explain everything you have just witnessed and suggest that a fairly hefty sum of cash deposited in your own personal benevolent fund would be sufficient to insure that the whole unsavoury matter is kept from the waiting world.

Of course in the interest of any long-term career prospects option 2) is the only course of action that should be taken.

But the subject of cheating is far from alien to greenkeepers. I don't know what it is but to golfers we greenkeepers seem to be completely invisible. (This is especially so when we are within range of their worst hit drives) So given this ability of ours to blend into the surrounding flora, acts of golfing dishonesty are often witnessed by the greenkeeper who the golfer either never notices or who is convinced that as a person that cuts grass we would be entirely ignorant of matters concerning the games regulations.

Here at Sludgecombe being a club that's only criteria for accepting members is can they come up with the readies, we have more than one example of such persons of dubious character. A few have been politely kicked out but one still remains and indeed is a popular member of the club. This has happened for two reasons. The first is that this particular person despite his suspect integrity does not make the fatal error of actually winning any of the clubs silverware. The second is that he has a lucrative sideline whereby he inflicts violence on people for financial reward. This is a job that he is especially good at with baseball bat

forcibly applied to patella being his speciality. As he finds this a rewarding tax-free occupation the membership as a whole have never felt they have much moral obligation to confront him with the irrefutable evidence that they have at their disposal.

But for real high performance in the unrecognised skill of cheating we have to go much further afield. At the risk of serious litigation I have always felt that certain, and I must emphasise a tiny minority, of professions are especially proficient in this art form.

I have a good friend who is a professional but I should point out that he is one of the honest majority. He has often witnessed examples of golfing deceit and some of them are absolute classics.

Of course there is the standard pro format of the suspect pro with the hand chosen team that decide dishonesty is the best policy and basically make the score up as they go along. Top pro, team prize, closest to the hole, longest drive, you name it they win it. But that is straightforward corruption and requires little in the way of imagination. I prefer the tale he told me of a player who had a brilliant stratagem when playing in those sponsored pro-ams where there was a hole-in-one prize on offer. If, as would sometimes be the case, visibility was obscured by dense fog or mist on the hole offering the reward, he would overclub by miles, hit the ball and claim to anyone within earshot that he had hit it perfectly and the ball would surely be close. Then following a cursory search and some nifty handiwork he would pick the ball out of the hole claiming the ace. The ball of course was in reality some distance over the green in an adjacent field but a nice sponsor's car was once again in the garage.

I also like the well documented story about the pro whose father was a famous ice hockey star. During a qualifying event he had decided that an erasure applied to scorecard card



would be the best way of making up a few shots. And so having failed by traditional means to qualify he simply reduced his score by a couple of shots somewhere betwixt playing partner and clubhouse. It was only later when one of his partners noticed the scoring error in the papers the next day that the matter was brought to the attention of the governing bodies.

Then there was the guy whose own speciality was "bird nesting". This comes into its own when a particularly nasty lie is encountered in the rough. Wedging out sideways appears to be the only course of action, that

is until 20 practice swings, plenty of stomping about and some vigorous thumping of the adjacent ground has revealed the ball to be in such a perfect lie that you could get a driver to it.

Finally we go to the greatest country in the world; the US of A. Only a country like America could spend a cool quarter of a million dollars on the uniform for the humble and retiring wives of their glorious Ryder Cup team. Here they take a real pride in this game within a game. They even have a golfing society made up exclusively of cheats whose proud motto is "If you don't cheat, you're only cheating yourself".

In California, there are eccentrics who could even rival our own aris-

tocracy. One such character towards the end of his regular night-time soirees would go to the balcony, flick a switch and there before everyone would stand a full flood lit, downhill golf hole complete with tee, bunkers, green, the works. He would then declare to the assembled drunken multitude that he would make a hole in one and asked for people to bet against him. There would always be a few gullible, intoxicated types convinced that this would be easy money. So having set up the necessary wagers he would go to the tee and gently chip a ball off the front. The look on the party goers faces must have been something to behold as the ball gently bounced down the slope and onto the green where it would go around

and around in ever decreasing circles homing in on the hole until it finally dropped out of sight. The entire hole had been designed whereby any ball chipped off the end of the tee would like in some enormous pin ball machine always end up on the concave green with the hole in the geometric centre. Brilliant!

Sandy McDivot.
Head Greenkeeper,
Sludgecombe Pay and Play