



Sandy McDivot

It's Tough on Tour

Sandy McDivot relives the occasions when he came into contact with Tournament golf.

Last year I briefly sampled the delights of what has become a commonplace activity in the land of the influential. We are talking, corporate hospitality. My transitory visit to this world took place in a hospitality suite at a European Tour event, where as an interlude between the *consomme truffe* and the *saumon et langoustine au sauce champagne*, I was granted the high honour of being introduced to the host club's Superintendent, a man who is regarded as famous within our industry. My only defence for getting his name entirely wrong was that apart from this introduction taking place during the gastronomic enchantments of the day, it also came midway between a 1988 Cotes du Roussillon and a 1999 Saint-Nicolas de Bourgueil, a wine that our hosts - all of whom were present during my foot insertion moment- described as being an especially lively young thing, whose impertinence they found amusing.

All I can say is, I don't think the assembled entourage were too amused by my insane blunder, especially as I mistook this unfortunate person as one of his shall we say, more illustrious peers. It's kind of like Tony Blair referring to that Bush bloke as my old friend Bill Clinton. Either way, at that instant it felt like a diplomatic catastrophe of global proportions that brought with it the consideration that my instant departure from this world would be an altogether more desirable alternative to existence.

But tournament golf can be the source of so many examples of psychological trauma.

Despite my best efforts I have total recall of an incident at a European Tour event that resulted in myself experiencing the collective derision of thousands. I was watching a group tee off from the adjacent 17th tee while perched in the upper reaches of a grandstand around the 18th green. I was forced to stand up for a more advantageous view because the person next to me was also standing. It became clear as to why he was adopting a vertical attitude when he took a quick snap shot of the players on the 17th tee with the noisiest camera 1970's Britain could produce. He then displayed an amazing piece of swiftness and dexterity by sitting down and concealing the camera and all within the time span of a micro second. This resulted in Bernard Gallagher taking his own quick snap shot out of bounds down the left. Bernard then immediately turned his attention to the direction of the noise that had cost him the average man's annual salary and set eyes on who else but moi, the only person standing and high above him and directly next to a prominent sign stating, "No Cameras".

I remember that sickening feeling of terror as I turned to my left to see the sign, then below me to engage a scowling Bernard, then to my right to witness about 4000 spectators all collectively identifying myself as the half-wit from Hades.

One of my favourite stories involving shame and tournament golf was the classic Arnold Palmer and the 'Portolet' incident. To explain, let me transport you back to the mid 60s when Arnie was the greatest name in global sport and where he commanded a following rarely witnessed before or since. The victim of this incident was innocently watching a golf

tournament when he was overcome with the desire to spend a penny, or cent as it would have been. He looked down the fairway and could see the advanced guard of Arnie's Army making their way up the fairway. Our friend spotted one of those awful portable conveniences called a 'Portolet' behind him and calculated that he just had time to nip in before Arnie was due. So he popped inside and did what he had to do. Having done that and being in a hurry to witness the great man, he somewhat regrettably opened the door in a rather flamboyantly theatrical manner only to find that to his sheer horror he had in the interim become encircled by a mass of TV camera's, overexcited spectators and Arnie, who had tweaked one off the tee and was about to do one of his Howitzer jobs from a mere ten feet distant. So what did our friend do? He immediately closed the door to the piercing accompaniment of squeaking rusty hinges and sat inside to contemplate the unfolding nightmare. He then waited for the sound of persimmon on balata only for there instead to be silence, followed by an eerie murmuring sound. Then there was the dreaded knock on the door. It was Arnie who asked, "Excuse me but I am finding it real tough to play my shot with you in there, could you please come out?" "Err no, Mr Palmer," replied our friend. "You just go right ahead, I'm ok here". Of course that was not an option and so after a minute or so of negotiation our poor comrade of agony was forced to face the bright sunlight, the TV cameras, the sniggering spectators and Arnie himself.

I must now describe the exploits of a friend of mine who follows the vocation of professional golfer. I thought I was a connoisseur of the cock-up but this man is a walking 'foot in mouth' epidemic. There was the unforgettable one where he was attempting to sell a second hand, slightly iffy electric trolley to the Lady Captain when he heard himself utter the line, "If you get a bit vigorous with this knob, it will jerk off."

Then there was the time when he arrived a tad late for a pro-am, hurried to the tee, met his team who had all invested £100 to play with this elite golfer and promptly proceeded to completely miss the ball with his first effort. His rather lame excuse was that he had just come out of a three month teaching stint where the only club he had swung had been a 5-iron and the shock of swinging 45 inches of driver had resulted in the

ground being struck approximately one foot ahead of schedule.

But I got involved as a caddie when he managed to get an invitation to a Tour event that was being staged within his PGA Region. St Mellion to be precise. This he achieved by the combination of a good run of form, aggressive networking and some serious wool pulling exercises. It all started to go wrong when a week before the event he got a bout of what true golfers refer to as 'the Lucy Locket's', 'the J Arthur's (and I don't mean Jim), "the laterals', 'the unmentionables', anything in fact to avoid the dreaded word "shank". Practice day arrived and we made our way to the range where he found a quiet spot at the far end well away from the masses. No problem until Seve and Nick Faldo decided to surround him. Several shanks followed, interspersed with the odd total duff for effect. Confidence now at an all time low, he shuffled off to the 1st tee for a practice round where he made up a three with Paul Broadhurst and another Ryder Cupper of the day. On the 4th fairway he stood at an approximate eight over par and proceeded to shank a vicious wedge that had Mr Broadhurst diving for cover.

Nine holes were enough before we made our way home. The next day and with several thousand spectators already enjoying the glorious weather, my friend got an early start on the 10th tee with a couple of monster hitting Swedes. A ghastly 1st tee shot off a previously undiscovered spot on the club face played in a state of advanced paranoid schizophrenia was followed by a chop with a 4- iron well short of the green. However, a scabby chip hit the pin and a tap in par managed to hoodwink the spectators into believing that there was some sort of control to his game. There then followed a half respectable par three followed by a birdie on the par-5 12th that was only achieved through a thinned second that managed to bound merrily over the stream fronting the green. Another couple of scrambled pars were interspersed with the odd stroke of merit that managed to get my friend to the entirely unplanned predicament of being joint leader when he stood on the 18th tee, which was his ninth. But of course, to those aficionado's among us that have taken the relentless pursuit of accidental disaster to the higher levels, the occasional moment of triumph has only been attained so as

to make the downfall all the more calamitous. And so it proved to be. A 'God Bothered or 'Gladice' as it is sometimes known, got him 160 yards off the tee and about 150 yards short of his Swedish companions. He then necked a 3-wood to a position right and well short of the green and in the perfect position to exhibit to the waiting world the full beauty of the well-executed shank into the crowd, a shot that according to the record books had never been pulled off by a tournament leader.

We have often discussed the moment when we were deciding how the shot would be played. As we watched the cameras pan across and zoom in on us, our main focus of attention was not on how we would attack the pin or the subtle intricacies of Mr Nicklaus' slopes but on how we could actually safeguard against spectator loss of life. In the end a lunge with a 7-iron, even though we were only 70 yards from the green, seemed the best way out as a hastily executed risk assessment reasoned that the shattering of a spectators knee cap would be preferable to permanent brain damage or worse. But to his eternal credit the shank was averted and the utter joy of a double bogey was enough to get my friend back to the sanctuary of total obscurity.

But enough of my negativity, a golf course is a place to enjoy oneself, unless of course you are like myself of Scottish descent, in which case a golf course is a place where a man must suffer. Still, coming from a race that believes that pleasure is epitomised by a brisk walk through sub arctic winds dressed in little more than a mini skirt and whose idea of haute cuisine is a boiled concoction of animal waste and oatmeal stuffed into a sheep's bladder, I shouldn't take such sentiments too seriously.

Sandy McDivot

Head Greenkeeper
Sludgecombe Pay & Play

