

WINTER GOLF

Winter golf . . . what memories those two words can conjure up! In this tongue in cheek look at the inclement aspects of the game **BILL PILE**, Head Greenkeeper of Fingle Glen Golf Club gives 'good' advice to both the novice and veteran player. Now read on . . .

FOR the novice golfer there are some unwritten rules and etiquettes of winter golf he or she must know.

The first lesson consists of two phrases to be used at certain times depending on weather conditions. The novice will soon learn to judge the most appropriate time by following the lead of the more knowledgeable advocates.

As a guide when you arrive at the club to find that the greenkeeper has had the temerity to close the course, just because of a small local 'monsoon', the first phrase can be brought into play: 'We've played in worse than this!' To get the maximum benefit from these words two factors must be borne in mind.

Firstly on no account must the speaker have been on the course to check the truth of the statement, and secondly, his position when making the statement. The position to adopt is one of standing inside the clubhouse, looking out of the window noting the black skies and torrential sweeping rain.

Then in a most accusing tone of voice: 'We've played in worse than this.' If you have judged your moment to a tee (if you'll pardon the pun) this will be echoed by other members sitting in the bar.

The second phrase to learn is: 'We shouldn't be playing in these conditions, it can't be doing the course any good!' The astute reader will have quickly gathered that this statement is used in inclement weather conditions when the greenkeeper hasn't closed the course or brought temporary greens into play.

Again timing and position are of the essence. You must be far enough from the clubhouse so that when you make the statement no-one, (heaven forbid!) would dream of accepting the facts and even



remotely consider walking in. Experienced winter golfers often bring the slightly changed version into play on entering the clubhouse: 'We should never have played in those conditions, hadn't someone ought to close the course?'

Two benefits come from this use of the phrase; firstly you have played your round and secondly the congratulations from your fellow golfers on your concern for the course.

The newcomer to winter golf will encounter on his round certain areas of the course roped off or surrounded by hoops. Now, to the inexperienced, this would, at first sight, seem to mean areas to avoid. However this is not, of course, the case. These obstacles are to test the ingenuity of the golfer as to how to enter this area without tripping over the hoops or catching other parts of the anatomy in the ropes.

The winter golfing beginner will have to look carefully for the next areas that will add to the enjoyment of the round. But the rewards are there for those who can spot the wet and muddy patches to walk through, carefully avoiding the dry clean grass to either side. The pleasure can be heightened if you declare loudly as you are in the middle of the mud: 'When do you think the greenkeeper will cure these areas?'

Perhaps it may be pertinent at this stage to touch on the standards of dress for the winter golfer. Although many styles are in vogue it would seem the really dedicated model themselves on the clothing worn by a bedraggled, retreating, defeated army, whose tailors reside in Third World countries.

However back to behaviour patterns on the course. The next example can, fortunately, be used in winter and summer, although a slightly different technique is required in the summer when the ground is drier.

The move can be brought into play when you find your ball halfway up a grass bank, the steeper the better. As a novice you may at first think to leave your trolley at the foot of the bank. Oh dear, you still have a lot to learn!

The expert will recall the trick here is to pull your trolley up the bank with you, release it, grab a club, play your shot, swing round and grab your trolley before it falls over or runs back down the bank. This is a real favourite with masochists, who mistime the ritual on purpose and positively thrill to the sight of their trolley tipping over, sending clubs, balls and tees cascading in all directions down the bank.

A point here also worth remembering is: Keep your trolley with you at all times, never let it leave your side. Again watch the more experienced and marvel at some of the places they manage to take their trusty trolley with them.

On a more general note, as in the summer, refrain from replacing divots, mending pitchmarks (and you can make some real beauties in the winter when the greens are softer) or raking bunkers, you certainly don't want to be seen to be the odd one out.

Hopefully the novice winter golfer will start to realise from this outline of the 'niceties' of winter golf some of the pleasures that can be gained from playing in the bitterly cold with the wind driving the rain straight at him, and indeed conjure up some new techniques that may end up in the winter golf 'hall of fame!'

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