



A Round to Remember

Sometimes things just fall into place. This past year, I had the fortunate pleasure of living out a dream. An impossible dream, or at least so I thought, if not for me being in the right place at the right time. Oh yeah, and thanks to a whole lot of good fortune.

It is only very rarely that you find yourself on the receiving end of an invitation to come play not just any golf course, but THE golf course, the golf course of which all other golf courses are mere offspring. Naturally, I am talking about "The Old Course" at St. Andrews, and the invite was right from superintendent Eddie Adams himself.

The place was the MAGCS hospitality suite in Dallas, the time last February. As my newly made friend and I parted company, I still remember his famous last words, "Ah man, eef yor evr ore me nek of da woods, coom plee me gowf coors." (My nearest translation being: Kevin, if you are ever over in my neck of the woods, come play my golf course.) Now, if you are in this profession, this is an offer we generally extend to our colleagues on a fairly regular basis. It is only very rarely that you find yourself on the receiving end of an invitation to come play not just any golf course, but THE golf course, the golf course of which all other golf courses are mere offspring. Naturally, I am talking about "The Old Course" at St. Andrews, and the invite was right from superintendent Eddie Adams himself.

Not even in my wildest imagination could I conceive taking advantage of such a gracious invitation. That is where good fortune comes in. I discovered it helps having family residing on the other side of the pond as well. Currently, my sister and her husband live in Amsterdam, Holland. From there, it is just an hour flight to Edinburgh, Scotland. This is significant for me because then my traveling on a European excursion to play golf quickly turns into going to Europe to visit family . . . and maybe play a little golf, too. That was much more palatable for my lovely wife Cheryl, although my wanting her to come with was what really sold her. For the sake of brevity, I will not be describing our entire journey here. But, if you ever get the chance, I highly recommend touring the beaches of northern France in a province called Normandy.

As I stated before, getting from Holland to Scotland is normally a one-hour flight. It is just a hop across the North Sea. We must have bought into the platinum tour package, though, because our trip took eight hours. It is not often you get to take off from an airport, fly for an hour and crash-land at the same airport you just took off from . . . then drink for free for the next five hours while you wait for a new plane . . . then board the plane with 150 loaded Scotsmen with whom by now you have become the best of friends and try again. Upon landing in Edinburgh, we found we were still an hour's drive from our ultimate destination of St. Andrews. That is another adventure altogether when you see your rental car with the steering wheel on the wrong side, which begins to make sense when you are driving, because you do that on the wrong side of the road. Needless to say, getting there was only half the fun.

Upon finally arriving on the hallowed ground of "The Old Course," I tried to keep things in perspective. I found it difficult to concentrate on my golf game when I could still not believe I was there. From the outset, my goals

(continued on page 6)

for the day were simple and attainable. No setting myself up for disappointment, although I do not believe that could have happened no matter what my final score. All I really wanted to accomplish was to break 100, shoot par on at least one hole and enjoy the moment. That one was a no-brainer. Oh yes, there was one more goal. I really did not want to embarrass myself off the first tee as the spectators gather to watch each foursome tee off.

My round was far from spectacular. Those of you who have seen me play, know my rounds never really are. Destined to be a lifetime 18-handicapper, I guess. I managed to snap a far hook off the first tee, landing safely in the 18th fairway. Not the best of drives, but far from embarrassing. With two of my goals already in hand before I even reached the first green, I was sure the others would follow. On the third hole, I got my par; on the fourth, my caddie found another one of my wayward drives had settled on a gravel cart path. Forgetting for a moment where I was, I asked for a ruling. Eddie was quick to respond with, "Ah man, cun yo see da bowl . . . den heet da bowl." (Meaning: Kevin, can you see the ball? Then hit the ball!) No free lifts here. On the seventh hole, I managed to navigate my ball into my first sod-faced bunker, six shots later I managed to navigate it out. Number nine I drove the green, only to three-putt for par. On the 11th, I five-putted for an 8; on the scorecard, they call that an "other." On 16, I saw the first out-of-bounds stakes; unfortunately, my ball was on the wrong side of them. On 17, I hit a hotel with my drive, finally got out of a sod-faced bunker in one, and putted from a cart path and still salvaged bogey. On 18, I finished with my ninth par of the day. Couple that with my three bogies and my six "others" and I shot my most memorable 95 ever.

In retrospect, my score is as immaterial to me now as it was then. Looking back, the greatest feeling is the fulfillment of a dream. I also found that what I noticed most about St. Andrews is not what is there, but

what is not. When playing, I discovered there are no trees, and not an annual flower on the premises, yet it's one of the most scenic places I've ever been. There are no motorized golf carts, no striped fairways, no manicured rough, no painted hazards, and no beverage cart or halfway house. In essence, you will find no-frills golf. Golf in its purest form, rich in tradition and natural as can be. Golf as it was meant to be played, not the revenue-based Americanized version to which I have been accustomed.

I not only walked away with a better appreciation for the game, but for my profession as well. I learned that sand bunkers should be a hazard and the true meaning of "rough." I learned free lifts are not an option, and putting surfaces do not need to be rolling at 10 or 11 feet to be challenging. Houses don't really belong on golf courses and "grasshoppers" are really caddies in the states. I also learned that the Scottish are the nicest and funniest people I have ever met and that 18 holes of golf can be played in less than four hours, even on a busy day. And finally, I learned that dreams are so much better when shared with family and friends.

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A special thanks to my sister Sue and her husband Joe Baker, for making this trip possible. I thank my brother Mike and his wife Sue for traveling 7,000 miles just to play a round of golf with me. I thank my wife Cheryl for having the courage to get back on a plane after we crash-landed once and for being our trip photographer. And last, I would sincerely like to thank Eddie Adams who proved to me that, "The bigger they are . . . the nicer they are." He certainly gave me a round to remember.



If the bridge looks familiar, that's because it's the most photographed bridge in golf: the Swilken Bridge on hole 18 of "The Old Course" at St. Andrews, to be precise. Pictured are (L to R) Joe Baker, Mike DeRoo, Eddie Adams and Kevin DeRoo.