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# TO GOLF OR NOT TO GOLF

By DR. MORRIS FISHBEIN

The well known editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association and of Hygeia, the Health Magazine, discusses the morale and hygienic significance of golf in war.

**T**O GOLF or not to golf—that is the question. Whether 'tis better for each of us to stick his nose constantly into his task and thus to have the brain become completely obfuscated or perhaps to steal away without mentioning the matter even to a secretary and to pursue the gutta percha pellet hither and thither over the countryside until the processes of thinking again becomes logical, irritability disappears and efficiency returns. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Just now I read that General Somervell in charge of the Service of Supply has given up his golf for the duration in a fit of anger because he called up a manufacturer and found him out on the golf course. If that tale be true—and I doubt

it—the General had better think it over again. How does he know that the manufacturer will not turn out a better job after an afternoon of physical conditioning and mental relaxation. The human mind, obviously developed for thinking, frequently fails to achieve that function and lapses into forms of reasoning that would appeal only to a moron. For instance, hours and hours are spent in conditioning our fighters for their tasks— young men especially selected for their fitness.

Morale is the concern of a whole division in our military organization. Yet we look askance at any reasonable effort toward maintaining the fitness and morale of those behind the lines—and I mean specifically men in positions of administration and management, men past middle age, for whom such physical conditioning may mean the difference between efficiency and disability—indeed between health and breakdown, between life and death.

The tremendous popularity of golf in the United States results from many factors. Golf is a game that is played by boys of eight and men of eighty—they can play together and enjoy it. Golf is played by women and men—and, except for something called a mixed foursome, with a great deal of pleasure. A man of 60 not infrequently can beat his son at 20. There

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is hardly any other sport except flycasting where this possibility prevails. Fathers' and sons' tournaments are great for the old man's morale.

The more I think about it the more certain I am that those of us who have been somewhat shame-facedly defending golf as an emergency sport ought to get off the defensive and take the offense. Anything capable of doing what golf can do for us in times like these needs to be given some serious consideration.

Many psychologists have tried to explain the fascination that lies in this so different game. As I have said, anybody can play it. True, the average player gives a lamentable exhibition when his efforts are compared to those of Little, Snead or Hagen. But occasionally, by some coincidental inexplicable coordination of mind and vision and muscle and stance and movements of the earth and wind velocity, Mr. Dub suddenly connects clubface to ball so that the pellicule describes a glorious parabola, alighting some hundreds of yards beyond the point of impact.

The psychoanalyst Stekel says the fascination of the game for those beyond middle age lies in the sense of virility that an oldster feels after accomplishing a perfect drive. Well, that's a sense we all need in wartime. Here is a game where hope springs eternal. That is its psychologic value.

### Golf's Hygienic Significance

Today every expert admits that exuberant health is not dependent on violent exercise. The value of exercise is not in the development of large muscles or in extraordinary athletic performance. When a mile in four minutes is an accomplished fact there will still be few occasions when the average man will need that quality of performance—not as long as there are still tires and gas or even horses—rationing and the meat shortage notwithstanding.

But the attainment of physical poise, symmetry of form and harmonious grace and the furtherance of proper activity of tissue cells and organs are among the chief values sought to be realized. Good health as a whole, not a highly developed muscular system, is the objective of exercise.

Fortunately, enough scientific studies

have been made of golf to establish its values. Vigorous practice and actual shots tend to accelerate the rate of the heart and thus stimulate circulation of the blood. Casual climbing of hills, heat and the wind aid this process. There is a definite rise in blood pressure when we make shots out of a trap. Three practice swings and then an explosion shot out of a trap will raise the pressure every time. The walking of the 3000 or more yards of playing distance makes little difference to healthy men or women when they play at the same tempo all the time. A friendly game has much less effect on the pulse rate and the pulse pressure than a championship contest. But when the golfer gets that do-or-die attitude—when every shot seems so serious that the maximum of concentration is applied—the effects on the body are definite. After a championship tournament the pulse rates of the players may still be rapid on the following morning. Once George Harvey was playing with his pro while Senator Albert J. Beveridge kibitzed the contest. On the first tee Harvey took a half dozen practice swings. Said Beveridge, "George, you seem to be taking a lot of trouble getting into position to hit the ball." Replied George, "Albert, I have listened to your oratory frequently, sometimes with admiration, but more often with a sense of pity. However, this is not the Senate, and it is not a place to start a speech." Then Harvey drove, smack into a bunker! Now, even that has its moral and morale implications.

### Mental Discipline

Alex Morrison—author of a golfing testament—says that the correct swing can be learned by anyone and after that it is just a matter of temperament. "Pressing" is the worst fault in golf. If you can keep calm, if you can avoid all the tightening, tugging and tension included in "pressing," you are conditioning yourself exactly as you should be conditioned for war-time. We see a similar situation in the operating room—the master surgeon calm, relaxed, and certain; the tyro sweating, tense and trembling. We see the situation repeated when boards and committees meet to consider war problems—the statesmen who are properly conditioned are calm, precise, alert, capable of timing their contributions to the discussion. Those who have not been conditioned are fearful; out of their lack

of confidence comes an inconsiderate impetuosity.

**Golf cultivates a self-discipline that goes beyond that of any other game of skill. There is the discipline that requires the player to grasp the club in a certain manner. There is the discipline involved in taking the club-head back slowly. There is the discipline required in bringing the club-head down. There is the necessity to follow through—keep that in mind—to follow through. Is there anything more certainly needed in wartime?**

There is the discipline required in doing the process over and over and over again, until it becomes a simple, rhythmical routine—until the clubhead strikes the ball with an inspiring, satisfying, stimulating click. Not long ago a manufacturer of sporting goods had to stop making golf balls because he could not make one that had that encouraging sound. Even though the ball went farther and lasted longer, players would not use it because they never heard that click. You see what I mean by the emotional release and the confidence developed by golf. Nothing similar, as far as I can determine, comes from graded calisthenics.

### **The Mental Side**

Experts will tell you that your golf depends on the state of your mind and the condition of your body. Equally the state of your mind and the condition of your body if you are past middle age may be somewhat dependent on your golf.

I know of no game which demands more self-confidence than does golf, and yet some of our greatest egoists are poor golfers. That's because their very egoism makes them want to excel and they are under severe tension before they start.

A clergyman who was a golfing fanatic once consulted a celebrated mental specialist because he was always under tension. He relieved himself by a lot of bad language, and he wanted to be freed of his difficult situation. The doctor asked him if he was happily married. Presumably his domestic situation and his repressions at home carried over into the tension on the golf course. That may be the explanation for a good many golf widows. The doctor advised him to give it up. "Give up what?" asked the clergyman, "my bad language, my golf, or my profession." "Well," said the doctor, "try giving up the bad language; then if you

meet with no success, give up the golf." The clergyman said he would rather reverse the order and give up his profession first.

Golf is a game of relaxation in two senses of the word. You must be relaxed to play it well and when you play it well you relax. At the same time, however, there is probably no other game that demands the same amount and the same quality of concentration that golf demands of its addicts. Chick Evans once said that he owed his success to a single word of advice given to him by Harry Vardon, who said: "Think."

There are in the United States something over 5,000 golf courses and the game has been played and enjoyed by millions of people. I understand that England has not given up its golf for the duration although the bomb craters on some of the golf courses have added to the hazards. The shortages of metals and of rubber will no doubt interfere somewhat with the supplies of golfing materials this season and next, but the golfer who plays the game primarily for the sport that is in it and for what it does for him mentally and physically will be satisfied to play with the equipment that he has now plus what he can get. Fortunately the manufacturers are able to recondition golf balls and will do their utmost to keep materials available.

**I see no reason why those of us who like to golf should not take our recreation in that manner rather than in swimming, walking, bicycling, boxing or shoveling, provided we get from golf the kind of relaxation and lift that does not come in any other way.**

Some people prefer gardening and in times like these gardening has real advantages. On our golf course we are going to set aside several acres for those players and their families who want to combine gardening with their golf.

One of the greatest problems of war and one closely related to postwar planning is the problem of salvaging for the post war period some of those activities of our lives which have real significance in the national health and morale. I am not a golf fanatic—oh! yeah!—but I believe that the contribution that golf has made is sufficient to warrant a considerable amount of thought on how best to salvage most of what we have for that period in our lives following the war when the qualities that golf can contribute will be so greatly needed.