



HEIFERS to DUFFERS: *Why Farmers Golf*

By Justin Isherwood

EDITOR'S NOTE: Justin Isherwood is a farmer from potato country up in Plover, Wisconsin. That suggests the possibility of renaming the feature for this issue "From Up North". Mr. Isherwood writes his witty pieces for the Isthmus, a weekly newspaper in Madison, and The Common Tater, a publication of Wisconsin's potato growers. This piece, most fully appreciated by those with a farm background, appeared in a July issue of the Isthmus.

For reasons of moral purity I do not golf. But I have friends, neighbors and kinsmen who do, many of whom are farmers, so I am curious about why farmers golf.

Golf started in a Scottish pasture, specifically a sheep pasture, where shepherds with not enough to occupy their minds took to whacking at stones with their walking sticks. This was a natural antidote to the awful boredom attendant to watching sheep, where either a shepherd gets involved with religion—as amply documented by history—or else commences to look at sheep in a romantic context. The Scots found neither prospect very commendable, and so we got golf.

As we know, all sports are therapeutic. Sport is the one viable alternative to murder, politics, agriculture, marriage, business, warfare and education. Golf is how civilization attempts to disarm otherwise nasty mental attitudes. Our Scottish predecessors understood this. Being prone to warfare themselves, the only thing between them and total annihilation was emotional displacement—in other words, learning to beat up an innocent white ball.

That golf came to exist at the same time sheep agriculture went into decline is no mere accident. Sheep and golf require the same basic resource—short grass. This is because sheep can't eat except hunched over, and little balls get lost in tall grass.

Open space is also necessary because both sheep and golfers smell. Actually, golfers don't smell so bad, but open space is also the best habitat for swearing. Golf was designed by an-

cestral Scots so as to be a remedy for humanity's stifled verbal expression. Baseball evolved from stealing and chewing tobacco. Football followed the customs of beheading and bell-ringing. Basketball developed from the need to wear colored underwear and jump. Only golf singlemindedly attached itself to literary relief.

But why should farmers golf? Farmers have fields to swear in and tractor noise sufficient to disguise foul language, and thus far the Department of Natural Resources hasn't put limits on such discharge. What is lacking in agriculture is the behavioral violence golf allows and normal tractor operation does not. I did say normal tractor operation. Add to this one more innovation of golf—cheating.

Ordinarily, the arithmetic involved in counting strokes ought not to present any difficulty to educated persons; surprisingly, it does. People who can otherwise tell the difference between one wife and two, 50 miles an hour and 70, two eggs or three, cannot understand the difference between four strokes and five. People who remember the name of the third cousin of their great-grandfather twice removed cannot exactly recall whether it was six strokes at the third hole or three strokes at the sixth. Being frugal, as the Scots intended, they put down three.

But we're still not to the heart of it. What can those in agriculture gain from

playing golf? A farmer who golfs will not threaten his best chance at a profit by surplus work. In other words, the more farmers golf, the less they are likely to overdo what the field has in mind. Golf is a better modifier of agricultural sin than drought, floods and hailstorms combined. Never mind the unsettling predictions of bovine growth hormone; so long as farmers are inoculated once or twice a week with a need to swing a stick at an innocent ball, prices will maintain themselves just fine.

Were I the Secretary of Agriculture I would not delve into set-asides, soil banks, wetland protection, buy-outs, feed grains, foreign markets or diversified production. Instead I'd provide every farmer and his apprentice with a set of golf clubs and limousine rides to a nearby golf course at least twice a week from April to November. Not only would the man's psychological health improve but so too his economy. To ensure the results, I'd build a golf course in every township for farmers only, and if they didn't show up I'd shoot 'em for uncapitalistic activities and because they're too damn stupid for us to chance their procreating.

Having sworn off golf, I now realize it's more effective than any government program, besides being a genuine inspiration to ritual violence and verbal expression. I intend to mend my ways now that I've seen the light.

