

The Lunar Golf Shot

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Have you ever thought about hitting a driver 1500 yards or a six-iron 900 yards? Or watching a white ball against a black sky with a time flight of 25 to 30 seconds? What golfer ever dares dream of these things?

I thought about these things during Apollo 14 in 1971. You see, the moon has one-sixth gravity of the Earth. That means with the same club head speed, the ball will go six times as far and stay in the air (or this case the vacuum) six times as long!

Actually Bob Hope gave me the idea of playing golf on the moon, although he didn't know about it until months after the flight. He was visiting NASA one day- Deke Slayton and I were showing him around and he had an old driver that he was swinging as we walked around the campus. We hooked him up in a moon walker and as he was bouncing up and down on his toes, he used the driver for balance! That's when I said, only to myself, I had to find a way to hit a ball on the moon.

Perhaps people on earth watching me on television thought it was spontaneous or unauthorized, but it was well rehearsed and all approved before we launched.

I had planned to use a collapsible aluminum handle, which we normally used to scoop up dust samples, since we really couldn't bend over in a pressurized space suit. And then I had a golf pro design a club head to snap on the handle, replacing the small scoop. It was a number six iron since the handle was about as long as a normal six-iron shaft. I planned to take the club head and two ordinary golf balls in my suit pocket - at no expense to the taxpayers!

I practiced before the flight several times in the suit-training room to be sure I could swing safely. The pressurized suit is cumbersome and I wouldn't get both hands on the club; still I could make a golf swing with one hand. And, finally, I checked with the "boss" and told him my plan to hit two golf balls at the very end of the lunar stay, only if everything went perfectly well up to that point. He agreed.

Fortunately, although we had some problems earlier, everything went just right while we were on the surface. Consequently, just before climbing up the ladder to come home, I prepared to tee off! When I dropped the first ball, it took a bout three seconds to land, and bounced a couple of times on the dust. Then, I improved my lie of course (winter rules in February) and made my best slow motion one-handed half-swing. Making a full swing in a space suit

is impossible. I made good contact with the ball, which would have gone 30-40 yards on earth, went over 200 yards. The ball stayed up in the black sky for almost 30 seconds. I was so excited I swung harder on the second one, which I shanked about 40 yards into a nearby crater. I decided to call that a hole in one, even if the hole was several miles in diameter.

So I folded up the golf club and climbed up the ladder to take off. The two balls are still there and ready to be reclaimed and reused- after all, they were new. But the club resides in a place of honor at the U. S. Golf Association in Far Hills, New Jersey, where all who see it can imagine, as did I, what a 1,500 yard tee shot would be like!

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