

For the golf addict, even when it's bad, it's good



Growing up in Southern California, there are a few things all young lads learn to do.

The learn how to say "dude" with just the proper tone and inflection.

They learn how to body surf the Wedge at Newport. And they learn how to play golf.

I golf. Have for years. I play the sport simply because I don't have enough frustration in my life.

As much as I'd like to be a good golf player, my skill level (professionally described as "pathetic") just isn't there. I am a hacker, a duffer, a high-handicap, high-stress golfer.

It doesn't matter. I still love the game.

Newcomers to the sport think it's easy. After all, the ball doesn't move, and there are no safety blitzes when you putt. Hit the ball with the stick. Simple, huh?

Right

The golf swing looks deceptively easy. It's a matter of bringing the club back and returning it to the exact same spot. Then follow through.

You would think there would be a limited number of mistakes a person could make during a backswing, and you would be right. At last count, there were 467 of them.

My golf swing has been compared to an old man fending off a mugger with a 2-iron. On drives, I would sometimes be better just kicking the ball off the tee rather than trying to hit it. A shot for me on the fairway is rare enough to suggest divine intervention.

Ten years of playing the game has left me with several conclusions. One is that I will never be on the PGA Tour. The other is that all golf course designers are evil.

Golf course designers have some intrinsic, genetic defect which makes them want to turn average golfers into sobbing infants. In past lives, they probably enjoyed the Inquisition. Genghis Kahn would have

made brutal water hazards.

Don't get me wrong. Some of today's courses are beautiful mixes of nature and man-made hazards. There is still no better way to spend four hours on a sunny Saturday afternoon than on the golf course. But a course designer can take an ordinary par four, and with a sprinkling of lakes, fairway bunkers and an elevated green, turn it into something from *Paradise Lost*.

If there is a hazard on a golf course, I will hit into it. I spend more time in the sand than the average beach bunny; I log more minutes in water than most whales. I can hit a beautiful drive, then launch a 9-iron dead on to the green, only to see a late gust of wind drop me into a sand trap.

Three minutes later I will emerge, sand-covered and swearing, lining up my 35-foot triple bogie putt.

Golf is also one of the few legal things which can spark instant addiction. I introduced my roommate Nolan to the game just six months ago. At the time, he didn't know what a sand wedge was. However, at

Christmas, I received a phone call in which Nolan told me about his new set of golf clubs. He used a lot of words like "counter-balanced heads." He talked like a golf pro.

Now, he watches golf on television and gets into arguments about the relative merits of Fred Couples and Nick Faldo. It wouldn't be so bad except he is beginning to beat me.

That I really can't stand. Don Peters is an editorial editor for the Emerald.

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