

Golf is still a four-letter word

Note: After I wrote this (and sent it to the Enterprise), something told me to check my files. Egad. I found nearly the SAME article I had written and provided to the paper two years earlier! Amazing! Not only does golf haunt me, my mind is able to recreate an article written 24 months earlier and not even know it. I changed the title, adding "still," and hope no one else remembers my first story. I need help.

I hate golf. Well, to be more precise, I hate the way I play golf. My father, Kayle, got me started playing this sadistic sport back in the early 1960s on Holyoke's then rustic golf course. I have never forgiven him.

I think my dad used golf as an outlet to his sometimes stressful days at the Highline Electric Association. In today's violent, big city environment, people take guns to the office and start shooting.

Back then, Dad was more diplomatic. He took his son to the course after work or on Saturday and relieved his tension by beating a little white ball mercilessly and (though not often) seeing how aerodynamic a driver was when thrown about 50 yards. Oh, and he worked on his language skills so that, on Sunday, he could have something to ask God forgiveness for when mom made him go to church.

Perhaps the reason I have no true athletic golf skills is hereditary. My dad wrote left-handed, batted left-handed, but bowled and played golf right-handed. I am not sure I can do anything very well with either hand, even write, so that is why I use my fingers and type a lot.

I can't imagine hitting a golf club left-handed, though there have been many times when my ball is hiding directly behind a tree or up next to someone's fence and I have tried (in vain) to smack it out of trouble with the back of a 4-iron, swinging wildly with my left hand. Mumbling or cursing usually follows this attempt.

Guest Commentary

Written by Bob Russell

I played in a few silly tournaments in Holyoke during high school, but the game really didn't capture my full attention. I think I was mostly hoping to not find a rattlesnake in one of the prairie dog holes in the fairways before the city finally planted real grass and watered the course. It was pretty rough back in those days.

And most of the people I play with today have never heard of sand greens; when I say that I grew up learning how to putt on sand, I get this quizzical look and puzzled stare.

I can remember the few times my dad took me to Denver to play on a "real" course and I would rocket my putts back and forth across those slick grass greens, so used to smacking the ball really hard on Holyoke's sand greens—I sometimes logged more strokes on the green than the hacks and whacks in the fairway just trying to get to the green.

I didn't play in college at all. I found out I was way more talented shooting pool and drinking beer and chasing women. My dad was a great pool shark, working in a pool hall for years in Holyoke and he taught me the game. The women and beer thing I sort of learned by myself. Golf took up way too much time, cost too much and no woman would have spent 10 minutes with me, had they seen my prowess on the links.

I also didn't play much in my Air Force career—once in Germany and once in Spain and a few times when stationed stateside. Oh, I did get to play St. Andrews, the "home" of golf. Three of my friends and I flew our F-15 fighters to Scotland and just had to say we played arguably the most famous course in the world. We rented clubs and (after way too much drinking the night before) played this marvelous piece of terrain on a windy, cold day in March.

Scottish courses are tough even on a nice day, with hundreds of small, hidden pothole bunkers in the fairways, sand traps near the green big enough to hide a Volkswagen, and heather (imagine poison ivy with thorns) in the rough, a place in which I spend a lot of time.

We walked the course, leaned into a 40-knot gale wind off the icy North Sea, bundled up against the cold and hacked and whacked and cursed our way around, knowing we could then brag to everyone that we had mastered St. Andrews.

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Probably my biggest mistake regarding this horrible sport, however, came when we were stationed in Hawaii, a golfer's paradise. Greg, an Army friend, was a great golfer and always on a course when not working. His wife, Jey, decided she would learn the sport so she could be with Greg on the weekends. She invited my wife, Judy, to come along.

Greg and I laughed, knowing that the women could never learn the sport and drop this silly notion in short order. Jey did quit her lessons and gave golf up; however, my wife LOVED the sport and paid attention to her instructor, so I soon found out how humbling it can be when your wife beats you nearly every time you get a chance to play.

Those of you who know me understand my pain and anguish. A type A, confident, former fighter pilot, I am not used to being humbled by the opposite sex in a once male-dominated sport.

Nevertheless, being masochistic, I keep taking my wife on and sometimes even inching ahead during a round, only to end up a distant second by the time we finish. Driven to tears, I slink from tee to tee hoping for some sort of redemption, but rarely see it. She takes great pride in putting me in my place.

Part of my problem is my strategy: if the ball goes so far with a gentle swing, it stands to reason that a supersonic swing will drive the ball farther. Not so. I spend a lot of time in forests, lakes, rivers, sand traps, driveways, back yards, swimming pools and roads—anywhere but the fairway.

Judy rarely ever misses the fairway and most ladies' tees offer about 1,000 yards of advantage over the men's tees on a normal 18-hole course. She arrives at the green and then has to wait on me, while I climb fences, wade in creeks, search in thorny thickets or sneak into someone's yard to get my errant ball.

When we are finally both on the green, I can finally compete—in fact, I think we should restrict our playing to putt-putt courses in the future, as I might get to win occasionally.

As I get older and my embarrassment wanes with regular beatings, I at least have improved my

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language, stopped breaking or tossing clubs and resisted suicidal tendencies while playing this game. What I don't understand is that I can be hot, tired, dirty and getting the tar beat out of me, yet I still want to go back out on a course and try again in a day or two.

Golf is like a drug; you know you should stop, it is doing you absolutely no good, yet it gets in your system and you can't shake it. I am thinking of starting a GA (Golfers Anonymous) group and starting a petition to make it illegal for any woman, especially a wife, to play on the same course as a man.

Bob Russell graduated from HHS in 1964 and is a retired fighter pilot and cockpit designer. Retired in Arkansas, his love-hate relationship with golf is legendary. Bob thanks the Holyoke Enterprise for holding back meaningful articles to publish his tongue-in-cheek stories. Bob hopes no one who really loves the horrid game of golf will take this diatribe seriously. He would love to write more on the subject, but he has to clean Judy's clubs and golf shoes for the next outing. Fore!

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