

TOTALLY RIVETING UTTERLY ENTERTAINING TRIVIA

Al Capone was a GOLFER

Hundreds of Fascinating Facts from the World of Golf



Erin Barrett and Jack Mingo

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A Word from the Authors

Clearly, it's easy to lose perspective about a game like golf. Golf combines so many variables, from weather and course design to individual players' physical abilities and mental attitude, that every round is different. Are fanatic golfers best envied or pitied? Have they found the secret of living large, or are they escaping from it? Are a driver, a putter, and a sunny day the keys to wisdom or the distractions that will forever keep someone from attaining it?

These are all questions that every golfer must grapple with. Thank heavens, however, we don't do that here. Instead, we offer arcane trivia, celebrity anecdotes, fun facts, and quotes from the best and worst golfers you've ever heard of. If you want to wrestle with the meaning behind the game of golf or learn how to psychically become one with your driver on a par 5, go buy another book. But if you want to know why they're called "duffers," who has driven a golf ball more than a mile, and what it took to make Groucho Marx throw his golf clubs over a cliff at Cypress Point ... well, this is your book. (Or at least it will be, when you take it up to the register and actually pay for it.)

Enjoy!

Erin Barrett
Jack Mingo

one
Golf Is ...



AFTER A BAD DAY'S GOLF.

"Golf is a puzzle without an answer."

—Gary Player

"Golf is an expensive way of playing marbles."

—G. K. Chesterton, author

"Golf is the Lord's punishment for man's sins."

—James Reston, journalist

"Golf is a game with the soul of a 1956 Rotarian."

—Bill Mandel, Berkeley radio legend

"Golf is a game of expletives not deleted."

—Dr. Irving J. Gladstone, golfer

"Golf is an ideal diversion, but a ruinous disease."

—Bertie Charles Forbes

"Golf is the hardest game in the world to play, and the easiest to cheat at."

—Dave Hill, pro golfer

"Golf is so popular simply because it is the best game in the world at which to be bad."

—A. A. Milne

"Golf is a game whose aim is to hit a very small ball into an even smaller hole, with weapons singularly ill-designed for the purpose."

—Winston Churchill



"Golf is like faith: It is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

—Arnold Haultain, Canadian author (1857–1941)

“Golf is the most fun you can have without taking your clothes off.”

—*Chi Chi Rodriguez*

“Golf is a wonderful exercise. You can stand on your feet for hours, watching somebody else putt.”

—*Will Rogers*

“Golf is essentially an exercise in masochism conducted out of doors.”

—*Paul O'Neil*

“Golf is war. And like all wars, if you're not looking to win, you probably shouldn't show up.”

—*Capt. Bruce Waren Ollstein*
, author and golf strategist

“Golf is a game where the ball always lies poorly and the player always lies well.”

—*Anonymous golfer*

“Golf is not just exercise: It is an adventure, a romance ... a Shakespeare play in which disaster and comedy are intertwined and you have to live with the consequences.”

—*Harold Segall, golfer*

“Golf is a game that creates emotions that sometimes cannot be sustained with the club still in one's hand.”

—*Bobby Jones*

“Golf is 20 percent mechanics and technique. The other 80 percent is philosophy, humor, tragedy, romance, melodrama, companionship, camaraderie, cussedness, and conversation.”

—*Grantland Rice, American sportswriter*

“Golf is the hardest game in the world. There is no way you can ever get it. Just when you think you've got it, the game jumps up and puts you in your place.”

—*Ben Crenshaw*

“Golf is an awkward set of bodily contortions designed to produce a graceful result.”

—*Thomas Armour, golfer*

“Golf is good for the soul. You get so mad at yourself you forget to hate your enemies.”

—*Will Rogers*

“Golf is like a cat chasing its tail. You're never going to catch it. The day you think you've got your game down pat, something goes awry and you're back to square one. That's one reason why I love the game so much: the soul-searching, and the never-ending search for the perfect swing.”

—*Greg Norman*

“Golf is an exercise which is much used by the Gentlemen in Scotland. A large common, in which there are several little holes, is chosen for the purpose. It is played with little leather balls stuffed with feathers, and sticks tipped with horn.... A man would live ten years the longer for using this exercise once or twice a week.”

—*Dr. Benjamin Rush (1770)*

“Golf is not a game of great shots. It's a game of the most accurate misses.”

—*Gene Little*

“Golf is like a horse—If you take your eye off it, it'll jump back and kick your shins for you.”

—*Byron Nelson*

“Golf is a game of endless predicaments.”

—*Chi Chi Rodriguez*

“Golf is not a fair game. It's a rude game.”

—*Fuzzy Zoeller*

“Golf is 20 percent talent and 80 percent management.”

—*Ben Hogan*

“Golf is not so much a game as it is a creed and a religion.”

—*Arnold Haultain*

“Golf is meant to be fun.”

—*Jack Nicklaus*

“Golf is just a game, and an idiotic one at that.”

—*Mark Calcavecchia (after failing to make the cut at the British Open)*

“Golf is a game where guts, stick-to-it-ness, and blind devotion will get you nothing but an ulcer.”

—*Tommy Bolt*

Driving and Putting Through History



Who invented golf? We could go with the Scots, but it's not that easy. The simple fact is that hitting a rock into a hole in the ground is such a no-brainer concept for a game that dozens of nationalities can lay claim to having invented it. Evidence shows exactly that—that the basic game was invented over and over again all over the world.

The Visigoths—known for their plundering and overall pillaging—may have played golf before they overthrew ancient Rome on August 4, 410. But whether they knew of the game before the sack of Rome, this very unrefined lot, many historians believe, certainly played the golf-like game of *paganica* afterward.

According to historian Ling Hong-ling, the Chinese played a game very much like modern golf five centuries before the Scots. *Chuiwan* (“hitting ball”) was depicted in tenth-century pottery designs and paintings and mentioned in a document that dates back to A.D. 943. Hong-ling believes that early travelers brought the game back to Europe. The game's popularity died out in the 1500s, a few decades after the game was “invented” in Scotland.

French people swear that golf came from their ancient game called *Jeu de Mail*.

Golf also might've come from an early British game called *knur and spell*.

Belgium's game called *chole* goes back to the 1300s. Although similar to golf, both sides played the same ball, and at certain intervals, the opposing team had the opportunity to hit the ball into an available hazard.

The Dutch game of *kolven*, which was played on any surface including ice, may have been golf's predecessor. The supporters of this theory insist that the word *tee* came from the old Dutch *tuyt* (pronounced “toytee”), meaning “mound;” *golf* came from *kolfe* (“club”); and *putt* came from *put* (“hole”).

Kolven at least has the distinction of being the first golf-like game played by colonists in the New World: Historians have found a warrant from 1657 for the arrest of three Dutch immigrants in Fort Orange (now Albany, New York), charged with skipping church and playing *kolven* on Sunday.

Two years later, Fort Orange issued an ordinance to “forbid all persons from playing ‘het kolven’ in the streets.”

Whatever its earlier roots, linguists say that the word *golf* comes from an ancient Scottish word *golv* that meant “to strike.”

What the L!: *Goiff* and *goff* were the preferred spelling and pronunciation of “golf” during the 1500s and the 1600s.

Regardless, golf eventually emerged in Scotland. Whether it was indigenous or— like kilts and the bagpipe—imported from somewhere else, the game became so popular that King James II feared that his army was spending too much time playing it instead of practicing their archery. On March 6, 1457, he decreed that “Fute-ball and Golfe be utterly cryed down” (banned) as a threat to his army's readiness to do battle against England.

King James IV reaffirmed the embargo in 1491. However, it was a “Do as I say, not as I do” situation—he is the first player of golf for whom we have documentation. A notation in the Lord High Treasurer's accounts shows payment of 14 shillings to a bow-maker for making “the King's golf clubbis and ballis.” From that point on, the treasurer's records showed numerous golf-related expenses for replacement balls and even a gambling debt to the Earl of Bothwell for 14 shillings lost on the links.

After a peace treaty with England, Scotland's ban against golf was finally rescinded by King James IV in 1503, except “in tyme of sermonis” on Sunday.

Perhaps King James should've kept the ban. Scots became very good at golf ... but their archery abilities got rusty. When the 1503 peace treaty fell apart ten years later, the Scots suffered a bloody defeat by English archers at the Battle of Flodden in 1513. Scotland lost not only many men and a number of their royals but a king as well: King James IV was killed in battle.

Church records from Scotland in the sixteenth century show that parishioners were severely fined the first two times they were caught playing golf on the Sabbath. The third time, they were excommunicated.

King James IV's notorious granddaughter, Mary, Queen of Scots, was the first known female golfer. Before she lost her head for other reasons, she gave her life to golf. History tells it that when Mary, Queen of Scots heard the news of the murder of her husband (who also happened to be her cousin), she was in the middle of a game of golf. By all accounts, she scandalized her subjects and the clergy by continuing to play her round, and then playing again just a few days later. (The fact that she hated her husband, likely arranged his murder, and then married his murderer just three months later didn't help, either.)

Mary's son, James VI, was also an avid golfer. He spread the habit to England when he became its king. As England's James I, he helped heal the church/golf split, in that he was the King James who authorized the first English translation of the Bible.

James I made two golf-related proclamations. One appointed William Moyer, an expert crafter of bows, as Royal Golf Club Maker. The other forbade the purchase of golf balls from Holland, upon which golfers were spending “no small quantitie of golde and silver,” and assigned a twenty-one-year monopoly of ball making to one James Melvil. (This latter proclamation some historians point to as evidence of golf's Dutch origins.)

Despite golf's popularity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it took some 150 years before the game became institutionalized and formalized. In 1744, the Company of Gentlemen Golfers of Leith (Scotland) became the first golf organization, and their thirteen rules were the earliest known written golf code.

The original thirteen written rules of golf had a few variations from the ones we play now. For one

the green of the previous hole was the tee of the next hole—players were to start within a club length from the last hole. Once a ball was played on a hole, no substitute ball could be introduced. And if a player lifted his ball out of water or “watery filth,” his opponent got to play an extra stroke.

What is now known as the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews wasn't formed until ten years later. In 1754, its twenty-two founding members adopted golf rules that were almost identical to the Leith Club's. St. Andrews' many holes proved more popular than Leith's five, which eventually led to the standardization of the golf game to conform to St. Andrews'.

Still, golfing organizations didn't exactly go “Fore!” and multiply. In 1864, more than a century later, there were only thirty-three known golfing clubs—thirty in Scotland and three in England.

The first permanent golfing club in the Western Hemisphere was the Royal Montreal Golf Club, which was established in 1873.

The first golf club in the United States? It's in dispute. The Oakhurst (West Virginia) Golf Club is said, without documentation, to have had a founding date of 1884. The Dorset (Vermont) Field Club has equally undocumented claims that it was organized in 1886. Our call on the whole mess? The Foxburg (Pennsylvania) Golf Course, which has documentation to show that its golf course was built in 1885 and its charter became formalized in 1887.

It wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century that golf took off like a straight shot to the green. By 1900 there were golfing organizations all over the world and more than 2,000 in England alone.

The first professional golf tournament was sponsored by the Prestwick (Scotland) Golf Course in 1860. Called the Open Championship, it attracted eight professional golfers and a considerable degree of skepticism: after all, could somebody playing for money be trusted to abide by the rules of the game, since a true gentleman played only for the honor of winning?

The Prestwick competition eventually became known as the British Open, the name it bears today.

Early golfing clubs were as dedicated to drinking as they were to driving ... which helps explain why the British Open trophy is a claret jug.

The early days of the British Open consisted of playing the same nine holes four times in a single day. Ending before dark was always a challenge, so it became a tradition for frontrunners to bribe poorly scoring competitors to quit early and speed up the game.

The very first golf manual was published in England. Written by H. B. Farnie in 1857, it was called—sensibly enough— *The Golfer's Manual*.

The first American book on golf, *Golf in America: A Practical Manual*, was published in 1895. Until that point, most Americans were terribly confused by the game, as inadvertently revealed by an explanatory article in the *Philadelphia Times*:

It is sometimes agreed that the game shall be won by him who makes the largest number of holes within a given number of minutes, say twenty or thirty. ... Each player places his ball at the edge of a hole designated as a starting point. He then bats it ... toward the next hole. As soon as it has started he runs forward ... and his servant, who is called “caddy,” runs after him.
...

As far as anyone knows, the first photo of someone playing golf in the United States was taken in 1888.

Horace L. Hotchkiss was in his sixties when he organized the first seniors' golf tournament at the Apawamis Club in Rye, New York, in 1905, attempting to prove that golf wasn't just a young person's game. It was a huge success, and the United States Seniors Golf Association was formed twelve years later.

The Ryder Cup was started in 1926 by Samuel Ryder, a wealthy English businessman who made his fortune from selling penny packets of flower seeds.

Samuel Ryder's idea of good prize money? "I'll give \$5 to each of the winning players," he offered. "And I'll give a party afterwards, with champagne and chicken sandwiches." Eventually he was convinced to put up \$250 for a solid gold trophy instead.

 Golf by the Numbers


“Golf is a game in which you shout ‘Fore,’ shoot six and write down five.”

—Paul Harvey

1 in 8,606: One often-repeated estimate as to the odds of making a hole-in-one—that averages out to one in every 478 rounds.

1 in 13,000: The estimate of companies that sell hole-in-one prize insurance to golf tournament organizers, or about one in every 722 rounds.

According to the Professional Golfers Association (PGA), a male professional's or a top amateur player's chances are 3,708 to 1 (an average of one hole-in-one every 206 rounds); a female pro's odds are 4,648 to 1 (one every 258 rounds). However, the average player's odds are only 42,952 to 1 (one every 2,386 rounds).

49: Holes-in-one made by golf pro Mancil Davis, who had more in his career than any other pro.

\$85.70: The average cost of a weekend's green fees in Hawaii, the most expensive state in which to play golf.

\$23.80: The average cost of a weekend's green fees in South Dakota, the cheapest state in which to play golf.

6: Tiger Woods' age when he got his first hole-in-one. However, at the time he failed to beat the record for youngest hole-in-one, which had been set by a five-year-old.

3: The age, in 2001, of Jake Paine of Lake Forest, California, who smashed Tiger Woods' record. He teed off with his Snoopy driver and hit the ball a soaring and rolling 48 yards, directly into the cup.

\$180,000: The initiation fee of the most expensive golf and country club in the United States, not including monthly dues. The club in question is the Vintage Club of Indian Wells, California.

\$900,000: The amount awarded to Retief Goosen for winning the U.S. Open in 2001.

\$500: The amount awarded to Gene Sarazen for winning the U.S. Open in 1922.

\$28,000: The price of a four-passenger, fully loaded deluxe Deusenberg Estate Golf Car, including CD players and rack-and-pinion steering.

101 mph: The speed that a driver travels when swung by a typical “accomplished” golfer.

7: The world record for the number of golf balls balanced on top of each other.

10 percent: The percentage of all professional golfers who are single and unattached.

35: The mean age of those players who tour with the PGA.

7 feet: The minimum height that the United States Golf Association (USGA) calls an adequate flagstick.

90: The compression number of a normal golf ball. The compression number measures the springiness of the ball. In windy or hot conditions, a ball should be harder, with a compression number of about 100.

12 percent: The percentage of all lightning fatalities that happen on golf courses.

\$15,000: The asking price by a sports memorabilia firm for a revolver used in the suicide of Clifford Roberts. Roberts was co-founder of the Masters Golf Tournament and its chairman from 1931 until his death in 1977. Roberts killed himself next to “Ike's Pond” on the Augusta National Golf Course and is buried in a secret location somewhere on the course.

 What's the Good Word?


Golf has a lot of slang terms. Some have great stories about their origins; others don't. Here's sampling:

Albatross You know what birdies and eagles are, but did you know that it's an *albatross* when a player plays a hole three strokes under par? These days—perhaps mindful of *The Ancient Mariner*—golfers usually call it a “double eagle.”

Birdie The term for one stroke under par has been traced to one Abner H. Smith, a golfer at the Atlantic City (New Jersey) Country Club, who in either 1898 or 1903 shouted, “That's a bird of a shot!” to a fellow player when he came in one stroke under par. The story sounds a little weak to us, but who knows? Anyway, others took the avian motif and came up with eagles, double eagles, and albatrosses.

Bogey The name for going one over par has nothing to do with Humphrey Bogart. It comes from beating the “bogeyman” of the golf course. In Middle English, the term referred to a hobgoblin, bugbear, or the devil himself. A song, *The Bogey Man*, became very popular in England in 1891, and the phrase was heard often on the golf course not long after. In England, it came to mean “par,” and golfers began referring to a mythical Colonel Bogey who dependably shot par. In the United States, though, bogey came to mean one stroke over par.



(A quick, golf-related tangent: *The Colonel Bogey March* was published in 1914 and later was used as the whistled theme in the 1957 movie, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. It was written by British Lt. J. Ricketts under the name Kenneth Alford. The story is that Ricketts had nicknamed his golf-loving commanding officer “Colonel Bogey.” On the golf course, the colonel thought it undignified to shout “Fore!” and instead whistled a loud two-note “Yoo hoo!”—in musical terms, a “descending minor third.” His little musical trademark stuck in Ricketts's mind and grew into the phrase that makes up the memorable march.)



Bunke It comes from the Scottish *bunker*, *bunkart*, or *bonkar*—all variations of a term that means a storage hole dug into the side of a hill. It may have come originally from Old Swedish *bunke*, which is a protected part of a ship.

Burn Scottish golfers call basic water hazards “burns.” Why? A burn is a spring. It's an Old English word (perhaps handed down from the German) that's still in use. Originally it meant “springing up” and could be applied to either water or fire. The water meaning faded in most parts of the world, but those across the Big Pond still use it from time to time ... especially in the land of Robert Burns.

Caddy From French *cadet*, meaning a young man. Reportedly from the practice of Mary, Queen of Scots, who used young men from her court to carry her golf equipment.

Chip In old Scotland, *chipping* (instead of “chopping,” as in England) was the word used for cutting wood with an ax.

Divot Means “a piece of turf” in Scottish.

Dolly Parton Witty (or so they thought) golfers came up with “Dolly Parton” as a slang term for a particularly hilly and uneven green.

Duffer From the Scottish *duffar* or *doofart*: “a dull, stupid person.”

Fore! Best guess is that it's a shortened version of what British artillerymen shouted at infantry troops before they fired a volley over their heads: “Beware before!” meaning, “Duck!” to the people *before* them, up ahead. Over time, “Before,” was shortened to “Fore!” and “Beware” was too wordy in battle and so was dropped completely. Golfers swiped the phrase. Some claim that in 1770, John Knox, the Scottish reformer, was the first to use the term “Fore” on the golf course. This is up for debate.

Frog hairs The fine grass that borders a green on a golf course is often called “fringe” or “apron” in the United States. Across the pond, however, in Great Britain, it's also called “fringe,” but it's sometimes referred to as the “collar” or “frog hairs.” “Frog hairs” comes from the expression for something so fine you can hardly see it. As in, “It's as fine as frog hairs.” Them limeys are an interesting lot, eh wot?

Links The term “links” comes from *hlinc*, an old Anglo-Saxon word that means “slope” or “rising ground.” Early courses in Scotland were on slopes that ran down to the seas. Now the term is used more loosely as slang to mean any golf course.

Mulligan Why taking a second chance at a muffed shot is called a Mulligan nobody knows, but members of scores of old golf courses swear it came from a long-ago member named Mulligan (or in one case “Mel Egan”) who was notorious for taking second and third chances when things went awry. Another legend is that it comes from “Hit ‘em all again!” Or even “Mull [it over] again.”

Putt Seems to come from an old spelling for *put*, as in “Put the ball in there, laddie!” However, old British meanings for the term also include a trap for fish and a cart for carrying manure.

Round Why is a game of golf called a “round”? Because courses are traditionally laid out in a loose circular pattern, bringing players at the last hole back to where they started.

Score slang Because of the number's shape, “snowman” is a slang term some witty golfer invented for a score of 8 on a hole. Likewise, “hockey stick” for a 7, and so on.

Stymie From the Scottish word meaning “not being able to see.”

Tee Not from the T-shape, as you might expect, but from the Scottish word *teez*. It refers to a small pile of sand or dirt, which is what golfers teed off from before an African American dentist invented the first wooden tee. When the word traveled from Scotland, people thought that *teez* was plural, so snipped off the *z* when talking about one.

Tiger tee It's not the golf tee that Tiger Woods uses; it's the slang term applied to the very back tee.

Texas wedge If you use a putter anywhere other than the green (and some peculiar folks do), you don't call it a putter. For heavens sake, no. You can call it a “Texas wedge,” or nothin' a'tall. Ya hear?

It Takes Balls ... and Some Clubs



The National Sporting Goods Association reports that golfers spend about \$600 million every year on equipment, including clubs, bags, carts, shoes ... and replacements for equipment destroyed in anger. “The golfer will never settle for anything. He's too insecure. The golfer is a crazy guy. If he thinks a new ball will go a 20th of an inch longer, that's his ball.”

—*Dave Lumley, marketing director, Wilson Sporting Goods*

Golfers buy more than 500 million new golf balls every year.

The first golf ball was made by the ancient Romans for the game they called *paganica*. It was made of feathers wrapped in leather. A good *paganica* player could drive one about 150 yards.

Scottish ball makers refined the process in the early days of “gawf.” They wet a hatful of goose feathers with a mix of alum and water, squeezed them into a tight ball, and stitched them into a leather cover. The feather-and-leather ball was the state of the art for centuries. That extreme compression sent the ball soaring about 180 yards.

Each “feathery” ball took about two hours to make, and so cost a lot. Worse, it tended to fall apart quickly when hit with metal clubs and became sodden and lethargic in wet weather.

Still, the feathery balls floated. As a result, in the early game of golf in Scotland, water hazards weren't so hazardous, as long as you got the ball out quickly before water seeped inside. Balls could simply be played from the surface of ponds and streams.

In 1848, the first rubber-based golf ball flew off a tee, just nine years after Charles Goodyear first vulcanized rubber. Manufacturers called it the “gutta percha,” naming it after the Malaysian gum tree that gave its sap for the material (in Malay, *getah* means “gum” and *percha* means “tree”).

Incidentally, gutta percha was also used for dental fillings in the eighteenth century.

Gutta percha balls revolutionized the game largely because they were much cheaper than the handmade balls they replaced. What was once a game for the fabulously wealthy became accessible to the merely affluent.

Some golf historians credit the cheapness of mass-produced gutta percha balls with spawning the golf boom of the late 1800s.

These first mass-produced golf balls weren't white. Because of the materials they were made from they were more of a gray.

In 1899, solid gutta percha balls were replaced with “bounding billies,” balls consisting of a rubber core tightly wound with rubber bands and covered with gutta percha skin.

From Pimples to Dimples

At the turn of the century, scientists began unraveling a question that had bedeviled golfers for a half-century: Why did gutta percha balls travel a distance equal to that of the feather-leather balls when new but 60 percent farther when old and beat up? After discarding several theories (including that rubber got bouncier with age), the scientists came up with a mind-boggling solution: The increase in distance came from the nicks, cuts, and scratches that marred an old gutta percha ball. The spin of a nicked-up ball provided lift like that of the wings of an airplane (which hadn't been invented yet) and also made the ball fly more accurately.

Ball makers tried to incorporate this new data into the design of their balls, trying to come up with the best pattern. They tried a rough mesh design; they also tried triangle-shaped dimples, rope patterns pressed into the outer shell, circle-patterned markings, and even bumps.

In 1908, triangles and pimples gave way to the circular dimples we know now (it was the fastest and farthest-flying design). That has remained mostly unchanged for nearly a century.

In 1983, the average ball had 330 dimples. By 2001, the average ball had 415, with the range between 360 and 523 as the most popular.

Each dimple can be .01 of an inch deep.

How well do modern dimples work? Take similar balls, one with dimples and one without. If you can hit the dimpled ball 260 yards, you'll find that the same shot will send the smooth ball only 120 yards.



Ever heard of the pneumatic ball? We thought not. Made by B. F. Goodrich in 1905, the ball was filled with compressed air and hit farther than any other ball on the links. Just one, teensy-weensy problem: The ball was known to explode in the heat. The pneumatic ball died a quick and quiet death.

“Two balls in the water. By God, I've got a good mind to jump in and make it four!”

—Simon Hobday, pro golfer

It's Not the Size of Your Balls

There is no official size for golf balls, per se—they just cannot be any bigger than 1.68 inches in diameter or weigh more than 1.62 ounces.

For fifty-nine years, the American golf ball and the official Great Britain golf ball were two different sizes. When in 1931 the United States Golf Association (USGA) approved a ball that measured 1.68 inches in diameter, Great Britain did not quickly follow suit. The Brits kept their ball the old standard—a maximum of 1.62 inches in diameter—until surrendering in 1990.

At one point American golfers petitioned the international rulemakers to allow them to increase the size of the hole from its standard 4 1/2 inches diameter, arguing that was only fair considering the bigger balls. They were turned down.



You might still be playing with the same ball as last year, but professional golfers switch balls every few holes, because after all those whacks, a ball tends to start getting out of round.

On a hot day, heat softens golf balls, reducing compression.

Believing folklore about golf equipment can be costly. Ask Mark Minnie of San Jose, California, who, as a seventeen-year-old, heard a radio personality say that a hot ball would travel farther than a cold one. Minnie took the information to heart and decided to put a golf ball into the family microwave. The ball exploded all over the inside of the oven.

Does the latest “miracle ball” really increase your distance? Not according to the USGA, which finds no evidence that today's golf balls travel any farther than those of twenty years ago.

Still, that doesn't stop manufacturers from trying. They've experimented with ball cores of cork, lead, ball bearings, even mercury.

A ball with a transmitter inside that allowed a player to locate it with a radio receiver was banned in the 1970s.

The USGA keeps careful tabs on the claims and specs of new equipment. Using an automated swing machine, a ball can fly no faster than 250 feet per second off the club head nor travel more than 288 yards.

The USGA swing machine, by the way, is called the Iron Byron, in honor of golfing giant Byron Nelson.

Mashies, Brassies, and Niblicks

“There are long cleeks and short cleeks, driving cleeks, lofting cleeks, putting cleeks; there are heavy irons and tight irons, driving irons, lofting irons, and sand irons. There are mashies and niblicks. In this multitude of golf clubs there is wisdom—somewhere—but it can scarcely be that all of them are necessary.”

—Horace Hutchinson, writer and championship golfer (1890)

In the golden age of golf, at the end of the nineteenth century, writer Robert Chambers listed the clubs that every well-equipped player had on hand:

- The *play club* for driving;
- The *mashie* or *long spoon* for getting out of roughs;
- The *short spoon* for short drives of 100 yards or less;
- The *brassie*, which was a wood with a protective brass sole;
- The *sand iron* for lofting the ball out of hazards and over stymies;
- The *cleek*, an iron for long shots; and
- The *niblick* or *track iron*, a small club with a heavy iron head made for getting the ball out of holes.

How about the rut iron? Believe it or not, it was quite useful in its heyday. The rut iron was designed especially to chip a player's ball out of a wagon-wheel rut. Fortunately for the golfer, but unfortunately for the rut iron's manufacturer, cars soon replaced wagons, and golf courses stopped allowing for through traffic.



“Why am I using a new putter? Because the old one didn't float too well.”

—Craig Sandle

The first golfers, desperate for good equipment, commissioned bow makers and carpenters to make their clubs.

Early wooden golf clubs split so easily that golfers routinely carried replacements.

As *gutties* took over where *featheries* left off, the slender, long-nosed wooden clubs (think thin smaller hockey sticks) were simply too unstable to handle the harder balls. Club design therefore quickly changed to the more blunt, thicker and harder club style we're more familiar with today.

Golf rules set the maximum number of golf clubs in your bag at fourteen.

Persimmon wood from America is the preferred wood used for golf clubs.

A hook can be the result of using golf clubs with too much flex in their shaft.

“Irons” are really made from steel. So are some “woods.”

The USGA ruled steel shafts illegal until 1924, when a worldwide shortage of hickory forced the issue.

“I asked my caddy for a sand wedge and he came back ten minutes later with a ham on rye.”

—Chi Chi Rodriguez

Ever wonder why there are so many clubs? For precision of distance, at least in theory. In the hands of an average professional golfer, a driver will hit a ball about 260 yards.

3-wood: 240 yards

1-iron: 230 yards

2-iron: 220 yards

3-iron: 210 yards

4-iron: 200 yards

5-iron: 185 yards

6-iron: 175 yards

7-iron: 160 yards

8-iron: 150 yards

9-iron: 135 yards

Wedge: 120 yards

Sand wedge: 105 yards

“The most exquisitely satisfying act in the world of golf is that of throwing a club.

The full backswing, the delayed wrist action, the flowing follow-through, followed by that unique whirring sound, reminiscent only of a flock of passing starlings, is without parallel in the sport.”

—Henry Longhurst, *British writer (?–1978)*

Some of the more common (and printable) nicknames that golfers give their drivers tend to be masculine: Big Galoot, Big Dog, Killer, Thunderstick, Hammer, and the big bad name to end all big bad names, Bazooka.

The more popular nicknames for putters tend to be more feminine and personal, like the Unsinkable Molly Brown and Run-Around Sue.

“Calamity Jane” was the name of famous golfer Bobby Jones's putter. With Calamity Jane in hand, Jones managed to win all four of the big-name golf tournaments in 1930: the British Open, the British Amateur, the U.S. Amateur, and the U.S. Open.

More Bang for Your Buck: In 1996, two men patented a design for a golf club that will fire a golf ball well in excess of 280 yards without strenuous effort. The club accomplished that feat by way of a small explosive detonator in its head. Needless to say, it wasn't accepted by the USGA as legal for tournament play.

In the same year and vein, a company in San Rafael, California, brought out Peace Missile Golf Clubs, made from melted-down Soviet nuclear missiles.

Still Another Golf Innovation from 1996: A Houston man patented a telescoping device that goes inside a golf hole. When you sink your putt, the device automatically lifts your ball up high enough that you don't have to bend down to retrieve it.

Hmm ... wonder why this one didn't catch on? The mechanized club of 1942 seemed like a good idea on the drawing board, anyway: When the player had a good swing, the club would play thunderous applause; when the golfer swung badly, the club made a loud raspberry sound. Golfers didn't like it for some reason.

Dentists have made a lasting contribution to the game of golf. George Grant, an African American dentist, patented the first golf tee way back in 1899. It didn't fly at the time. It took another dentist, William Lowell, twenty-two years later, to make the tee a golfing success. Dr. Lowell called his version the Reddy Tee, and it, too, wasn't well received at first. There's nothing greenbacks can solve, however. Lowell paid a huge sum—\$1,500—to golf star Walter Hagen to use the tee in his matches. After that, the golf tee caught on.

Another Way That Golf Resembles Baseball: They're about the only two activities where you wear one glove, and specifically on your nondominant hand.

According to golf pros, the main reasons why professional golfers don't wear sunglasses are because sunglasses slip in the hot sun and the tint alters the colors of the fairway and green, making it hard to read the course. However, national market manager for Ray Ban Scott Hansberger says it's about fashion and image. As evidence, he points to the fact that sunglasses are traditionally worn by standoffish movie stars, not easygoing and friendly golfers. In past celebrity pro-ams, says Hansberger, “The celebrities were all wearing sunglasses—but the pros weren't.”

Tubular wicker baskets were the first golf bags, which were enough because most golfers didn't carry that many clubs or balls. Golf bags appeared during the golf boom of the late 1800s. Before that, your caddy had to lug your loose golf clubs over his shoulder or under his arm.

Not Our Kind of People



“Very few blacks will take up golf until the requirement for plaid pants is dropped.”

—Franklin Ajaye, African American comedian

Tiger Woods' longest-lasting contribution to the game of golf? Perhaps finally shaming country clubs that still discriminate against African Americans, Jews, and other minorities.

An ugly side of the elite cult of golf: Even now, in the twenty-first century, there are golf courses in the United States where Tiger Woods would not be allowed to play because of the color of his skin. And Ladies' Professional Golf Association (LPGA) pro Nancy Lopez, because she's a woman, would only be allowed to play during Tuesday and Friday “Ladies' Days,” if at all.

Even into the 1970s, the Baltimore Country Club posted signs reading, “No Dogs, No Coloreds, No Jews.” Now, at least, the all-male, all-gentile, all-Caucasian clubs usually consider it crass to actually spell this policy out, even when the exclusionary policies remain unchanged.

The venerable Burning Tree Club in Bethesda, Maryland, has never had a woman member or guest in its seventy-nine years of existence. Members' wives are allowed to enter the premises at Christmas time—but then only to visit the pro shop to buy presents for their husbands.

But progress inches forward ... perhaps. In the 1990s, many clubs that had racial or ethnic restrictions actually written into their charters removed them (even if they remained in practice). This was after it was revealed that the site of 1990's PGA championship, Alabama's Shoal Creek course, had not even a single black member. Because of the disparity of the membership at the club, advertisers promptly pulled \$2 million of TV advertising so they wouldn't be associated with exclusionary practices. In response, the PGA drafted a policy stating that no PGA event “will be held at any golf club that has membership practices or policies that discriminate on the basis of race, religion, sex, or national origin.”

“I think it's absolutely a coincidence. We have no members from Hungary, either, and none from Lithuania or Estonia. It's a nothing. It's meaningless.”

~~—Attorney and member Graham Koch trying to explain away the fact that Northwood Country Club in Dallas has never even considered a black member for membership, quoted in the Dallas Times May 18, 2001~~

Despite Tiger Woods, black golfers make up only 3.3 percent of all golfers—professional and amateur—a figure unchanged over the last decade.

At last count, only four golf courses in the United States are owned by African Americans, down from an all-time high of seventy, when many blacks ran their own golf courses offering otherwise excluded African American players a place to play.

When asked in 1994 why he hadn't spoken out against racism at private country clubs, Jack Nicklaus suggested African Americans weren't suited for the sport. “Blacks have different muscles that react in different ways,” he said.

“Very few people will voice their opinion in public. But I guarantee you behind closed doors across the country there are people wishing to see Tiger Woods fail.”

—Bill Dickey, president and founder of the National Minority Junior Golf Scholarship Association

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