

Golf

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Newton Abbot

“**G**OLF is the peculiar game of a peculiar people. It is the pastime of the Scots.” (John L. Low). “Golf is a test of temper, a trial of honour, a revealer of character.” (David Forgan). “Golf is the only game where the worst player gets the most enjoyment out of it”. (David Lloyd George).

The forces of nature

You might not think golf is a dangerous game, yet it does claim a surprising number of victims. Almost every year lightning kills either players or on-lookers caught on the course in a thunderstorm. To avoid this contingency, players should observe rule 37, 6a, of the rules of golf, which states—

“Discontinuance of play

“The player should not discontinue play on account of bad weather, or for any other reason unless—*he considers that there be danger from lightning*”. In which case he should abandon his clubs, lie flat on the ground, avoid isolated trees, wire fences or small exposed shelters. An aptitude for artificial respiration and external cardiac resuscitation may be useful.

Early fatalities

Injuries by contact with ball or club have occurred ever since the game achieved universal popularity in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As long ago as 1881 it is recorded that a boy on the course at Montrose was struck on the back of the neck by a ball and died within five minutes.

At Wormit, Fife, in August 1914, Private David Barnet, of the Black Watch, was struck by a lady golfer's ball. He was stunned, but recovered and walked back to his billet; two days later, the unfortunate soldier lapsed into a coma and died, presumably from compression as a result of haemorrhage from the middle temporal artery. A similar accident occurred at Perth in 1956.

A real tragedy marred a golf lesson at Girvan in 1927. Benjamin Wesley was teaching his son the elements of the golf swing and then handed him the club. Too hastily, his son made a practice swing, struck his father on the head and killed him almost instantaneously. There have been many other instances of players being struck on the head by a club and sustaining a fractured skull. There is really no excuse for this, for both players and spectators should obey the very first Rule of Golf (Etiquette)—“No player should move, talk or stand close to or directly behind the ball or hole when a player is addressing the ball or making a stroke.”

A coroner's verdict

Death from septicaemia might seem an unlikely hazard for a golfer, but in 1934 at Newcastle-under-Lyme, John Bennett was struck on the face by a golf ball; the swelling became septic and he subsequently died. At the inquest, the coroner recorded a verdict of accidental death. A similar fate befell George Watters of Hawick in 1953, when he was struck on the leg by a ball and later died of pulmonary embolism.

Death from haemorrhage

An extraordinary tragedy occurred at the Inglewood County Club, Seattle, U.S.A. in November 1951. Ed Harrison, playing alone, broke the shaft of his driver and the split shaft pierced his groin. He tried to reach the club house, but bled to death only 100 yards from where the accident took place. Maybe a knowledge of first aid might have saved his life.

The unfortunate gardener

A ball driven from the 18th tee at St Andrews on 14 August 1940, struck Miss Carmichael, aged 70 years, in her garden. She collapsed and died an hour later. At the same hole, I saw a girl struck on the knee by a golf ball which fractured her patella.

Serious injuries*Loss of vision*

There are on record many cases of injury to an eye, caused by club or ball. For example, at Leven in 1937, a ball struck a club member in the eye which, subsequently, had to be removed.

Spontaneous fractures

I once witnessed a javelin thrower who sustained a spontaneous fracture of his tibia and fibula, and I recall the resounding crack which preceded his subsequent collapse. A Mr Moody Weaver of Texas, made a practise golf swing of such vigour that he broke his leg in two places. Similarly, though with a more liberal translation of 'spontaneous' a lady golfer at Darwin, Australia, became so excited by a good shot, that, throwing up her hands in joy, she tripped backwards over her golf bag and sustained fractures of both wrists. Stress fractures in the form of a march fracture of the metatarsals are well known, but occur more commonly in caddies than golfers.

Minor traumata

Like tennis, golf too has it's elbow, probably an epicondylitis. The signs are similar to tennis elbow, though in the left, as opposed to the right, elbow joint. Capsulitis of the shoulders is encountered by those who play too much golf without prior practice.

The novice may sustain stress injuries of the left wrist, such as damage to the ligaments and even a fractured scaphoid, due to striking the ground too hard. Such minor injuries should be treated by rest, short-wave diathermy and, possibly, injection with cortisone. Golfers elbow is, however, as recalcitrant to treatment as tennis elbow.

Mental aberrations

Golf, especially competitive golf, requires supreme powers of concentration. Anyone who has played before a large crowd will have experienced the overwhelming silence which precedes each shot.

Stress of the occasion can cause loss of mental and physical co-ordination culminating in the condition known as 'Golfer's Twitch'. Thus a player addressing the ball, or even at the top of the swing, may become seized with a prolonged paralytic inertia; similarly, when about to putt, he may develop a sudden nervous jerk, knocking the ball in an uncontrolled strike.

This condition is no special privilege of the novice for it has at times afflicted some of the greatest professional players in the game. A method of treatment worth trying is to place about a dozen balls three inches (8 cm.) apart, strike the first one promptly

and play each successive shot without first addressing the ball. Practising this exercise may eventually eliminate the embarrassing 'Twitch'.

Coronary occlusion

At Toronto in October 1966, Mr Ted Abbot, aged 72 years, holed his tee shot at the 8th, and died from a heart attack on the 14th.

Golf being a game which can be played in the latter half of a man's life span, it is inevitable that coronary occlusion will claim its share of victims.

I know of a golf course in Berkshire where three members have, in the past ten years, dropped dead on the first tee. Every golfing doctor must know of similar incidences, though all will surely agree that golf is not the cause, but merely the occasion. Some might add, "but what better place to end one's days than on the Elysian Fields".

It can, however, be a problem, as the story of Jock and his friend will illustrate. Jock was a very keen golfer and he and his friend decided to play a round at a famous, but expensive, golf course in central Scotland. Half way round, Jock's friend dropped dead. Approaching the club house, Jock was seen by the club secretary carrying his friend over his shoulders. Hearing of the tragedy way out on the course, the secretary remarked how tired Jock must be at carrying his friend so far—"Och! it was no' carrying him that made me tired" replied Jock, "it was puttin' him doon and pickin' him up between ma shots that made me tired!"

Conclusion

Tobias Smollet (1721-71) wrote of golf, "Such uninterrupted exercise, co-operating with the keen air from the sea, must, without all doubt, keep the appetite always on edge and steel the constitution against all the common attacks of distemper".

I am firmly convinced that opinion holds good to-day, and I quote the greatest English golfer, Henry Cotton, who says—"Golf is one of the finest forms of outdoor exercise."

Golf is played in the fresh air, at a leisurely pace on soft ground, and involves every muscle and joint of the body in a co-ordinated rhythmic action, without physical or mental stress. Moreover, the game is not finished after 18 holes. There is always the 19th.

Postscript

"Golf increases the blood pressure, ruins the disposition, spoils the digestion, drives men to drink, breaks off the edges of the vertebrae and starts angina pectoris."

(Dr A. S. Lamb of McGill University).

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