

The World's Worst Golfer

I remember once playing on the putting green which lies next to the world famous St. Andrews Old Course in Scotland. It was just me and a friend and a party of about a dozen blue rinsed pensioners enjoying a pleasant, if unspectacular, afternoon of modest sporting recreation. Suddenly, as one, the mature ladies dropped their clubs and charged like a herd of startled elderly wildebeest to the white fence that abuts the 18th green. Whatever could have happened? Why the sudden frenzy? As if she had read my mind, one of the ladies turned towards me and with a joyful smile, answered my unvoiced question.

'It's Sean!'

Sean Connery, Hollywood mega star and golf fanatic, was indeed striding down the final fairway, straight into the loving gaze of his small but devoted circle of aged admirers. He was an absolute gentleman too, nobly raising his club in acknowledgement of their applause, finishing his round and then patiently signing autographs, shaking hands and consenting to a photo or two before departing.

It's not a great anecdote I know, but this is the most interesting thing that has ever happened to me on (or near) a golf course. For I may well be the world's worst golfer. I have certainly never met a worse player than myself. I learned early on that no matter how hard I tried, I could not persuade the ball to go where I wanted it to. In fact, as often as not, I couldn't even hit it at all - I am the undisputed master of the air shot. I once hit a ball backwards, a feat I would have defied Tiger Woods in his prime to have achieved. And if, by some miracle, I did make a firm connection, the ball would seek out the deepest, thickest, knottiest gorse bush in which to conceal itself, unfindable, for ever.

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And yet, I've never entirely given up. Golf does that to you. It has a habit of tempting you back, and anyone who has ever picked up a club and swiped in vain will know how easy it is to delude oneself - *if I could only improve my stance, adjust my grip, keep my head down, capture that zen like balance of focus and relaxation, the next ball will explode off the face of my club and soar through the air on it's glorious journey to precisely where I wanted it to go.* I can make myself believe that this will happen one day, even though, in my heart, I know I belong on the putting green, with the old ladies.

But Britain welcomes golfers of all levels and may well be the best country in the world to play the game. We have more courses than you can shake a putter at, from the elite historic championship venues to the more accessible and affordable local courses. You could spend a lifetime thrashing, slicing and shanking down the fairways the length and breadth of the UK and never have to encounter the same bunker twice.

<http://www.todaysgolfer.co.uk/Golf/Courses/Top-100-Golf-Courses/Top-100-courses-in-the-UK-5-1/>

Playing a round in the UK puts you in touch with a sporting heritage that goes back centuries and is still as alive today as it has ever been. Golf is actually the most popular sport in terms of actual participation in the UK today and Europe's victory in the Ryder Cup in 2010 proved yet again, golf's almost unique status as a game the British not only like but are actually quite good at. I couldn't find statistics for the UK alone, but apparently Europe has 6 million regular golfers and I'd wager the lion's share of those come from Britain. And I sincerely hope that somewhere among that multitude is a player even more inept than myself. And if he does exist, I'd like to meet him. And shake his hand.

Golf expressions:

- *Below par and not up to scratch* –less than satisfactory:
- *I can't come to work today. I'm feeling a bit below par.* (shouldn't **below** par be a good thing?)
- His work just isn't up to scratch.*
- *To make the cut* – be selected from a group of people:
- *I had an interview with the British Council but I didn't make the cut.*

Written by Philip Patrick

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