

THE HACKER

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An athlete's breakfast...

With our nation's passion for DIY vying strongly with golf to swallow up our precious weekend hours, many of you will I'm sure know that a quality finish is all about good preparation. Get this right, the professional tradesman will tell us and our chances of success have multiplied exponentially. We understand this, but the trouble is, proper prep is bloody boring and time consuming.

In this respect the similarity between the two popular hobbies is striking. Again in golf, the professional will tell the amateur it's all about preparation. Take the example of the morning preparation of a pro on tour before he tees off. A nine o'clock tee time finds his alarm shattering his nocturnal dreams of winning at around 5am. Breakfast will be carefully selected by their dietician or personal trainer to maximise and ensure a slow release of energy throughout the round. Once refreshed and charged they will make an early approach to the course to carry out an extensive warmup routine starting with a regime of stretching exercises to firstly wake, then heat their body muscles before they even contemplate grasping a club. Once they are feeling supple then their attention finally turns to hitting balls. Most professionals will hit balls with all of their clubs, or at the very least every other one. Starting with wedges they slowly work down to the longer clubs, woods and eventually the driver before they hit reverse gear and work back towards the wedges again. This warmup could easily involve hitting as many balls as a 28 handicapper would hit in two rounds of golf. This extensive programme will be done methodically, and slowly, with meticulous patience. Finally, with their bodies alert, warm and supple they progress to the putting green to sharpen their focus. Again the routine would entail more putts than an amateur probably makes in a summer of medals. To summarise, from the moment the pro's hand silences the alarm to it holding the driver on the first tee, they have been in preparation mode for hitting their first ball for real.

So what about the amateur golfer? For them, the morning after the long night before invariably arrives too quickly. Heavy eyelids struggle to open and focus on the bedside clock to read the time. Eventually sleep is replaced by panic as they realise their tee-time is less than an hour away. Ten whirlwind minutes later and with clubs thrown into the back of the car they are speeding to the course.

If the speed cameras allow then they may just be in time for some hurried breakfast and a rendezvous with the patron saint of golf - St. Bacon. Quite what golf would do without bacon I don't know but it stands proud every turn. No matter what event is on, from a society day to a club match, you can rest assured it will kick off with a bacon roll. Pigs must really hate golf.

Of course not every amateur arrives nano-seconds before their slot. Some have an ulterior motive to be more organised and arrive in good time. For them the princely offering of an athlete's breakfast awaits. Full English; all the trimmings.

Thus with oleaginous fuel glooping through their veins they make it to the first tee. If they pass a handily placed practice net along the way they use the convenient structure to lean their bag against it as they dig out a ball, tea and pencil. Now for the warmup! Out come two irons that are thrown across their shoulders and with great gusto they do a couple of half turns each way before finishing with the flourish of a wedge at some unsuspecting weed. So it is that with a difference of some three hours prep to the professional our amateur takes his place centre stage. With a miracle of engineering their belts somehow keep in the contents of their breakfast as they bend down and plant a tee, balance their ball and conquer the head rush as they stand back up.

At this stage one can only marvel at their optimism as they stare confidently down the fairway and lock onto some distant target with the assuredness of a heat seeking missile. They totally and utterly believe it is their right and destiny to launch an Exocet with unfaltering shape and

accuracy and take the plaudits of their playing partners. But alas this is where it becomes clear and obvious that they should have taken a little more time on the sanding down, for no amount of topcoat can hide their shoddy preparation.

With a back as stiff as a board they swing like Pinocchio on strings and slice the ball fifty yards right into the Captains Charity Bunker and immediately start the round a pound down. To cap it all, their faces look like they've just discovered their spouse's infidelity. A mixture of shock, hurt and disbelief. How could that happen? They cannot believe it, they played so well last week! And no doubt in four holes time, after they have finally warmed up they'll be back to their best. But the damage will probably have already been done and the mountain of dropped shots already too high to overcome.

But they never learn and in some kind of perverse groundhog cycle of course the same will happen next week.

There is however one exception. The club championship. For one night and morning every year the routine is turned on its head. It begins with the ritual of the annual washing of clubs; every groove and cavity cleared and polished. An early night follows and for once the alarm bell is early enough to wake the birds as well. A healthy home breakfast is the precursor to a slow, leisurely drive. Like a true professional it is straight to the range and a three bucket warmup, topped off with meticulous putting practice. They then take to the tee like never before, their bodies and minds warmed and focused.

There are many phrases to describe what happens next. But somehow, instead of the normal slice, they somehow snap-hook one out of bounds left. Time stands still, and for once the look of hurt and anger and disbelief is justified. This readers is the law of the sod.

Of course instead of putting this one down to Murphy playing his legal games with them and persevering next time out they vow to never go on the range again before a round. And thus the cycle is kept intact.

So here's my tip. Instead of spending another hundred pounds on a new putter that claims to take five shots off your round, spend a fiver on some sandpaper. Stick a hole through one of the sheets and hang it next to your members tag on your bag in the hope that next time you throw your clubs in the car you might, just might, think of swapping the athlete's breakfast for a bucket on the range.

On the other hand, fancy a bacon roll....?