

# THE HACKER

## # 5 (April 2010)

### The more the merrier....

I'm sure from time to time I'll get a chance to use this column to vent frustration at the seemingly endless rules of golf. I mean how difficult can it be? We smack a small ball, as hard as we can and try and pop it into a silly little hole that even a rabbit would be embarrassed by. And yet not only content with producing a whopping great 121 pages of rules for us to read, interpret, remember and then follow; the powers that be then go on to grind us into the deepest recesses of boredom with 58 pages of appendices and a 23 page index. Now as a little aside I have to take to task the job done by the 'chairman of the rules index' or the 'Chief executive of the list of pointless and irrelevant words at the back of the book' or whatever they are called, for pointless and irrelevant is certainly what it is - you try looking up something when you need it, and maybe, if you are very lucky you may find it about an hour later after following a trail seemingly designed by the same person who laid out the Hampton Court Maze. Never in the realms of human typing has so much been typed, to confuse so many, by so few. I guess if the rules ended there we could probably just about stomach it. Could we just accept the fact that an anal 5% of golfers will have a go at reading and learning the rules, whilst the other 95% will make it up as they go along? Well no, because it doesn't stop there. Many rules are so ambiguous, pernickety and pointless, that their authors then realised they needed to produce a hefty tome almost 2-3 inches thicker than the rules themselves called 'The Decisions on the Rules of Golf'. 546 more pages to try and clarify what they couldn't say properly in the first place - oh and the index bloke is at it again, this time glorifying in a list of 5340 entries. If you read it in a novel or watched it in a film you'd wouldn't, *couldn't* believe it.

Now as a backdrop to this introductory rant, it is worth noting that the corporate world of golf isn't surviving in some financial bubble ever on the up. A quick read of the last years full accounts of some of the major manufacturers endorses this. Callaway for example showed a whopping 15% drop in sales from \$1.1b down to \$951m from 2008-09. To make matters worse this reduced turnover also came at huge fall in gross profit - from 44% to 36%. They were not alone; Adams Golf seem to be in corporate downward spiral with the last full years accounts showing net profit down from a surfeit of 9.9% in 2007 to a deficit of 1.6%. And the quarterly figures for 2009 seem even worse - a comparison to Q3 2008 against the same period in 2009 shows a drop in sales from \$79m to \$46m, a percentage you don't even need to bother working out. Having said that, some lucky brands find themselves in relative healthy homes, with stable mates such as Jim Beam & Laphroaig to warm the cockles of Titleist & Foot-joy. Some where between golf and whiskey you can't help thinking they've got things covered for the good times as well as the bad.

Which sort of brings me to my point, with the industry strapped into the same global straight jackets as other industries and a rule book littered, in my opinion with some pointless twaddle - is there anyway we can kill two holes with one ball so to speak. And I think there is - it's time to get out the permanent marker pen and confine the first rule to the annals of history. Turn to page 52 and draw a thick diagonal line through the whole page - there, gone. Rule 4.4 is no more, and what you may not realise is that you have just added \$28 billion dollars to the global golf industry, a figure that obliterates words such as recession, depression and administration.

Now I guess that if you don't have a rule book to hand then I might be going a little to fast for you so let me back-track and explain. Rule 4.4 states 'Maximum of Fourteen Clubs' - why?! Give me one good reason. Come on, I'm waiting. Now maybe you are a hell of a lot smarter than me but I can't think of even the slightest hint of a good reason other than one on the decidedly dodgy ground of Osteopathy. So did you come up with a reason? My money's on no. What the hell would it matter if we bung in the 7 wood as well as the 3 & 5. Stick in the 60 degree wedge in case you get a nice floppy lie and you can do your best Michelson impression. But then the more you think of it the more opportunities open up. Why stick to just traditional extra clubs? We could invent new types of club. How about a new set of 'multi-putters™' (thought I'd get in quick with the trademark)? A set of 3 putters designed so that you take a consistent stroke with each one but the first is set up for long putts, another for medium and another for short - we do exactly the same thing for all the irons and woods so why not putters? Or how about a tiny little club with a shaft about a foot long in case you're up against

a tree? The options are endless and I see no reason whatsoever why the rules would bother to limit the number of clubs we carry. Just another wasted page in the rules. Imagine if everyone of the supposed 60 million golfers in the world bought a set of multi-putters™ at say £200 plus a tree iron (no not an Irish 3 iron) you could easily be at £300, multiplied by the number of golfers, converted into dollars and maybe, just maybe I just got the attention of a few CEO's around the world.

Now I ought really to leave it there and leave something for a future column, but let me just take out one more rule and add another few billion to the bottom line; Rule 5.3 spouts on about when you can and can't substitute your ball for another. Again why bother. I see no reason why you can't change your ball for every shot. Start with a brick designed to fly 250 yards, then change to a ball suited to your approach shot and then end with your perfect putting ball. Every golfer in the world would need to buy 3 times as many balls and the green activists would be over the moon because the world's resources would be spared another 4 sides of text in the Decisions books about changing your bloody balls. Simple.

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