

# THE HACKER

## # 8 (July 2010)

### Time for a round?

Following a shockingly cold and brutal winter of golf, it is with a huge sigh of relief that the last few weeks has seen a proper bit of summer. Playing with the sun on our backs and muscles warm for once softens the frustration of thinned wedges and missed putts. However there is one down side to the sunshine season, the sight of shy legs blinking their way into the light from their long hibernation. Many a matchplay has been won by the powerful effect of exposed pins on the enemy.

A bit of research on the internet found me the perfect literary quote to back up this observation: "*The uglier a man's legs are, the better he plays golf - it's almost a law.*" So wrote HG Wells in his novel *Bealby* in 1915.

And I'm afraid that this is where this month's column takes a sharp and surprising about turn from the expected reflections upon summer golf. For as I read more on HG Wells I see that he lived much of his life in The Avenue in Worcester Park, a few minutes from the home I was born and brought up in. The father of science fiction must surely have trod the same pavements as I. What was going through that amazing mind as he hauled himself up the steep high street? Further ruminations on the infinite adventures suggested in his genre creating book on time travel perhaps? It wasn't long before I found myself staring at the laptop trying to answer a simple, albeit science busting question, that I now put to you. Given that you are now the proud owner of a shiney new time machine, who out of the whole of human history would you choose to play one round of golf with? Or maybe you would prefer to use the machine to go back and witness some of the most historic rounds or shots ever made. Be warned, the machine only has a enough juice for one round trip so choose wisely....

If golf history is your thing then you might consider zipping back to 1935, four years before the horror of a world war that would bring life for a generation to a shuddering halt. Perhaps if we trawl back through the black and white photographs of that time we might just see you standing in the background watching on as Gene Sarazan plays the infamous 'shot heard around the world'; a thundering 4 wood to the par 5 15th in The Masters that rolled in for an incredible albatross to tie the lead. Or maybe you would prefer Seve's tee shot at the 10th at the Belfry or Sandy Lyle's miraculous bunker shot to set up a first British win at the Masters in 1988.

Of course if you are feeling a little bit more daring then how about setting the machine for 1872 and the chance of a three ball with Old and Young Tom Morris. Between father and son they won the Open four times each between 1861 - 1872. The year you play with them sees the famous claret jug presented for the first time. Young Tom is just 21 as you pound the fairways of St Andrews, he is at the peak of his game having just secured his fourth consecutive open championship, a feat never repeated to this day. And yet you watch in heartbreaking reverie, as he strokes his way around the old course, for you alone know that he will never win another title and in just three years time his wife will die in childbirth along with the baby. Young Tom will never recover, eventually dying three short months later on Christmas Day 1875 at the age of 24. Such is the curse of the time traveller.

For many, maybe the machine will allow the chance to plot a more personal course through time. Perhaps it will enable you to snatch hours with an unknown grandfather or once again share a sun dappled two-ball with a sorely missed parent. The chance perhaps to complete unfinished conversations or the opportunity to whisper words never said.

Or perhaps Gandhi would be able to unlock some inner calm to control the red mist from descending everytime you miss a two foot putt. Could Field Marshall Montgomery, hero of El Alamein, teach you a thing or two about coming out of the sand? Whenever, whoever; it's your choice. I suggest that before you get to the silly conclusion of this column you take a few

moments to consider your choice. Once you have chosen you may proceed on to the ridiculous end.....

For me, I would choose Charles Darwin in 1860, a year after the publication of *On The Origin of Species*. The round would allow me the chance to understand the man who revolutionised natural science. No doubt he would still hunker some concerns and even alarm at the response to his research and subsequent theory. Despite being forbidden, I would of course be bursting to tell him that all would be well, his theory would prevail and his renown remain undimmed even into the next millennium.

But actually I choose him for a very practical and selfish reason. What if during the course of our round my ball should run into a small hole? I pick up my rule book and flick to the index. I look up 'hole' and find 'Made by burrowing animal' and turn to the proffered page of definitions. A "burrowing animal" is an animal that makes a hole for habitation or shelter, such as a rabbit, mole, groundhog, gopher or salamander. An index chain later and the gist is: hole by burrowing animal equals abnormal ground condition equals relief. If 'burrowing', the animal ain't, bad luck. Thus I find myself out of my sphere of knowledge and stuffed by a stupid rule.

I haven't got a clue what holes may or may not have been made by 'burrowing animals' or otherwise. Why should I? You should get relief either way! Instead, I'm in a hole, and can't move on until I can identify the species that made the hole. Even if I can then I have to know enough about it's physiology to ascertain if it is 'burrowing' or not. And then I remember my well chosen partner, the pre-eminent naturalist of the last two centuries. Salvation. "Hey Chas," I ask "Do you know anyone whose got a gopher?"