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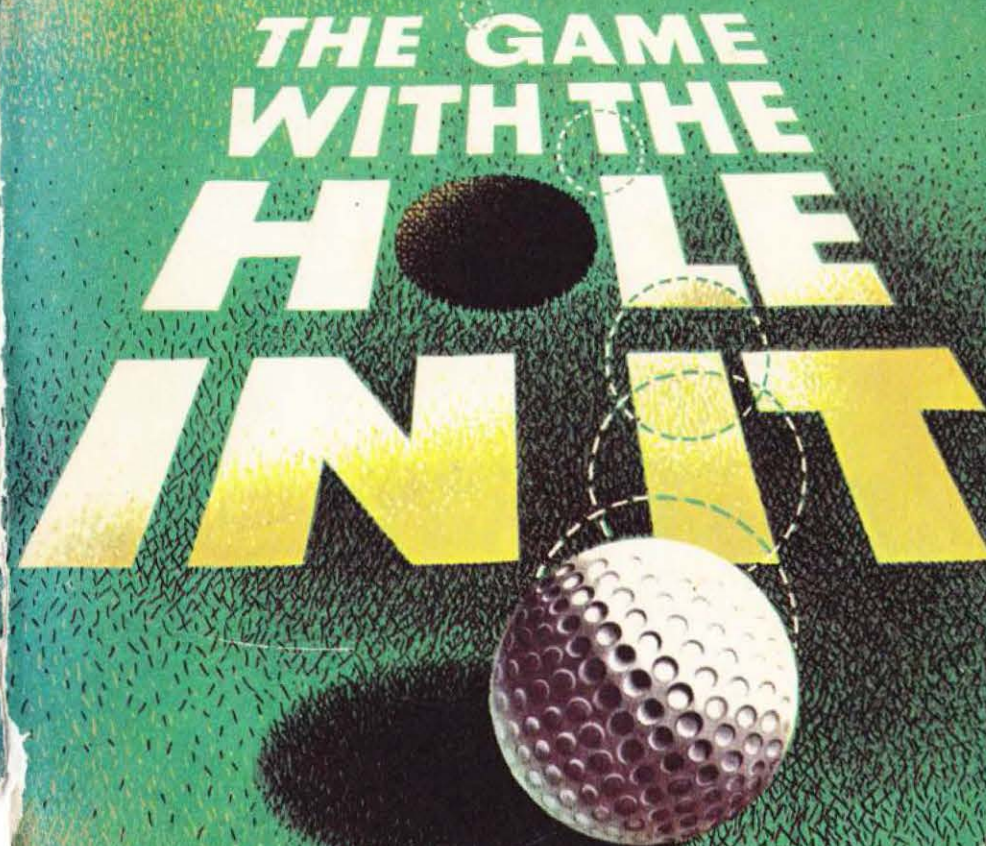
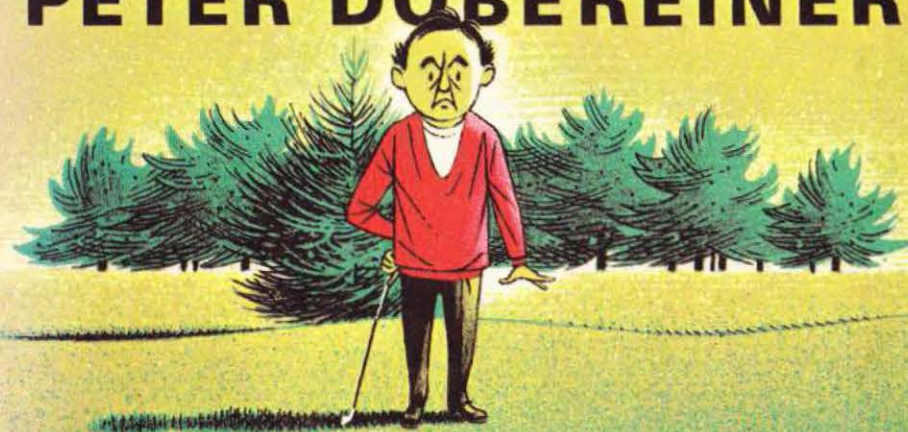
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PETER DOBEREINER

THE GAME WITH THE HOLE IN IT

PETER DOBEREINER



The Game with the Hole in It

PETER DOBEREINER

'Golf', says Peter Dobereiner, 'is a basically absurd pastime. . . . Man, a natural tool-using animal, is born to just such an implement as a golf club. He takes an atavistic swipe. And probably misses. . . . It is so patently simple and yet, in practice, so fiendishly difficult. There is the fascination of golf—the urge to reconcile these two evident yet contradictory truths.'

Peter Dobereiner himself, now golf correspondent of the *Observer*, has a love-hate relationship with the game that began when, at the age of four, he was set to pick up stones from the turf of a putting course, and paid a dime for his first week. He calls his book an 'introduction' to the world of golf, but seldom has so much information and sound advice about any game been combined with so much wit and sheer reading enjoyment, so that not only newcomers but people long acquainted with golf, from week-end players to those with tournament ambitions, from fans to golf widows, will find it irresistible.

Beginning with a lighthearted account of the origins of golf, he goes on to describe famous courses in the U.K. and U.S.A. Close-up views of the great Open Championships and of the champions lead on to lucid advice about choice of 'weapons' and curing faults in one's strokes. He illustrates the difficulty of knowing what actually happens when club hits ball, and how cameras can lie. His chapter on the vicissitudes of putting is packed with memorable insights.

Club houses, Golf Club problems, women in golf, the handicap system, the club pro, the use and abuse of the rules—these are just a few more of Peter Dobereiner's subjects. He attacks them all with a wry smile and some thought-provoking comments.

Jacket design by Leo Newman

YOUR BOOK OF GOLF

D. C. N. HUDSON

The author has succeeded in defining lucidly the essentials of the game. This, together with his extremely careful analysis and helpful explanation, will make his book invaluable to young players.

Each shot is dealt with in turn and at the end of each lesson Mr. Hudson suggests a number of ways in which to practise the shot and so improve your game. He also gives advice on common faults and how to correct them, course etiquette, and some of the fundamental rules of the game. With the help of a skilfully devised diagram, he takes the reader round a typical nine-hole course. The careful study of this diagram alone will be to the advantage of all would-be golfers, who will be guided in the all-important matter of selecting the right club for each shot.

'... written in simple, explicit language. He concentrates on the basic principles and has made a successful job of simplification, more particularly in boiling the fat off the rules and rendering them in eight short paragraphs.' Peter Dobereiner in the *Observer*

12s 6d net

YOUR BOOK OF TENNIS

C. M. JONES

C. M. Jones has written *Your Book of Tennis* for boys and girls beginning in the game. Starting with first essentials he takes readers through the principal strokes and explains with the help of action photographs and diagrams exactly how they are produced and how the ball is controlled. His advice on techniques that have to be varied when the player is still small in relation to the height of the net should help the very young player to acquire a style that can develop naturally as he grows in stature. The emphasis throughout is on how to enjoy and therefore to improve one's game.

13s net

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The Game
with the Hole in it

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PETER DOBEREINER

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Dedicated to my other favourite sport
My wife, B.E.D.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

The plates between pages 88 and 89
illustrate the swing of the club

Photographs by Chris Smith,
by courtesy of the *Observer*

Introduction

THEY say that converts are more rabid than those born into a faith. My own case, in regard to golf, certainly bears out that theory. For although I was exposed to the game early—my first paid employment was to pick up stones scuffed on to the turf from the gravel paths of a putting course in New York in the late 1920's—I escaped infection. I was then four years old and remember that at the end of the first week I was paid a dime. Within half an hour I had blued the lot on a penknife, cut my hand and had the knife confiscated by my mother.

That experience may partly explain my opinion of putting as an exasperating and futile activity. It is an important part of the game, of course, rather too important in my view, but unworthy of being dignified by strong emotions or intense application. 'Miss 'em quick' is an old and sound adage.

The childhood experience may also have been responsible for souring my attitude to work. I have never been able to recognise much logic, except in theoretical terms and in relation to other people at that, in the concept of hard work being virtuous of itself. After many years in many jobs I have at last achieved a satisfactory compromise between my natural lethargy and the need to eat. My work is my play; my play is my work. Golf has allowed me to indulge this selfish philosophy. My life consists mainly of playing it badly, watching it being played well, and writing about it for *The Observer*.

Envious people often ask: 'How do you become a golf correspondent?' There is no approved method; all the golf writers I know

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drifted into the job by accident. In my case the apprenticeship started in the late 1940's when I was working in India for a large company which refined sugar and distilled whisky, gin and brandy of such vile quality that I have been virtually teetotal ever since.

For much of my stay in Travancore there were only three other European males and so I was conscripted, with mutual reluctance and misgivings, as a makeweight fourth for bridge, tennis and golf.

It happened that the English tutor of the Maharajah of Travancore had been a keen golfer and had prevailed on the royal family to build a nine-hole course to further the young prince's social education. The Maharajah didn't much care for the game and gave it up as soon as he became old enough to please himself.

But the course was beautifully maintained and, apart from rare golf-playing guests at the palace, was used at the Maharajah's kind invitation only by our fourball. Each of us had two caddies, of course, one to carry the bag and a forecaddie to run ahead and mark the position of the ball. The cost of such luxury, by the way, amounted to a total of 2s. 3d. a round, including generous tips.

The fairways of this equatorial course were sun-baked and drives bounced for flattering distances, almost as if on concrete. And, thanks to the forecaddies, shots hit off line, slicing and hooking did not matter. If one of us carved one way into the rough, his forecaddie rushed to the spot, picked up the ball between his toes and strolled nonchalantly back to the centre of the fairway depositing the errant missile on a coaxing cushion of grass. Often in my case, he leapt the boundary wall and saved his sahib the embarrassment of penalty strokes. I regret to say that our efforts to discourage this scandalous practice were not over-emphatic. Compassion proved stronger than our legalistic conscience; after all, the boys were only trying to ingratiate themselves in the hope of a good tip and we, all too aware of their poverty, became easily ingratiated. Cheating it may have been, but it was the same for everyone. Even today I cannot raise much of an incredulous whistle at the massive hitting of golfers such as David Thomas and Jack Nicklaus. For

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I cannot forget that I once drove as far as any muscular professional and with never a stray one into snake country.

For all that, or perhaps because of it, I became irrevocably touched by the spell of this great game. The love-hate affair has lasted ever since and eventually led me into the field of professional golf writing. Fanaticism is basically my only qualification.

Looked at with clinical detachment, golf is a simple and basically absurd pastime. What would Socrates have said if he had been told that one day men skilled in knocking a ball over a hill with a stick would be esteemed above philosophers and rewarded many times higher than great statesmen? Something pithy, no doubt. But golfers cannot be objective about their sport. Emotions, even passions, are involved the moment a man first takes club in hand. It looks so easy, just a matter of hitting a stationary ball. Man, a natural tool-using animal, is born to just such an implement as a golf club. He takes an atavistic swipe. And probably misses. At that moment a golfer is born. It is so patently simple and yet, in practice, so fiendishly difficult. *There* is the fascination of golf—the urge to reconcile these two evident yet contradictory truths.

Everyone knows he is physically capable of hitting a perfect shot. Occasionally he is reinforced in this belief by actually doing so. It follows that any person is theoretically capable of stringing together a series of shots to constitute a perfect round of golf. No one has done it yet and it is quite safe to predict that no one ever will.

Every week the lure of golf attracts more recruits to the course. My purpose in writing this book is to provide a brief introduction to the world of golf for newcomers who may wish to know something of the enormous ramifications of the game. Instant golf lore. My intentions are neither scholarly nor technical nor comprehensive. The book, I hope, is more like a game of golf itself—a leisurely stroll with occasional halts for business but without ever forgetting, as the great American golfer Walter Hagen insisted, to smell the flowers along the way.

An impressive case could be made out for golf as an important

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thread in the fabric of our society, as a force for good in an evil world, as a healthy counterpart to the stress society. But not by me. Golf is a game. It is more than 'just a game' but a game nevertheless. Its purpose is to provide pleasure. This book is my attempt to give to others something of the pleasure that golf has given to me.

I

A bastard of a game

WE need not linger over the origins of golf. Historians and scholars have argued at tedious length about the game's parentage. This eminent authority claims that the French game of *chole* fathered golf; another states with no less conviction that the Dutch *kolven* was the true progenitor. Yet another points the finger of suspicion at *jeu de mall*.

There is little doubt in my mind that they are all mistaken. Golf is a bastard.

Man, we are told, is distinguished from other living species by his capacity for speech, imagination and the use of tools. And there we have the essential requirements for golf—the ability to judge a shot, the power to execute it and the faculty for shouting 'Damn!' as the ball plummets into a thorn bush.

Anthropologists seeking the missing link need ask themselves only one question as they inspect a likely skeleton: Could this creature have played golf? If the answer is yes, they have their man; if no, it is just an ape.

The appeal of golf is elemental. Just as a newly born baby instinctively grabs his rattle, albeit with a hooker's grip, so a grown man who is presented with a club cannot resist the primitive promptings to pick it up and swipe at something.

And so golf is not a game that was suddenly invented, or even imported into Scotland from heathen lands. Clearly it evolved, slowly and naturally, as we can see from the writings of earliest times. We know, for instance, that the Normans and Saxons were 'driving balls wide over the fields' at the coronation of King