

SHELL SHOCKED

The Near Miracle on the Golf Course By Art Stevens

I am a neophyte golfer. No, let's be more precise. I am a lousy golfer. I'm still learning the difference between a birdie and a double fault. I must admit though that I can't quite figure out the role a double fault plays in golf.

I torture my good friend Ed who reluctantly agrees to play golf with me periodically. It's not easy to get him to play with me. He plays with me when he runs out of excuses, such as "I can't play today because I need to add detergents to my laundry." Or "I misplaced my golf clubs. I think I left them at CVS."

Or "I forgot how to get to the golf course and my GPS is down." Ed is very inventive but when he can't think of any more excuses, which isn't very often, he will consent to play with me. But I do note the look of disdain on his face when we both get into a golf cart.

Yes, I do slow his game up but what's the rush anyway? A par four hole will take me at least twelve strokes, Ed four. Whenever other golf groups see me ready to tee up they immediately reschedule their game for another day.

The problem with playing with me is that it takes me a lot of shots to get my ball onto the green. Ed would rather that I bring my ball forward to where his has just been hit but I tell him that I need the practice. So Ed just waits and waits until I hit at least four shots to get near where his better hit ball has landed. Ed has lots of time on his hands waiting for me to catch up. I once suggested to him that he ought to go over his will in his mind while waiting for me to move my ball forward. One thing is for sure though. Ed won't be including me in his will anytime soon.

And then one day the strangest thing happened while we were playing golf. I asked Ed to put it in his own words and this is how he described the divine intervention that took place during one of our golf outings:

Ed: Two weeks ago, on the 17th hole of the Dunes, I witnessed a golfing near miracle. On the tee were my wife Audrey, Art and me. Understand that Art has only recently taken up golf. He's played maybe a dozen rounds total, most of them with me. I try to give him tips on golf's protocol but don't mess with his swing. His swing: how can I describe it? Can you visualize a man in a straight jacket chopping wood?

In truth, he has improved recently and had hit a few spectacular shots on our way through the Dunes' challenging back nine. Back to that 17th tee. Audrey hits a nice shot, a bit short. I hit a pitching wedge just off the green. Art addresses his ball with a seven iron. A seven is a lot of club for this very short hole, which is less than 90 yards, but Art uses a seven for all of his shots, be they 50 or 500 yards, on the theory, I think, that the seven is the easiest club to hit. "What about the other 11 clubs in your bag," I've asked him. "No, no, the seven is fine," he always replies.

He swings and hits a humpbacked liner that lands softly in the center of the green and makes a bee-line toward the flagstick. "Can the Gods of golf be this capricious," I think. "To give an ace to my rookie friend?" Not quite; it hits the stick, and to my intense relief/disappointment bounces off to the left, stopping not 18 inches from the cup. Art seems totally unfazed or possibly clueless. He makes his way to the green and calmly rolls in the putt.

"Congratulations on your first birdie," I say.

"What's a birdie?," he replies.
