

A Friendly Little Round of Golf

THWACK!!!

Bob Hansen was all too familiar with that sound. His drive had sliced majestically over the edge of the fairway and slammed into a tree. Next he heard the ball crash through the underbrush and plop into a ravine. First hole, first stroke, and already he was in trouble.

“Oh, that’s too bad!” Brewster said with fake sincerity. “You’re in the rough.” He then proceeded to hit his own drive straight and long, down the middle of the fairway. The fact that he was an excellent golfer made the man even more insufferable. Tarkington hit his usual nondescript drive that drifted off to the left but stayed on the fairway. Bob picked up his golf bag and began trudging off toward the ravine while the other two sped down the fairway in a cart. Bob didn’t like carts and preferred to walk, but Brewster joked that he didn’t spend enough time on the fairway to make a cart worthwhile.

Bob rummaged around in the weeds until he found his ball. It took him three shots to battle his way out of the woods and into a greenside bunker. He got out of the bunker and onto the green on his second attempt. His first putt brought him to within two feet of the cup, and a crisp second putt closed hole with an eight. Eight strokes on a par four hole. Brewster carded a four and Tarkington bogied with a five.

The rest of the round didn’t go as badly, but Bob never quite managed to win a hole. He wasn’t a bad player – some of his individual shots were quite nice - but he never seemed to pull everything together. If he got a good drive, he muffed his approach shot. Once in a while he’d sink a spectacular putt, but only after bouncing on and off the green with multiple chip shots. Finally, on the 18th, it all came together. The 18th was a long, par four with a moderate dogleg to the right. Bob’s drive soared down the fairway, and a slight fade carried it around the dogleg. It dropped in the middle of the fairway, a good 30 yards beyond Brewster’s ball. Brewster topped his second shot, rolling it maybe 20 yards past Bob’s ball. Bob chose a 5 iron for his second shot and it arced gracefully through the air, dropping onto the green and rolling to within 18 inches of the cup. Brewster tried to reach with a 7 iron but fell short, and had to chip onto the green. Tarkington also reached the green in four.

Bob couldn’t believe his good fortune as he strode onto the green. He was on in two, with a short putt for birdie. He didn’t have to worry about his chip shot sailing over the green or falling short, because he was already here. He didn’t have to worry about the bunkers because he was already past them. Better still, the best Brewster could do was a bogey. Bob marked his ball and stood back to watch the others putt.

Tarkington was out so he putted first. He came close, but the ball broke a little more than he’d expected and rolled past the hole. He tapped it in for a six. Brewster benefited from watching Tark’s putt, aimed a little more to the left, and dropped his putt for a five.

Bob took his time replacing his ball, and looked up at Brewster to see if he was going to concede the putt. Brewster just turned his head toward Tark.

“Five bucks says he’ll miss it.”

Tarkington waved his hand dismissively.

“Don’t want to take the bet? Can’t say that I blame you. You and I have watched him choke too many times when the pressure’s on to believe he’s gonna make this putt.”

“No, it’s not that” said Tarkington. “I just don’t think it’s good sportsmanship to bet against somebody like that. Forget about the bet, and just let him make the putt.”

“I didn’t ask you to bet *against* him, Tark” Brewster replied. “I challenged you to bet *for* him. Of course, if you don’t think he can make it. . .”

“All right. I’ll take the damned bet.”

They both turned back to Bob and watched him intently. Bob took his time lining up the shot, a lot more time than he’d usually take for an 18 inch putt. It was a slight downhill lie, so he didn’t want to hit it too hard. “Hit it low” he told himself. “No topspin.” He relaxed his hands and held the putter loosely. He drew the club back slowly and very gently stroked it forward. The front of his putter stubbed the ground, the putter twisted in his hands, and the ball dribbled to the right of the hole. Disgusted, Bob walked over to tap it in. As he was walking his left foot somehow kicked the putter into the ball, which skittered off to the edge of the green. Brewster laughed uproariously as Bob took two more putts to find the cup. He was still wiping tears from his eyes as he pocketed the five dollars Tarkington handed him.

Fortunately, things were pretty hectic at work the next week. It helped Bob take his mind off Sunday’s game. He tried to give Tarkington five dollars, but Tark wouldn’t take it. Bob felt worse about Tark losing the five dollars than he did about losing the hole to Brewster. He lost holes to Brewster all the time, but letting Tark down was something else. He didn’t have much time to brood about it, though, as he was constantly on the phone to potential customers or driving to their office to show them the product in person. Things were a little tight, and the slowdown in construction certainly wasn’t helping things, but by Friday afternoon he felt pretty good about the week. He was looking forward to the weekend as he walked down the hallway to turn in his sales numbers to Jennifer, Mr. Beeman’s secretary.

Brewster was sitting in Jennifer’s guest chair when Bob walked in, leaning back and regaling her with some wild story. Brewster had a lot of time to talk, and he spent much of it in Jennifer’s office. He’d been with the company longer than any of the other salesman, and had arranged things so the three biggest customers were in his territory.

They sent in the same order every month, allowing Brewster to make his quota without breaking a sweat. Bob dropped his numbers in Jennifer's in-basket.

"Why don't you ask Bob to play?" Brewster said to Jennifer. "He's quite the golfer."

"Are you?" Jennifer asked hopefully. She seemed genuinely interested in him, but it was hard to tell. She may have just been glad to have an excuse to turn her attention from Brewster. "Mr Beeman is organizing a golf tournament for charity, and he really wants a good turnout."

Bob had been with the company long enough to know that "Mr Beeman is organizing" meant Jennifer was doing all the work. He also knew that "he really wants a good turnout" meant it was almost, but not quite, mandatory for all salaried employees, even junior sales managers who depended heavily on commissions. Still, the memory of Sunday's game festered in the back of his mind. The thought of screwing up like that in front of the whole company was more than he could take. "I, I don't really play golf very well" he stammered.

"Sure you do!" cried Brewster, rising out of the chair and putting his arm around Bob's shoulder. "He's just being modest" he said to Jennifer. "You should have seen the putt he made last Sunday. I've never seen anything like it." He turned back to Bob. "Why don't you tell Jennifer all about it?" he grinned.

"It was an incredibly bad putt" Bob said to Jennifer. "Brewster's just going on about it because he won five dollars betting I'd miss it, which I did. Which is exactly why I don't think you want a duffer like me in your tournament." Bob turned and walked out of the office, with Brewster's laugh following him down the hall.

Bob didn't give the tournament another thought until the following Thursday, when Jennifer came to his office. "Are you sure you don't want to change your mind about the tournament?" she asked. "All the other sales managers have signed up. Mr. Beeman says you don't have to be a good golfer to play. He says it's just a friendly little round of golf. And the money is going to a good cause." She paused for a moment. "I have to turn in the sign-up sheet tomorrow."

Bob knew this last sentence meant "Mr Beeman doesn't yet know you haven't signed up, but tomorrow he'll see that you're not a team player." He also realized for the first time that his not signing up reflected badly on Jennifer, as she was the one organizing the event. As far as he knew, this was the first time the company had ever held a golf tournament. With luck, this wouldn't be something he'd have to do every year. "All right" he said. "Sign me up."

The following week Jennifer brought him the pairings sheet. He was surprised to see that Mr. Hutchinson, the Chairman of the Board, would be playing. He was even more surprised to see that he was paired in a foursome with Brewster, Mr. Beeman, and Mr. Hutchinson. Jennifer explained. "It turns out Mr. Hutchinson is an avid golfer. He

signed up the minute Mr. Beeman told him about our tournament. And then when Mr. Beeman found out you and Mr. Brewster both had three handicaps, just like Mr. Hutchinson, he told me to put the four of you together.”

“Who said I had a three handicap?” Bob asked.

“Oh.” Jennifer looked flustered. “You weren’t at your desk, so I asked Mr. Brewster. Do I need to change something?” The look on her face showed that the last thing she wanted to do was go back to Mr. Beeman and change the pairings.

Bob started to tell her he didn’t have a three handicap, but then he stopped. Getting face time with Mr. Beeman was difficult at best. Brewster was obviously trying to set him up for failure, but maybe he could turn this to his advantage. He didn’t play that much worse than Brewster, and the tournament was still a month away. He could practice. If he could just pick up one or two strokes per hole . . . Hell, he wasted at least that many strokes every hole. Look at the 18’th hole the other week. He almost beat Brewster, except for that putting screw-up. All he had to do was practice enough so that he stopped screwing up. Stopped making those rank amateur mistakes. He didn’t need to win the tournament. All he needed to do was not make a fool of himself. Surely he could practice enough in a month to improve that much. And who knew where this could lead? Maybe Mr. Beeman would want to play every week. . .

“No, you don’t need to change anything” he told Jennifer. “I just wondered who told you about my handicap.”

“Sh--!” Bob swore as his ball sliced off into the woods. He hit buckets of balls at the range every night after work. He played 18 holes every Saturday and Sunday. He did sit-ups and push-ups every morning, and he spent his lunch hours reading books on golf. And now the tournament was only a week away, and he still wasn’t getting any better. He slashed away at the dead leaves with a 5-iron, looking for his ball. He found it hiding underneath a dead branch, next to a small bush. Angrily he tossed the branch out of the way and hacked at the ball with his 5-iron. His backswing tangled in the bush and the ball just dribbled a few feet. His next swing slammed the ball into an oak tree, and it bounced back almost to where he was standing.

“Calm down. Hold your temper” he told himself. He forced his breathing to slow down and carefully lined up his shot. “Take your time. Don’t try to kill it. Just an easy iron shot onto the green. Smooth. That’s the key word. Smooth.” He drew back his club as smoothly as he could, cocked his wrists, and swung forward through the ball. Follow-through. Twist body. Right heel off the ground. It felt good, and he was delighted to see his ball arc through the air, out of the woods, and toward the green. It landed right on the edge of the elevated green, right where he’d aimed it. Except, instead of rolling forward onto the green it bounced crazily off to the right and landed in a bunker.

“Sh--!” he yelled again. He threw down his club in disgust and raised his arms to the sky. “Can’t the gods of golf take pity on me? Just this once?”

“You need more than pity, kid. I’ve seen your swing.”

Bob spun around to see who had spoken. A medium-sized man in an extraordinary outfit was sitting on a log, calmly smoking a cigarette. He was wearing a long-sleeve white shirt with a tie and a tan vest, brown plus-four trousers, argyle knee socks, and brown and white wing-tip golf shoes. He looked like a caricature of a golfer, except that somehow on him this outfit looked good. A roguish smile creased his deeply tanned face and his jet black hair was slicked straight back. He looked like the devil-may-care uncle your mother never quite trusted, like the president of the fraternity that always had the best parties on campus, like somebody Bob almost recognized. . .

“Walter Hagen?!!” The words escaped Bob’s lips before he realized how foolish they sounded.

“I’m impressed” the man replied. “You’d be surprised at how many people don’t recognize me any more.”

“But what are you doing here?” Bob asked incredulously.

“You called upon the gods of golf” Walter replied. “Who’d you expect?”

“I, I don’t know” Bob replied, still in shock. “Tiger Woods? Arnold Palmer? I really didn’t expect anybody.”

“Those guys are still alive” Walter said as he stood up. “You can’t be a god while you’re alive.”

“Harry Vardon?” asked Bob.

“Harry’s got a weak stomach.” Walter said casually. “One look at your swing and he’d be off puking in the weeds. Besides. He’s busy with Tiger.” He dropped his cigarette on the ground and crushed it with his shoe. His face turned serious as he looked at Bob. “Look. Those guys are great at playing the fairways, but you don’t play the fairways. You need someone who knows how to recover from a shot that wanders off where God lost his overshoes. You need me. Now are you going to let me teach you how to play golf or are you going to stand around arguing that you want someone else?”

“I, I’m not arguing.” Bob stammered. “I’ve just never met anyone who was . . .” his voice trailed off.

“Dead?” asked Walter. “You need to get over that or we’ll never get anywhere. Look here, kiddo. You got yourself in a jam. You’ve got less than a week to learn how to play

this game without looking like an idiot in front of your boss. I can't work miracles, but maybe I can help. Let's forget this hole and go on to the next. I want to see you drive."

Dazed, Bob followed Walter to the next tee. When they got there, he patted his pocket and then turned back toward the previous green.

"Now just where are you going?" Walter asked.

"I left my ball in the bunker" Bob replied.

"Forget it" Walter told him. He reached in his pocket and tossed a ball to Bob. It was an autographed, Walter Hagen special. "I get them for free. Endorsements."

"Still?" Bob asked.

"What can I say. I had a good agent. Now let me see you swing."

Hagen watched Bob's drive and offered a few suggestions. After his next shot he made a few more suggestions. As the afternoon wore on, however, Walter offered fewer and fewer suggestions. After a while he just watched Bob play, with a puzzled look on his face. He didn't speak again until after Bob finished the 18'th hole.

"I'm not certain where to start" Hagen said. "It's hard to say what you're doing wrong, because you never swing the same way twice. Sometimes your swing doesn't look too bad, but I think that's just a fluke. I'm going to have to think about this for a while. Meet me here tomorrow morning at 8:00."

"But tomorrow's a Monday" Bob protested.

"Better still" said Hagen. We'll have the place to ourselves.

"I have to work tomorrow" Bob replied."

"Can't you take the day off?" Hagen asked. "I mean, just how important is it to you to do well in this tournament? And I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, but just how often has someone who won 16 majors offered to give you private lessons? You're turning that down because you have to work?"

"Well, I do have a couple of vacation days coming. . ."

"Tell you what" said Hagen. "We don't want to wear you out before the tournament. Take off Monday and Tuesday and we'll work on your drives and iron shots. The rest of the week you can go to work in the morning and we'll spend the afternoons working on putting, chipping, and specialty shots."

"It would be easier for me to take the mornings off" Bob suggested.

Hagen grinned. "I'm not a morning person. It will be tough enough for me to get up two mornings this week. I don't have much need for an alarm clock any more."

The next morning, true to his word, Hagen was waiting for Bob in the parking lot. Bob started to get his clubs out of the trunk but Hagen said "Leave 'em. We'll use my sticks." He was carrying a skinny little tube of a golf bag with less than a dozen clubs in it.

When they got to the driving range, Walter tossed an antique driver to Bob. It was a "Hagen Arrow" with a beautifully lacquered persimmon head, a hickory shaft, and a skinny handle with leather wrapping for a grip. It looked like a nice museum piece, but not something you'd want to hit a golf ball with. The head was less than half the size of Bob's "Mighty Mildred XB70" titanium driver.

"The trouble with your clubs" Hagen explained "is that they have a sweet spot the size of a grapefruit. As long as you swing those clubs in the same county your ball's in, it's going to go straight." He paused for a moment, remembering Bob's shots from the day before. "Well, sometimes they'll go straight. Anyway you don't have to have a consistent swing to hit a good ball. That's great when you're just messing around, but when the pressure's on and you get nervous your swing gets erratic. Since your swing wasn't very consistent to begin with, that spells trouble."

Hagen pulled another club out of his bag. "These babies will let you know if your swing's off. Swing 'em right, and you can do anything you want with your ball. "Swing 'em carelessly, and they'll turn around and bite you. Practice with these and you'll learn the right way to swing. Then when you play with your clubs, if your swing gets a little loose you'll still hit a good ball."

Bob nodded enthusiastically. The plan made perfect sense. At least, it made perfect sense until he hit his first ball. It felt like a good swing, but the ball flew off the heel of the club at about a 45 degree angle. The next ball careened off the toe of the club. Bob hit several dozen balls, but even the ones that went straight barely made it past 100 yards. Finally he handed the club back to Walter. "I think maybe there's something wrong with this club" he said.

Hagen examined the club carefully. "I don't see anything wrong" he said. He teed up a ball and took a smooth, easy swing. The ball sailed past the 300 yard marker. "That's odd" he said, as he watched the ball fly. "The club seems to be working fine." He turned and looked at Bob. "Maybe the problem is with your swing" he said thoughtfully. "Let's start with the basics."

They spent the rest of the day working on Bob's grip, his stance, his backswing – things he hadn't worried about since his father taught him the game nearly 20 years ago. If he hadn't been totally humiliated by how effortlessly Hagen had outdriven him he

would have resented spending all this time on things he thought he already knew. Instead, the memory of that drive made him willing to learn. By the end of the day he couldn't match Hagen's drive, but he could consistently hit the ball straight for about 200 yards. He gained an appreciation for Walter's clubs. They were a bitch to master, but because they were so difficult when Bob did hit them right they gave him a sense of satisfaction he'd never gotten from his own clubs. They also made a beautiful "tock" sound when he hit the ball.

"Nothing sounds like hickory" Walter agreed. "Those clubs of yours are impressive works of engineering and they'll drive the ball a country mile, but they make that God-awful 'dink' noise when they do it. It's like listening to an aluminum baseball bat when you're used to a real one." He chuckled. "If you want to get an earful some day, ask the Babe what he thinks about aluminum baseball bats."

"The Babe?" exclaimed Bob. "Do you know Babe Ruth?"

"He's an old friend" said Hagen as he slid the clubs back into his bag. "Same time tomorrow" he announced. He walked off toward the clubhouse and faded into nothingness as he went.

When Bob returned to work Wednesday morning his shoulders ached, his arms were sore, and his midriff was tender, but he felt like his game was coming together. The warm glow he felt lasted about 5 minutes, until Brewster strode into his cube and dropped into his guest chair.

"What the hell have you been saying to old man Beeman about the golf tournament?" Brewster demanded.

"I haven't said a thing to him" Bob replied. "I've been out of the office since last Friday."

"Well somebody's been filling his head with wild-ass ideas. Now he says we're going to walk the course instead of using carts."

"That was Mr. Hutchinson's idea." Jennifer had walked up behind Brewster and was standing in the doorway. "He wants to make this like a PGA tournament."

"Whatever happened to a friendly little round of golf?" Bob asked.

Jennifer ignored the question and looked at her notepad. "I've spent the last day and a half trying to get people to volunteer to caddie. Jimmy's going to carry for you."

"Jimmy the stock boy?"

“Only Jimmy we’ve got. Oh, and the clubhouse is booked for a wedding that night, so the cookout has been moved to lunch. You’ll play nine, eat lunch, and then play nine more.” She checked something off on her notepad and walked off. Brewster got up and followed her.

Bob tried to imagine what Jimmy would be like as a caddie. He’d spoken to Jimmy a few times in passing, but he really didn’t know him. Jimmy pushed a cart from workstation to workstation in Production, refilling empty parts bins and hauling off the finished products. They called him a stock boy even though he was in his late twenties. On the other hand, he still dressed like a teenager and alternated between staring vacantly into space and grinning at some private joke. Rumor had it he spent most of his weekends getting wasted, but he was always polite and coherent when Bob spoke to him. Bob didn’t think he’d be particularly useful as a caddie, but since he’d never used a caddie before he didn’t think that would matter.

By Friday afternoon Walter was letting Bob use his own clubs again as they played 18 holes and discussed strategy on each hole. Walter would tell Bob how he ought to play a shot, then he’d drop a ball and demonstrate. Bob would try to duplicate Walter’s shot, then they’d play the next shot from wherever Bob’s ball landed. Most of the time Bob could come pretty close to matching Walter’s shot, and occasionally he even outdrove him. Once, after a particularly successful fairway wood, he felt cocky enough to point this out. “I guess these new clubs really do make a big difference” he said.

“What do you mean?” asked Walter.

“I mean, by using newer clubs, I’m playing almost as well as you are. I outdrove you by a good twenty yards on that shot.”

Without saying a word Walter dropped another ball, pulled a brassie out of his bag, and sent it sailing down the fairway. It left the other two balls far behind and bounced up the side of the green, dead center on the pin.

Bob’s jaw dropped in amazement. “I think you’re on the green.”

“I’m better than on the green, kid” Walter replied. “If that’s not in the cup it’s not more than six inches from it. I’ve been setting ‘achievable goals’ for you today. You’re playing a lot better than you did on Sunday, but don’t get any crazy ideas about giving up your day job.”

Bob decided to keep quiet and focus on learning as much as he could for the rest of the game. After they finished, Bob asked Walter if he’d care for a drink. He didn’t have to ask twice. They walked into the clubhouse bar, and Walter picked out a table while Bob bought a couple of beers. When he walked back to the table, he was amazed to see a couple of attractive women sitting on either side of Walter. Even on a Friday night there

weren't many unattached women in the clubhouse bar. He couldn't imagine how anyone could pick up two within seconds of walking into the place.

Walter introduced his new friends as "Sugar" and "Honey." Bob had already guessed that Walter wasn't very good at remembering names. He also discovered that Walter had told the women he was Bob's uncle, a sports writer who had written a couple of books on golf which by a strange coincidence neither one of the girls had ever read. That's where the con artist ended, however. Back in his college days Bob had occasionally had the misfortune to go bar hopping with smoozy frat brothers who used slick lies to chase anything in skirts. Walter wasn't like that. He seemed genuinely interested in everyone he met, and he had a gift for keeping the whole table engrossed in conversation. As a matter of fact, he kept them engrossed in conversation throughout dinner at the restaurant they went to after they left the clubhouse, and later on at a bar several more men and women joined their crowd. Walter didn't dominate the conversation, but he was definitely holding court at the center of things. When the conversation turned to golf, he regaled everyone with his anecdotes about the great games and golfers of the past. Impulsively Bob called out "What about Walter Hagen?"

"Who?" Walter asked innocently.

"Walter Hagen. What was he like?" Bob replied.

"Ah yes. Walter Hagen. He was a good golfer. He was a damn good golfer. Probably not the best golfer that ever lived, but he might take issue with that. You see, he was the first touring golf pro. He invented that role, and made it a respected profession. Before Walter, golf pros were looked down upon as the 'hired hands' at golf courses. They ran the pro shop, gave lessons, repaired clubs, oh and once in a while the members would give them a few days off to play in a tournament. They were always second class citizens at these events, though. Even the best, like Harry Vardon, weren't allowed to join the clubs. Usually they weren't even allowed inside the clubhouse, and often they weren't allowed to use the locker rooms. Those were reserved for members only, while the pros had to change clothes in the stables."

"Walter Hagen changed all that. He became the best golfer of his day, quit his job at a golf course, and devoted himself to playing tournaments and exhibition games. He built a larger than life reputation for himself, making certain he was always the best dressed player on the course and living the elegant lifestyle of the 1920's sports heroes like Babe Ruth. He went out of his way to draw attention to himself, but always in a way that promoted the idea that a golf pro was a man to be respected, an athlete who truly was the best in his field. When the golf club hosting the British Open refused to let pros enter the clubhouse, Hagen hired a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce to park in the club driveway. He used that as his locker room and had catered lunches of pheasant and champagne delivered to the car. Flamboyant yes, but it drew attention to the fact that the world's best golfers had come from all over to play in the tournament, yet the club wouldn't let these pros eat in the clubhouse. The final blow came when Hagen played golf with Prince Edward at the Royal Saint Something-or-other golf course, and the Prince invited

him into the clubhouse for lunch afterward. A waiter actually had the audacity to tell the Prince, the future King of England, that he couldn't serve them because they didn't allow 'professionals' in their dining room. For once in his life Hagen was going to leave quietly, as he didn't want to embarrass the Prince, but the Prince wouldn't hear of it. He told the waiter that they would be served immediately or the club would drop the word 'Royal' from its name. After that, a lot of barriers fell. There are golf superstars today who probably play a better game than Hagen did, but they'd all be changing in the stables if it weren't for 'Sir Walter.'"

The table grew silent for a moment when Walter finished this story. Then somebody called out "What about Arnold Palmer?" and Walter was off on a new tale. Bob was enjoying the evening so much he was shocked when he looked at his watch and discovered it was almost 3:00 AM. He worked his way through the crowd to tell Walter how late it was, and Walter told him to go home and rest up for the tournament. "Don't worry about me, kid." He said. "I'll find my own way home."

"Rise and shine, kiddo. We've got golf to play." Bob shielded his eyes against the blinding sunlight that blasted through the curtains Walter had opened. For a confused moment he wondered why the sun was shining in the middle of the night. Then he opened one eye enough to peer at his alarm clock and saw it was 8:15 in the morning. He sat up and squinted at Walter. Walter was still wearing the clothes he had on the night before. They looked a little the worse for wear, but Walter himself looked bright and chipper. He was holding a half-finished Bloody Mary in one hand, and offering Bob a full one with the other. Reluctantly Bob took the drink. His stomach roiled at the thought of swallowing anything, but his brain was willing to take the risk if only it would stop the pounding.

By the time Bob finished his shower he felt well enough to eat a piece of toast. Walter harassed him a little when he put on shorts and a polo shirt ("Are you playing golf or tennis?") but mostly he discussed strategy and worked on building Bob's self-confidence. That made it all the more surprising when, as Bob walked out to his car, Walter stuck out his hand and said "Good luck, kid."

"Aren't you coming?" Bob asked.

"There's nothing more I can do for you" Walter answered. "The only person who can give you advice on the course is your caddie."

"Aren't you even going to watch?"

"Oh, I might drop by for a bit, but you won't see me. Don't worry kid. You'll do just fine."

Confused, and feeling a little abandoned, Bob drove to the golf course. Mr. Beeman and Brewster were already there, and Jimmy shuffled up a few minutes later. Mr.

Hutchinson arrived just before their tee time. He and Mr. Beeman hit reasonably good drives, and Brewster scorched his drive way down the center of the fairway. Then it was Bob's turn. Jimmy handed him his driver, and as he walked up to the tee he suddenly realized there were 20 or 30 people watching. Not much of a crowd by PGA standards, but to Bob it seemed as though everyone in the company was staring at him as he teed up his ball. He took a few practice swings and then stepped up to the ball. Suddenly, he was filled with doubt. "Do I inhale, exhale, or hold my breath while I swing?" he thought. After years of playing golf and an intense week of practice, he couldn't remember how to breathe during a swing. He couldn't even remember thinking about it before. Somehow it always came natural in the past, but nothing seemed natural now. He finally decided to inhale just before his backswing, and then hold his breath. He took a deep breath and hacked at the ball.

A hook?!! He never hooked a shot in his life, but this one started to the right and then took a sharp turn to the left. THWACK!! It struck an oak tree off the left hand edge of the fairway, but then it miraculously bounced back to the right and came to rest in some ankle-high grass just off the edge of the fairway. Jimmy took the club from his hand and stuck it back in the bag as Bob stood staring at the tree. Then they both trudged off toward the ball.

With the opening drive behind him, Bob settled down and began to play decent golf. It soon became apparent that many years had passed since Mr. Beeman and Mr. Hutchinson had earned their three handicap. Their game was OK, but the real contest was between Bob and Brewster. Bob was playing the best golf of his life, but unfortunately Brewster was having an exceptional day too. They played neck and neck, with neither one ever gaining more than a one stroke lead over the other. Bob was pleasantly surprised to discover that Jimmy made an excellent caddie. He didn't talk much, but occasionally he'd suggest a club or offer advice on how to play a shot. Early in the game, when Bob asked for his five iron, Jimmy suggested a seven might work better. Bob said he thought the five would be fine, and Jimmy just shrugged and handed it to him. Bob promptly hit the ball over the green and into a small grove of trees behind the hole. After that, Bob paid more attention to Jimmy's suggestions.

Brewster was also on his best behavior and didn't do anything even mildly irritating, until the seventh hole. Bob had to sink a fairly long putt for par, but as he studied the green he realized it was a dead straight shot.

"Five bucks says he misses it." Brewster said to no one in particular.

Mr. Beeman looked shocked, but before he could say anything Jimmy spoke up. "I'll take that" he said in a matter-of-fact voice.

Bob gave them both a withering look and they shut up. He carefully lined up the putt and confidently stroked it. It looked great at the start, but then the ball slowed down as though it was rolling through molasses. It finally ground to a halt just before it reached the cup. Bob tapped it in and Jimmy handed Brewster a five dollar bill.

On the eighth Bob pulled his approach shot and wound up in a nasty greenside bunker. He knew it would be tough to lift his ball over the edge of the bunker, and tougher still to get it to roll close to the hole when it landed. While he was checking out the green, Jimmy spoke to Brewster. "I'd like a chance to win back my five-spot."

"What'd you have in mind?"

"Five bucks says he's up and down in two."

"Ten bucks."

Jimmy nodded in agreement as Bob stepped down into the bunker. His shot cleared the edge with room to spare, but it stopped dead when it landed on the green. That left him with a long putt across a sloping green. After careful study he chose his aiming point and stroked the putt. The ball arced gracefully into the cup. Brewster rolled his eyes in amazement and handed \$10 to Jimmy. Jimmy looked up at Bob and grinned as he pocketed the money. Bob realized it was the first time all day he'd seen Jimmy smile. It wasn't Jimmy's usual vacant grin, though. This was a captivating, mischievous smile. It looked strangely familiar.

Bob's drive on the ninth took him to within a medium iron shot of the green. He and Jimmy stood side by side and surveyed the shot. "Mashie" Bob announced. Jimmy reached into the bag and handed Bob a five iron.

Bob finished the front nine tied with Brewster for the lead. He brooded as they walked back to the clubhouse, and Jimmy seemed to understand his need to be alone with his thoughts. They picked a table away from the crowd and ate in silence. When they finished Jimmy stared off across the room, apparently lost in a daydream. Bob noticed that Jimmy's seemingly vacant stare just happened to be in the direction of Miriam, the femme fatale of Marketing. "Walter?" Bob said quietly.

"Yeah kid?" Jimmy turned around and looked at Bob expectantly. Then he smiled sheepishly when he realized what he'd done. "How'd you know?" he asked.

"You knew what a mashie was." Bob kept his voice low so no one else could hear. "What the hell are you doing in Jimmy's body?"

"I'm just borrowing his brain for a couple of hours" Walter answered. "It's not like he was using it for anything. The only person who's allowed to help you is your caddie, so it just made sense for me to be your caddie."

"You said my caddie was the only one who could give me advice. Now you say you're helping me?"

"Well, OK. Technically I can only give you advice."

“Technically? Have you done anything besides give me advice?”

Walter hesitated before answering. “You’re playing great kid. All you’ve needed is advice. Except for that first drive. The one that went into the trees. I may have sort of wished that one back out of the woods.”

“That’s cheating!” Bob hissed indignantly.

“It would have been an unplayable lie. You’d have had to take a one stroke penalty to move it away from the tree. Except that it would have been more than one stroke, because it would have destroyed your confidence and you’d have played lousy for the rest of the day. I figured I could save you a stroke there, boost your confidence, and make it up later. It will all come out even in the end.”

“Now what do I do?” Bob asked, putting his hands on either side of his head. “I’ve got to report this. I can’t win by cheating.”

“Christ!” said Walter. “You’re worse than Bobby Jones. Always wanting to call a penalty on himself, Bobby was. I promise you it will all come out even in the end. Besides, how are you going to report this? Are you going to tell your boss that the ghost of Walter Hagen pulled your ball out of the trees?”

Bob stared at Walter in silence. Walter continued speaking. “What did you expect when you asked the gods of golf to take pity on you? That they’d take pity, but not affect your game? No. You wanted them to give you the breaks. You wanted them to alter your shots, to save you from the consequences of your bad strokes. You just didn’t want to know about it. Well, I gave you a lucky break. It was exactly what you asked for.” He pulled a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket.

“You can’t smoke in here.” Bob said flatly.

“I can’t smoke in a clubhouse?” Walter asked in amazement. “Hell. I almost liked it better when we ate in the stables.” He stood up in disgust and walked outside. Bob sat fuming at the table. What really made him mad was the knowledge that Walter was right. A week ago, when his game was lousy, he was asking for a lucky break, asking for someone to save him from his mistakes. Walter had done much more than that. He’d spent a week teaching Bob how to avoid making mistakes in the first place. He’d taught Bob how to play golf. And in return, Bob had jumped down his throat for giving him the lucky break he’d asked for. But that didn’t make it right. Walter may have just been doing what Bob had asked him to do, but Bob couldn’t just ignore the fact that he hadn’t earned the score he’d reported for the first hole. He sat and thought for a long time before he headed back to the course.

Outside, he found Walter sitting at a picnic table with Jennifer. He was surprised to hear Jennifer laugh. She had a reputation of being the “ice queen” in the office, but

Walter seemed to be getting along famously with her. When Walter saw Bob he excused himself, picked up Bob's golf bag, and walked over to join him.

"Are you coming on to Jennifer?" Bob asked.

"You're only here for a short while, kid." Walter replied. "You've got to make time to smell the roses along the way."

"What's she going to think when the real Jimmy comes back?"

Walter stopped walking, and looked Bob directly in the eye. "Don't sell Jimmy short. People tend to live up or down to your expectations. Everybody treats Jimmy like a kid, so that's how he acts. That doesn't mean he likes it. Treat him with a little respect, and you just might be surprised at the change in him. Everyone deserves a little respect."

Bob was suddenly reminded of Walter's story from the night before. "Even golf pros?" he asked with a smile.

Walter returned the smile. "Damn right" he said as he started walking again. "Do you know why Jimmy volunteered to carry your clubs? Because you're the only one in the office who doesn't treat him like a kid. He respects you."

Bob was taken aback. He probably hadn't spoken more than a dozen words to Jimmy in the past year. He certainly hadn't gone out of his way to talk to Jimmy, and he wasn't aware that he'd treated him any differently than anybody else. Whatever they'd talked about, it hadn't made an impression on Bob. But apparently it had made an impression on Jimmy. It made Bob wonder how badly the rest of the people in the office must be treating Jimmy.

Walter interrupted his thoughts as they approached the tenth tee. "Don't start brooding about it. We've got a tournament to finish. You need to get your head back in the game."

The back nine played out much like the front nine. Brewster and Bob traded the lead, while the others fell further behind. They finished the 16'th hole in a tie. The 17'th was a narrow par five with a lake off to the right and a grove of trees along the left border. Bob looked at the lake, and shifted his stance to the left.

THWACK! Bob's drive struck a tree and dropped down into the bushes. "I guess that makes up for my good luck on the first hole" he said to no one in particular. He strode off toward the trees with Walter following while the others followed Brewster's ball down the middle of the fairway.

"Did you do that on purpose?" Walter asked as soon as they were out of earshot.

“Damn right I did.” Bob replied. “And I two-putted the last hole to make up for that shenanigan you pulled on the 8’th.”

“What shenanigan?” Walter demanded.

“Up and down in two.” Bob answered. “I’ve never made a putt like that in my life.”

“That’s great.” Walter said. “Very noble. The only trouble is, I already took back that stroke I gave you on the first.”

“What? When?” Bob demanded.

“That putt that came up short on the 7’th. You stroked it just right, but I stopped it. I told you everything would come out even in the end, but you didn’t believe me.”

“But you lost five bucks on that putt!”

Walter chuckled. “Actually, Jimmy lost five bucks on that putt. And anyway, I won it back for him on the 8’th. But I swear I didn’t do anything on that hole. You got out of that bunker and made that putt all by yourself. I swear on Gene Sarazen’s bible.”

Bob looked Walter in the eye and realized he believed him. “So now what do we do?”

“Now we get out of these woods and beat that grinning bastard named Brewster.” Walter replied. “You’ve given up three strokes to atone for that one stroke I saved you on the first hole, so I think you can stop worrying about playing fair and start playing golf!”

This proved to be easier said than done. The ball truly was unplayable, so Bob had to take a penalty stroke to move it to a playable position. Even then, there were too many trees in the way to try for the green, so the best Bob could do was to burn another stroke chipping out to the fairway. He played well from there, but finished the hole down two strokes to Brewster. Bob earned one stroke back on the 18’th, when a blistering drive let him birdie the hole, but it wasn’t enough. Brewster dropped his putt for par and won the tournament. Bob shook his hand and congratulated him, and then looked at Jimmy. Jimmy stared back blankly, with the confused look of someone who doesn’t quite know where he is or how he got there. It wasn’t an unusual look for Jimmy, but Bob felt as though he’d just lost his best friend.

After the match, Bob shared a couple of beers with Jimmy in the clubhouse. They talked about football, and Bob was surprised to learn that Jimmy had missed the last couple of Monday night games because he was going to night school to earn his GED. After that he planned on attending a local community college to learn how to repair computers. Bob realized Walter had been right about Jimmy. There was more to him than met the eye.

Jimmy's attention wandered to a ball game playing on the TV over the bar, which gave Bob time to think. He really wasn't upset over losing the tournament. For one thing, he knew he could have beaten Brewster by at least one stroke if he hadn't intentionally two-putted the 16'th and driven into the trees on the 17'th. He also knew that Brewster had played the best game of his life, and Bob felt like he was just starting to get the hang of this game. He had no doubt that he'd continue to get better. Their Sunday afternoon games were going to get a little more interesting. He was also pleasantly surprised at how restrained Brewster had been when Mr. Beeman had handed him the trophy for winning the tournament. He thanked Mr. Beeman, thanked everyone who had worked so hard to put the tournament together, and even complimented Bob for having given him such stiff competition. Of course, that was while Mr. Beeman was still in the room. Now that Mr. Beeman had gone home and Brewster had a couple of beers in him, he was starting to crow about his victory. Now he was challenging everyone in the bar to a round of golf. Bob winced when he saw that Brewster was walking over to his table.

"What do you say, Bobby boy? There's still plenty of daylight left. Care for a rematch? Ten bucks a hole?" Brewster swayed a little as he spoke. Maybe he'd had more beers than Bob thought.

"Not today, I'm afraid." Bob answered. "I've had enough golf for one day. I was up late last night. I think I'll just go back to the house and relax."

Brewster gave Bob a patronizing smile and shrugged his shoulders. He was starting to turn away when Jimmy spoke up. "I'll play golf with you, Mr. Brewster."

Brewster raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Do you even know how to play golf, Jimmy?"

"Sure I do" Jimmy answered. "My dad taught me. And anyway, I watched you guys play today. It didn't look that hard."

Brewster hesitated for a moment, and then patted Jimmy on the shoulder. "Some other time, Jimmy. I think you need to practice a bit before you play me."

"I understand, Mr. Brewster." Jimmy turned back toward the TV. "I'm up five bucks on you already, and you don't want to lose any more money."

This was like waving a red flag at a bull. The smile vanished from Brewster's face and he stared intently at Jimmy. "All right Jimmy. You're on. Just remember that this was your idea."

"I've got my dad's clubs out in the car" Jimmy said. "I'll get them and meet you out at . . . at the place where we start playing."

“The first tee?” Brewster asked.

“Right. The first tee.”

Brewster shook his head and walked out the door to get his clubs. Jimmy looked at Bob and gave him a conspiratorial grin.

“Walter. . .?” Bob said.

“Don’t worry, kid.” Walter answered. “I’m just going to earn a little respect for Jimmy. A little respect and a few bucks for his wallet.”

“No funny business” Bob warned.

“Of course not” Walter replied. “Just a friendly little round of golf. And don’t worry. I won’t beat him too badly.” He finished his beer and stood up. Then he leaned over and whispered to Bob. “If I beat him too badly, he won’t double his bet.” Whistling, he walked out the door.

Bob sat back and sipped his beer. A few minutes later Tarkington came in. “You wouldn’t believe the clubs Jimmy has” he said. “They must be at least a hundred years old! They’ve got wooden shafts, Bob. Wooden shafts!” He shook his head sadly. “Brewster’s gonna cream him!”

Bob shrugged his shoulders. “Some people just have to learn things the hard way.” He finished his beer and stood up. “I really am tired. I think I’ll call it a day.” As he walked out the door he decided to stop at a few antique stores on his way home. Maybe he could pick up a set of practice clubs. Walking across the parking lot he heard the familiar “thwack” of a golf ball striking a tree. This time it was followed by the sound of Jimmy’s voice.

“Gee Mr. Brewster. That’s too bad. You’re in the rough.”