

Assessing the “Unassessable”

By: Nathan Crace Date: October 22, 2002

Is there anything in golf more frustrating than a three-putt? How about a shank? As golfers, we tend to let mistakes on the golf course transform us into people we are not—consumed by a tiny white ball that isn't even moving when we try to hit it! Why do we torment ourselves? To put it simply, we put up with all of the bad shots for the hope and promise of the good ones. For the average golfer the good ones are few and far between, but when you connect the expanded-dual-forged-polymer-inserted-face-balanced sweet spot of your 7-iron with just the right number of dimples (whether they're hexagonal or round) on that little juiced-up-cut-proof-double-covered-plutonium-cored \$5.00 golf ball, there's no better feeling in the world. Or at least I used to think so.

Then came September 3, 2002. After enjoying some time off to spend with the family for Labor Day, I was back in the office as usual. But this day was different. This day was my little girl's first open house. It was Kindergarten and she loved every bit of it. She couldn't wait for Daddy to meet her classmates, meet her teacher, and see all of the wonderful things she had made which hung from every corner of the room adorned with drawings of her parents, her dog, and of course her baby brother. To be honest, I was excited too. Except for the small and remedial task of filling up the car at the gas station on the way home, I was only a few blocks from home and was—oddly enough for me—on time. It seems I'm always habitually late by at least a few minutes nearly anywhere I go. The strange thing is, being on time this time caught me in a cruel and ironic twist of fate. After leaving the gas station and heading home to meet my wife and children, I was traveling down a quiet city street in a residential area when a small car of Japanese decent failed to yield the right-of-way at a two-way stop (as the police report would later explain) and firmly inserted its front end into my driver's side in a classic “T-Bone” collision—totaling the other car. I was only a matter of blocks from my house and thus, I'm now officially a statistic: one of the people who are in a wreck within a few blocks of home. Thankfully, the people in the other car were not injured. I, however, was experiencing some discomfort in my lower back that grew increasingly more painful as the EMT surveyed me for injuries. Ten minutes later, I found myself in the local Emergency Room.

As I waited for the doctors in the ER, I joked with my wife about my concern regarding my ability to play golf if this was indeed a serious injury. What golfer wouldn't be concerned? Of course I was thinking at the time that I was still young and “bullet-proof” and that I could recover from anything—especially a car wreck. Right? In fact, I was more upset then about missing my daughter's open house. Eventually, I was wheeled away to radiology and began undergoing x-rays in search for broken bones. After an hour and what felt like 50 x-rays, I finally asked, “Do you see something that doesn't look right?” In a kind yet businesslike voice, the radiologist replied “I can't tell you or you could sue me.” I thought that was a strange answer, but I left well enough alone. A few minutes later, I could hear her and the doctor talking to each other in the next room. She returned and asked if I had any other chest x-rays taken at that hospital in recent years. I replied that I had not and she told me she wanted to take a few more x-rays for the doctor to look over. This was when I began to wonder what they were looking at...or looking for.

Afterward, I was wheeled back to the ER and allowed to change back from the drafty hospital gown they loaned me into the clothes I arrived in at the hospital. The doctor followed shortly thereafter, sat down, and told my wife and I that the good news was there were no broken bones. I could tell there was more. “However,” he continued as he curled his thumb and index finger to make a circle roughly the size of a quarter, “There is a nodule this big in the lower portion of your left lung.” Needless to say, we were waiting on the next sentence. “It could be some scar tissue,” he explained, “Or it could be a fungal infection.” Again I could tell there was more so I completed his thought. “Or it could be a tumor,” I said. “Yes,” he replied, “It could be a tumor.” My wife turned paler than white.

When we got home some five hours after the wreck, I was too sore and too tired from the medications they gave me at the hospital to worry much about what the doctor had told us. I have never smoked and I was sure it was nothing—and I was determined to feel that way until my CT Scan scheduled for the next day told us otherwise. The preliminary result of that CT Scan was that it was not a tumor, but my family doctor wanted me to see a pulmonologist to be sure—four weeks later. For a month, I kept telling my wife that they would not make me wait four weeks if it were something serious, but in my mind I kept playing through the “what ifs” in my future. What would my wife do? What would my kids do? Thankfully, following a few tests and a review of my CT Scan and x-rays with the specialist on October 1st, I was given the good news and a clean bill of health for my lung: not a tumor...a calcified hemartoma. But for four weeks, I wondered about things I never had to think about before. Sometimes it takes something nearly altering your life to make you step back and take stock of it. So you bogeyed the last three holes to blow your club championship? When you get home, your family will still love you and your kids will still think you are the greatest Dad (or Mom) on the face of the planet. After weeks of physical therapy, I can play golf again and the mistakes on the course seem miniscule in the big picture. Sure the game is important to my livelihood, but the work-related things that used to worry me so are now in better perspective. Take my word for it: don't let stress from the game of golf (or other truly unimportant things) take too much energy from your life and the time you spend with family and friends. Assess the things you can in case you are forced to assess the things you cannot—even if for only a few weeks.

Nathan Crace is the Senior Design Associate at Maxwell Golf Group in Jackson, Mississippi. His freelance “Lipouts” column is based, in part, on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know. Copyright 2002.