

Fan Mail, Hate Mail

By: Nathan Crace Date: January 25, 2008

When I was working as an assistant golf professional at Big Spring Country Club in Louisville, Kentucky more than 15 years ago, the pro I worked for my first year kept a file he simply titled "Fan Mail, Hate Mail." Curious, I asked one day why he kept both in the same folder. The answer was that sometimes fan mail and hate mail are more similar than the author may care to admit. Besides, when he needed a "pick me up" he could read through the letters and get a good laugh. Since that time, I have kept the same file bearing the same name and that brings me to an email I received in August of 2007. The story is particularly entertaining to me because it is completely true and as we all know, truth is often funnier than fiction. In fact, I have been meaning to write about the email for months, but have managed to put it off until now. Herewith, the contents of the email verbatim (the names of the author and his wife have been withheld to protect the innocent and some censoring has been done since this is a family-friendly column):

Nathan,

I've always heard that the best golfers get a mental picture of what they want their ball to do and where they want it to go before executing (to the best of their ability) their shot. To this regard, I have attempted to pass this exercise along to my lovely wife, of nearly 30 years I might say, in an effort to help her improve her game. She loves the game.

For the most part, she listens to my instructions with an open mind but usually mumbles a quiet [shut up] under her breath. She sometimes asks me why I don't seem to practice what I preach when it comes to shot selection and /or club selection and I have to remind her that we have different flight trajectories that call for different shots. My ball comes in high and soft and hers goes in low and hard. She has come to accept this and has been fairly successful at making necessary adjustments when needed.

However, certain holes at our home course, Copper Mill Golf Club, give her quite a challenge but none as much as the par 3 number 8. As a matter of fact, she will begin making derogatory comments about it as we are leaving the tee on number 7. She will, from time to time, curse the design of the hole and comment that had she had some input as to its design from the beginning, her experience on the course would be much more pleasurable.

Getting back to the 'Picture in your mind' exercise, she informed me only yesterday that she attempts to apply this on this particular hole more often than on any other. There in lies the problem and the gist of this communication.

*After hitting yet another good shot only to have it come to rest in the upslope of the sand bunker guarding the front of the green, she turns to me and says, " My only mental picture of this hole is that of a sand wedge buried in Nathan's [****] grip deep", of which I respond, " Well no wonder you never hit the green".*

As a result, she has become a pretty good bunker player and will from time to time get up and down. She is almost always ready for another beer on the 9th tee, which in turn puts her in a good mood by the time we reach the 10th. The rest of the round, until we get to 17, goes fairly well (she thinks 17 should have been a par 5 for women).

Anyway, being that you are so often on my wife's mind during our fun time on the course, I thought I would share this with you.

Picture that,

[Author's Name Withheld]

As I have often said in this column and elsewhere, hazards should be a point of discourse among golfers because they are by definition hazards—there should be no consensus on their merits. If everyone agreed on how good a bunker is, it should be replaced or renovated. Or to quote Donald Ross, "Often the highest recommendation of a bunker is when it is criticized." To that end, it would appear that the bunker in question fronting the 8th green at Copper Mill is sufficient in accomplishing its intended task. For those who have not played the hole, it is a slightly uphill par 3 with a bunker front right and another back right. In fact, the back bunker was actually designed to be hidden from the tee, with only the foreboding shadow of a dark pit visible, planting a seed of doubt in the golfer's mind about playing away from the front bunker to the lay up catch area to the right of the green—you see there actually is a thought process behind this whole design thing. Because of this, when I began reading the above email, I assumed the point of the message was that the back bunker was hidden and thus unfair as the front bunker is plainly visible.

So it is my humble opinion that the bunker serves its purpose and I side with the husband on this particular issue. Besides, she can always play out to the right and chip up to the green to avoid the bunker or, as the husband so expertly noted, take full advantage of the opportunity to sharpen her bunker play skills. However, in an effort to be fair and balanced and offer constructive criticism in a caring and compassionate manner, I instead offered the following reply via email (no word yet as to whether my advice has worked):

Dear [Name Withheld]:

*Tell her to picture the flagstick up my [***] instead and maybe she can hit the green.*

Respectfully,

Nathan

Note: In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention that I have known the author and his wife for years, but I can't help but believe she may have been taken aback by such unexpectedly candid instruction on how to play the hole. Picture that...

Nathan Crace is a golf course architect and member of the Golf Writers Assoc. of America whose freelance "Lipouts" column is based, at times, on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed or wish to read past columns from his archives, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know or email him at nathan@watermarkgolf.com. Copyright 2008.