

The Ties that Bind

By: Nathan Crace Date: May 26, 2004

Have you ever heard this one: "I wonder what kind of scores Bobby Jones would shoot if he could use today's equipment and golf ball?" Although Jones did not pass away until December of 1971, it stands to reason that he would have been flabbergasted by the advances in golf technology that have occurred since the early to mid 1980's—and especially in the past ten years. Furthermore, the conditioning of golf courses from the most basic municipal layout to the most grandiose private club has advanced by leaps and bounds since the time Jones played competitive golf in the late 1920's before retiring at age 28. But one of the changes Mr. Jones would notice immediately is the way golfers today dress for a round of golf.

The game of golf has seen tremendous growth across all socioeconomic segments of the populous since John Daly's incredible win at the 1991 PGA Championship at Crooked Stick Golf Club in Carmel, Indiana. Daly's impact on the game is unquestionable and many people who would have never had an interest in the game wanted to know how to "grip it and rip it" 300 yards—not that long by today's long drive standards, by the way. The resulting impact was a positive one as more people picked up the game, more courses were built, and the industry prospered. But one trend that began then and continues today is the attire of some golfers.

When Bobby Jones was in his prime, it was not uncommon to see golfers in long sleeves with neckties. It was, by the way, a gentlemen's game at that time. And the women who played must have been some of the most uncomfortable women on the face of the planet with corsets, stockings, and hats seemingly too large-brimmed to accommodate a workable swing. At that time, golf was an elite sport for those who could afford it. Now, thankfully, the game has become increasingly more affordable and programs such as the *First Tee* are introducing scores of young children to a game they can enjoy for a lifetime. But just as the technology has changed, so has the "typical" golfer and his attire.

There was a time when it wasn't necessary to inform golfers that collared shirts are required on the golf course. These days, it's not implausible to see not only no collar, but also no shirt! I'm not kidding—I've seen it myself. Furthermore, a few years ago I witnessed an interesting gentleman walk into the pro shop of a course I was going to be playing. He was wearing a collared shirt just as the course rules stated, but eh shirt itself was made of mesh! Not the type of material today's "breathable" golf shirts are made of, but actual mesh. It looked more the stockings one might find on the legs of a French can-can dancer, but it did have a collar. At least he could work on his tan while he played.

Now far be it from me to turn people off from playing the game. It benefits everyone involved for more people to pick up golf and attract more people to it. But I don't want to see some man's underarm hair from beneath his Jeff Gordon muscle shirt anymore than I would want to put someone through seeing me in such attire. When I was a junior golfer, it never occurred to me to play golf in a muscle shirt or t-shirt. Not because I was taught so by my golfing family (because no one in my family played golf when I started playing), but because my mother and father just wanted me to look nice in public. And by the time I was an adolescent, no one had to tell me what to wear to the course. In fact, when I was a young lad, my Dad let me know at a young age that "gentlemen" do not wear hats indoors. When's the last time you saw a man under the age of 65 (or any age for that matter), take off his hat when he walked into the clubhouse at your course?

Regardless of what you do in life or who you are, people judge you by your actions. The way you speak, the way you dress, the manner in which you conduct yourself in public. It may not be right, but it is fact. We live in a society with socially-acceptable standards and, although they are more lax than in the past, there still are standards. You don't wear swim trunks to church and you don't play golf in a t-shirt if you want other golfers to think you have some modicum of manners and sensible behavior. You dress for the occasion.

Recently, I was standing in a golf shop at an upscale public course when another golfer and the golf professional had the following conversation:

Golfer: "How can you justify having a mandatory collared shirt policy on the course when you are selling mock turtlenecks in the golf shop?"

Pro: "Mock turtlenecks of to be worn under a golf shirt in cold weather or as after play wear in the nineteenth hole."

Golfer: "Tiger Woods wears a mock turtleneck on the Tour."

Pro: "He won't wear one on my golf course."

Nathan Crace is a golf course architect 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 the archives, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know. Copyright 2004.