

C H A P T E R

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How to Enjoy the Lifetime Sport of Golf

A Good Walk Spoiled

title of *John Feinstein's* best-selling book about golf

"Golf is a good walk with enjoyable and challenging opportunities!"

Brad Brewer

Does it seem strange to start off a golf book by encouraging you to have fun? I'll be the first to tell you that golf requires a strong sense of humor along with a good sense of perspective. While playing in the Los Angeles Open one year, Arnold Palmer shot an unbelievable 12 on a hole. After the round, someone asked the "King" how he could have possibly shot the 12. Arnold answered, "Easy! I missed a 20-footer for an 11!"

How's that for a sense of humor from a man who personifies everything that's good about the sport? Let me assure you, there's no one on the face of the earth who enjoys golf more than Arnold Palmer. And just like Arnold Palmer, all golfers have to be able to laugh at some of the things that happen because, frankly, golf is an imperfect sport. It's also a game of incredible emotional rewards. The passion you develop for the game brings you back over and over again.

Enjoyment Doesn't Always Mean Smiling!

Enjoyment is one of those subjective, hard-to-define terms because each of us has a unique sense of what we individually find enjoyable. You may not be smiling, for example, as you read the green for a tricky 10-foot downhill putt, but chances are you're enjoying the challenge of making it. In fact, let's rephrase that to say—you're enjoying the opportunity of taking on that challenge. Maybe my next book will be titled, "Golf is a good walk with enjoyable and challenging opportunities."

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHT



The earliest mention of the word golf occurred in 1457 in an act of the Scottish Parliament. King James II passed the "Fiery Face" act, forbidding the playing of golfe along with futeball so that every able-bodied man could devote all of his spare time to practicing archery. The aim was to protect the realm during the long drawn-out war with England.

King James did not live long enough to see the futility of his decree. He was soon after blown up while inspecting a cannon. Perhaps this was golf's first example of a "blown round."

Some of us may enjoy the thrill of competing while others may find enjoyment by just getting together with friends for a few hours on the course. Some may enjoy the ambiance of a well-groomed and designed country club course, while countless others are represented by the golfers I've seen teeing it up on a trailer park course in the shadow of the majestic Zion National Park in Utah.

By the way, when the Scots invented the game, it was played on fields, not the meticulously groomed courses of today. Do you think they didn't enjoy the game just as much back then? Forget about the occasional spike marks or the bunker that's not perfectly groomed when you play today—you never had to contend with the droppings of well-fed sheep!

What Do You Really Like about Golf?

What is your answer to this question: “What do you enjoy about golf?” The off-the-top-of-your-head answer would most likely involve a “Tiger Woods”-type long drive or a tricky putt holed. But below the surface lies the true answer, the special magic of unique enjoyment that golf brings to you.

Obviously, you have a passion for golf—or we wouldn’t be meeting like this. However, your answers may provide an insight into some of the challenges you face. Being clear about your attitudes will help you learn to enjoy the game of golf even more than you do now. Whatever your answers are, we can turn negatives into positive areas to work on as we improve your game.

Brad’s Golf Enjoyment Questionnaire

1. Can you control your emotions and remain even-tempered while on the golf course?
2. Are you easy on yourself by using positive self-talk and avoiding negative thoughts?
3. Can you keep your confidence level up even when you hit a bad shot?
4. Are you committed to the shot you want to hit?
5. Can you visualize your ball flying, landing, and coming to rest at its intended destination before you pull the trigger?
6. Do you enjoy competing against other golfers?
7. Do you like to practice your game and sometimes roll putts on the carpet at home or practice gripping the club while watching TV?
8. Do you enjoy having someone coaching you?
9. Can you learn by listening to others?
10. Do you enjoy the challenge of having to create a shot to get out of trouble without cursing the gods of golf for giving you a bad lie?
11. Are you friendly with your playing partners, even if they are complete strangers?
12. Do you like to carry on conversations between shots?
13. Do you enjoy the walk or ride between shots, smelling the flowers and looking at the scenery?

So, Brad, What Do My Answers Mean?

What's important to keep in mind is that all golfers run the full gamut of emotions—but good golfers learn to regain control before their next shot. In fact, it's not that bad to get mad occasionally and get it over with, but keep your temper under control. Getting mad usually means that you enjoy your competitive side and strive to play the best you can. Just be careful of negative self-talk.

SWING KILLERS



"Steve, you idiot, why did you do that! How stupid can you be?" Nothing will destroy your confidence more than negative self-talk. (By the way, notice I didn't use "Brad" in my example). Golf is a mind game, and even if you hit a bad shot, try and find a way to encourage yourself to remain positive.

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Gaining confidence in your abilities after hitting quality shots is another normal reaction and high up on the enjoyment meter. Confidence allows you to relax and thus frees up your swing, creating better shots. All golfers have bad days—it's a fact of life. It's normal to experience an occasional lack of confidence.

Unfortunately, tension is usually the end result, along with a tight restricted swing.

Sometimes even the very best players in the world have to play mind games with themselves. Brad Faxon usually ranks at or near the top of the PGA Tour's putting statistics. He's found a simple way to keep his confidence level high even if he misses some putts early in the round. Brad walks off the green pretending that he made them and reminds himself that he's a great putter.

If you could ask Brad Faxon about the key to becoming a successful putter, he'd answer, "Putt like a kid." Give a child a putter and ball and they putt to make instead of tensing up and becoming preoccupied with working on technique. Kids are relaxed, having fun, and just trying to put the ball in the hole. As we get older, our minds take over and we become too mechanical. In the Stroke Saver section of the book, Part 5, we'll work on restoring the *putt to make attitude* into your game.

Having a clear understanding of the type of shot you want to hit is a positive way to approach the game. Jack Nicklaus decides what he wants the ball to do and then mentally visualizes the flight of the ball before he hits it. This works for him, along with using the same pre-shot visualization while addressing the ball. Great players understand that consistency breeds confidence. Being positive definitely keeps your enjoyment level high.

Enjoyment Comes from Attainable Goals

All of the positive enjoyment traits are fed and nurtured by the feedback you get from your senses and your mind-set. Without really knowing it, subconsciously you are already practicing one of my favorite aspects of the game—*attainable goals*. On the other hand, if you get easily frustrated and have even thought of giving up golf or actually did give it up, attainable goals may be just the element you need to become a good golfer as well as rejuvenating your enjoyment for the sport.

If you're a high handicap golfer and get easily frustrated by your lack of consistency or improvement, I suggest working on the fundamentals of the game (correct grip, for example) and setting an attainable goal of 30 days to feel comfortable with them. If, on the other hand, you say to yourself that "by tomorrow my grip will be perfect"—that's not going to happen and you'll get frustrated. Most people I know don't equate frustration with enjoyment.

However, if you set a realistic time frame for getting comfortable with your new grip and then do something every day to work toward your goal, you'll accomplish the goal and have fun doing it. Many of the fundamentals of golf can be practiced at home and you'll be surprised at your progress. You can work on a new grip by holding onto a club with your hands in the correct positions while developing a feel for the pressure points as you watch TV at night. Working toward a goal and being able to see and feel your progress will definitely boost and maintain your enjoyment level.

ATTAINABLE GOALS

Here's my definition of an attainable goal: goals that are easily reached. Your progress must be easily seen and tracked.

Depending on the goal, it should be reachable today or within a 30-day period of time. Set your target on the tasks you are going to do on a daily basis in order to accomplish your attainable goal.

Enjoyment Comes from a True Understanding

Most of us enjoy something we understand. If something is a mystery, we may even shy away from it, preferring not to reveal our ignorance of the subject. Using a computer is an example of this behavior. Whether you've played golf for years or are just taking up golf, you are going to really boost your enjoyment level for

the game by developing a true understanding of what the sport is all about. What takes place in the swing is an example. Once you understand the simple aspects of a free-flowing golf swing and practice the fundamentals, you will see improvement in all aspects of your game.

To many golfers, the various movements and actions in the one and a half seconds it takes to make a swing are a complete mystery. You may read about them in magazines and see the terminology but, in this book, you'll be able to learn, see, and feel the swing. I'm not going to turn you into a bio-mechanical engineer, just help you develop golf senses you never thought were possible. You'll know what it takes to have a good-quality golf swing that repeats itself. As you develop your new understanding of the complete game, you'll even enjoy watching golf on television a little bit more.

The swing is only one facet of good golf. Course strategy, getting yourself out of trouble, and understanding how to practice effectively will all lead to further enjoyment. And understanding the scoring zone can dramatically cut strokes from your game.

Enjoyment Comes from Friendships

Golf is usually played in foursomes, so it's not uncommon to be paired up with players you've never met. What an incredible opportunity to make new friends! You may also get to meet golfers from other states or other countries. As a golfer, you are a member of a worldwide fraternity (or sorority). It's funny, wherever I have played around the world, I've met someone who knows somebody I know.

Conversation and camaraderie should be easy to establish since you're sharing a common experience. You're not competing against one another as much as testing the golf course and yourself. When you're out there and walking to the next shot or hole, you have time to make friends with people, share stories, and have fun.

While growing up in Winona, Minnesota, I was often invited to play with the leaders of industry in my hometown at the young age of 15. They enjoyed playing with me, because I could hit the golf ball pretty good and, at the same time, I enjoyed learning about their businesses and about life in general. Golf provided the opportunity to make friends with people who were twenty or thirty years older than I was. We competed against each other on even ground. Few sports allow or encourage that environment to happen. What a great experience for a young teenager!

In the PGA Tour's *Partners* magazine, Arnold Palmer was asked what it is about golf that intrigues him. Part of his answer had to do with friendships made: "Think how many people you've met and made friends with because you play golf. I don't care where you are or the sport you're in, it can't compare. Golf is a world in itself."

Enjoyment Comes from a Healthy Lifestyle

Being able to get out and play golf in the fresh air and walking, if possible, is going to help your quality of life. Try to adopt the attitude that golf is a game that is fun. Allow this to happen and golf will de-pressurize you. Hitting the golf ball, going and finding it no matter where it ends up, hitting it again and having fun doing it—while enjoying the people you're with—is as good as life gets.

Sometimes, to take even more pressure away, I recommend not keeping score. Forget about the score. Focus on having fun, playing golf, and enjoying your walk. Is there anything more enjoyable than the serenity of a beautiful environment?

Enjoyment Comes from Being Part of the History of Golf

Golf is a sport that has been passed down from generation to generation. It's a sport with an illustrious past. All of us, regardless of our skill level, who uphold the traditions of golf and have its passion in our souls are part of the lineage of golf.

We are not only participants but witnesses to the evolving history of the sport. It's a game with great players of the past, present, and future. You may have watched or read about the great amateur Bobby Jones, seen the legendary charges of Arnold Palmer, or the incredible victories of Jack Nicklaus.

On television you may have seen the unforgettable chip shot of Tom Watson's winning the 1982 U.S. Open and Tiger Woods' amazing performance as he won his first Masters. The battles between Annika Sorenstam and Karrie Webb will be part of golf's history. All of it is there for us to enjoy.

Golf: The Next Generation

Just as it was passed on to us, we all have the responsibility of passing on our enjoyment of the sport to the next generation. Part 6 deals with teaching children to play golf, but I think the best way for them to develop a sense of enjoyment for the game is to observe us.

I've had the incredible opportunity of learning the traditions from one of golf's strongest pillars, Arnold Palmer. He's someone who has made golf history. He's someone who believes in traditions and etiquette, and for me to be able to be in his presence and learn firsthand has been an unbelievable experience. He lives the passion of the game and it's infectious when you're in his aura.

As a result, I will continue to pass that on to my children and the people I work with. This is what makes golf a special sport and game.