

# The Golfing International.

## Introduction

Jim Montpelier, a Silverfield member, absent-mindedly reminisces about his world travels as a golf raconteur while playing a needle match against Bill Mandlay, his regular opponent.

He uses incidents occurring during the match to allude to events from his extensive golfing experience at home and abroad, and fights back from a losing position against an opponent to whom he concedes many handicap strokes. It emerges however that he enjoys the unequal struggle, and always looks forward immensely to the next battle.

## Let Battle commence

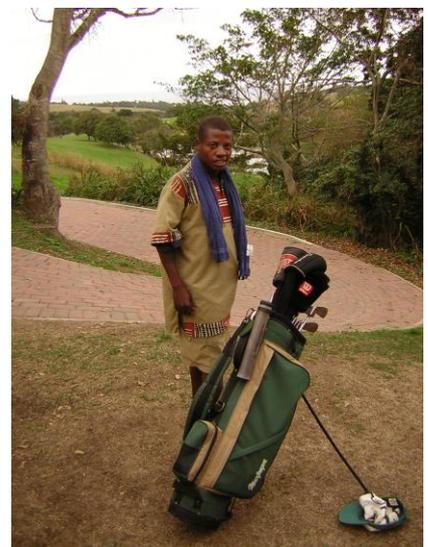
Jim Montpelier shrugged as he walked off the tricky sixth green. His long birdie putt had lipped out allowing his great adversary Bill the opportunity to go further ahead with the aid of his stroke, after holing an unlikely curling six footer for his par. Jim remembered similar instances in the past; three down after six with only a couple of good chances for his opponent. He could offer an excuse; he had discovered on the first tee that he was missing two clubs from his set, his trusty four and seven irons being safely tucked up in his garage rather than in his bag. He had removed them for use on the Silverfield practice ground, and while the absence of these clubs might not be considered too much of a handicap for a skilled golfer,

Jim did rely on them for some of his safe shots, and had required them on most of the holes played.

Jim had lost two four irons in the past, at least two club heads, one during a trip to the Algarve, where the only trophy he won during the week on the boys outing was for the 'longest four iron'. Sadly it was the head which travelled around 40 yards to win the prize. Another four iron club head disappeared in the penal rough at Muirfield, the force required to move the ball causing the unfortunate outcome. Jim didn't look too closely at the contents of Bill's bag. Bill Mandlay had probably kept the same clubs since he was a teenager. A lifetime as an accountant and auditor had ingrained the practice of thrift, and aside an infrequent application of glue to the grips, they received little other loving attention. They looked like 1960's Ben Sayer's Crown Irons, economy models of that era, had shiny grips and well-worn heads; he kept them in a period-piece



of a golf bag, eschewing any form of assistance in carrying them, suggesting that trolleys, particularly the new-fangled electric models would start his slide into senility. He also liked the freedom to walk with his clubs anywhere on the course. Jim used an early three wheel push trolley, and marvelled at the explosion of carrying options, including 'stand' bags and the emergence of dual-strap golf bags that were said to reduce back strain. He remembered the extraordinary motorised golf trolley he saw at a sand-green course in rural Western Australia, the power source being a small motorbike, the device being completed by a welded chassis with a third wheel. The local caddies in South Africa vary considerably, from simple bag carriers, to those single-handicappers who can genuinely give advice. "One boll rrite" or "Down-heell putt, seeks inchis lift" are usual putting instructions in the mixed Zulu-Afrikaans patios favoured by these splendid chaps. Sadly, their remuneration falls well short of acceptable standards,



certainly compared to Steve Williams or Oddjob. In Johor Bahru in southern Malaysia, the obligatory caddies (ladies in pink jumpsuits), stood on the back of the buggy. Some of them gave good directions, but their broken-english description of each resultant shot was terrifying: “play reft” they would say, followed by the triumphant “in a bunkah”! following the disappearance of the shot over a rise in the fairway, on exactly the line and trajectory she had suggested. Given their charming style, it was difficult to be annoyed.

All of this is a far cry from the carrying habits of golfers in the 19th Century; sepia-toned photos from that era show caddies uncomfortably carrying a bundle of assorted clubs.

Jim had fallen two down courtesy of an unusual birdie on the second by his opponent, followed by him stymying himself behind a tree after a pulled drive on the third, and comfortably losing the hole. On the short second, Jim was towards the back of the green while Bill was left and short. Jim, aware that his ball was nowhere near Bill’s required line to the hole, didn’t mark his ball. Bill executed what was virtually a shank and rebounded off Jim’s ball into the hole. Sadly, even Jim’s extensive knowledge of the Rules of Golf couldn’t overrule that fluke.

His monthly matches with Bill were mainly played at Silverfield, but occasionally elsewhere, including locations ‘down the coast’ as East Lothian courses are called with reference to Edinburgh. On one occasion, at Dunbar, the smoke from the nearby concrete works were unusually blowing North East, rendering the course nearly unplayable for anyone with breathing problems, which included Bill. Jim remembered playing the Rororua Golf club (or Arikikapakapa in Maori as the locals call it) in North Island New Zealand, where if the sulphurous atmosphere doesn’t overcome you, the bubbling mud geyser at the short 14th will do if you venture too close. Even his chum who was given a telescopic ball retriever for his birthday wouldn’t venture there - he’s a rich guy, but manic about collecting pond balls. I doubt if the Silverfield (or Muckletrickihoholi in the local dialect) regulars would like that sort of feature; it would be right up there in danger factor levels with the act of donning your plus fours and cravat for a few pints at the seriously downmarket nearby Doo’cot bar (one of Irvine Welsh’s Trainspotting venues) on a Friday night.

## **The fightback**

Jim held his nerve for a couple of halved holes, and on the 10th hole, having safely found the green in easy two-putt range while his opponent fumbled around in the rough, he mused about the small tented village he had proposed be erected temporarily on the spare ground near the green. Jim had been given the opportunity to put his name and his sponsorship to a tournament, and while the unfashionability of drink-related sponsorship hadn’t yet arrived (in 1990), he was a little concerned when a number of his friends suggested a thirty six hole event with bevies available throughout. When committee and other establishment figures demurred, it simply spurred him on, and he cited the habit at the upmarket Muirfield of considerable ‘refreshment’ being taken between morning and afternoon rounds. What’s good for the goose is good for the gander he said to detractors. He was also aware that other prosperous clubs in the west of the city fairly regularly installed on-course bars of one sort or another.

Golf-drinking competitions take many forms. The most frequent is the simple installation of a beer tent around the turn on a warm Saturday friendly competition day (as was Jim’s proposal), when unsuspecting semi-teetotallers are rendered as gabbling idiots. The worst examples are those manic practising low handicappers, who achieve their low number despite little golfing acumen, but simply can’t hold their drink. The real old-fashioned extreme hand-eye co-ordination golfers skilfully exhibit their genetically acquired art, even after an assortment of legal intoxicants (including kummel of course) halfway through the thirty six hole day.

Other golf-drinking competition formats include the provision on some tees of a variety of graded percentage-alcohol beers, where avoidance results in an additional shot being added, the weakest attracts

no extra handicap, the strongest perhaps an additional two handicap shots on the following hole. Scandinavians practice the dark art of whisky golf, where an unregulated belt of unspecified strength accompanies the winning of the previous hole. Skilled but unsuspecting visiting golfers at the Silverfield Biennial Bacchanal have been known to call for motorised assistance in making the tortuous return trip to the clubhouse, having been cuffed well out in the country by a high handicap toper during one of these Scandinavian-themed outings.

While Jim mused about alcohol golf, Bill, having driven well to the left, and blind from the tee, in having difficulty finding his ball exclaimed that perhaps an urchin had emerged from the adjacent woods and purloined it. Jim suggested that, given the wild nature of the woods, and the poor condition of Bill's ball (he generally played pick-ups), the wealthy local children wouldn't be interested. It brought to mind occasions when, particularly in days gone by, golf balls perennially disappeared if hit out of sight. Jim's father talked about playing at the Braids in the 1930's, and having to ensure every shot stayed in sight; local lads became skilled at picking up balls on the move. Those were the days of the Haskell ball, the wound rubber ball which consisted of a liquid-filled or solid round core that was wound with a layer of rubber thread into a larger round inner core and then covered with a thin outer shell. The dismantling of this complex object, particularly the rubber thread and the liquid filled core were prized boys' activities in those days. Others have stories of the same lads making off with sets of golf clubs; that wouldn't happen at a golf course north of Durban where Jim had guested. Several sets of decent clubs had been stolen by locals who braved an electric fence on a hole where clubs were left while players walked a distance back to the tee. The locals threw clothing over the fence, before climbing over and dispatching the clubs one by one then following with the bags. There must presumably have been a 'Maurice Pollock' villainous fence in the township, the shanty village where the locals resided. The solution used at the Durban course during busy tee times was to locate a committee member with a shotgun on a platform atop a twenty foot telegraph pole. No record is available of the 'Hit Factor'.

Jim only halved the 10th, Bill eventually locating his ball and just scraping a net half with a generous two and a half foot concession.

On the tricky uphill eleventh, Jim found himself in the front right greenside bunker, partly submerged in what appeared to be an animal scrape, probably a deer. Bill was unsure about the relief options, but



fortunately Jim knew that Rule 16.1c allowed him to move his ball. He played an extraordinary recovery to just a few inches, beating his opponent's bogie. He was no stranger to animal encounters on the golf course, particularly in Florida and the Southern hemisphere. He remembered having to wait for a considerable time to allow a pack of baboons to make their way across the fairway at Pezula, one of his favourite South African courses, and several encounters with alligators and snakes at Florida venues. While playing with a medic on a water feature Florida course, and reaching into an inch or two of water to retrieve his ball, receiving a serious tongue-wagging

from a local – “that's just when Water Moccasin's strike” he said. It's perhaps no surprise that one of the famous Tampa (North West Florida) courses is named Copperhead, another venomous snake. The snake soubriquet is repeated on several holes, highlighting the number of venomous reptiles on the golf course. Perhaps his most endearing encounters were with kangaroos on a variety of Western Australian courses, the females sometimes with 'joeys' peering out of the marsupial pouch, both animals appearing to be critically judging the quality of his swing. They sometimes had be nudged off the tee in their haste to witness the intricacies of the Vardon grip. British courses do nurture a good variety of birds, including raptors, but one of his twitcher friends couldn't believe his eyes when in the South Carolinas he saw osprey nests on artificial nesting poles, around twenty feet in height, immediately above a number of teeing grounds. His proximity to *Pandion Haliaeetus* had previously been limited to occasional distant sighting

through powerful binoculars at one of the Scottish bird reserves. Now he was virtually face to face with them.

## A clear run home

The pair saw that the course was clear ahead of them, not the situation they had expected a few holes previously. They could see two elderly fourballs plodding carefully along, and predicted that they would, as a two ball, simply have to wait. Many golfers fail to observe the etiquette which requires slower golfers to allow quicker ones to pass, and the pair were relieved when they arrived on the 10th to discover that the squad of eight had cut the corner, shortening their round. Jim, a firm supporter of the habit of allowing quicker golfers to pass, had even constructed and performed a topical calypso at a golf club event, with many references to slow golf. The terms, grinding, guddle and gridlock were references to the number of golfers in a group in the construction of the rhymes; needless to say it was a once-off performance. Jim recollected following a very slow elderly mixed foursome at a difficult course 'down the coast', being held up for several holes, and on eventually catching them where the next tee was conveniently near the green, and on delicately enquiring after their speed of play, received the startled response "but we've let someone through"! He also remembered the Guadalmina golf course in Southern Spain where German fourballs would tee off legally, then once they were out of site after a few holes, three of their chums would illicitly join in, resulting in six hour seven-ball games. On one occasion, when his fourball reached the turn unhindered by slow play, the starter for the second half couldn't find them on the scoresheet as they had reached the turn around an hour before they were expected.

By the time they had reached the short thirteenth, Jim, by now only one down after a couple of good holes, was being harassed by early season gnats which were rising fast from the heavily fertilised fairways. Jim had always been bothered by insects, and it brought back in a flood of memories the occasions this had affected his game.

As a thirty year old on a boys golfing trip to the Aviemore area, he had been cruelly accused by his mates of having a 'bush fetish', when playing on a torrid day at Grantown-on Spey. The flies were out in droves, and occasionally the only respite to be had was by sticking his head in whatever vegetation was available. Worse was to come at Moonah Links, South of Melbourne, when in a country already famed for its flies (witness the symbolic cork-embroidered hats), he was forced to abandon the match against his great Antipodean rival while in a commanding position. No amount of dousing in fly repellent can exclude the attentions of the great Australian fly.

Bill's handicap advantage was being to rankle; Jim on this occasion suggested jocularly that the absence of two of his clubs might occasion a slight adjustment in the number of shots given, but a wall of silence suggested otherwise. Jim kept his handicap pretty much up to date and 'honest' by playing at least one medal round a month, and tested it on other occasions in team matches; Bill by comparison always cited pressure of work and family for failing to complete more than the three cards essential to maintain a handicap. Jim reckoned that Bill was two or three shots better than his perpetual number, but he liked the extra challenge so never questioned the disparity. He occasionally suggested playing a different form of match than their standard hole-in-hole format.

He remembered playing the 'snakes and camels' version of golf scoring at Son Vida in Majorca, where one of the of his chums made his maiden appearance on the boys outing, citing his experience from his lofty position in the corridors of power in the European Commission in Luxemburg. This chap had no experience of rough golf, and as a relative newcomer to the game, and a stickler for rules whatever he was doing, couldn't accept the practice applied by some of his not-unrefreshed combatants of improving the lie of their ball, particularly in bunkers. He was then totally undone by the scoring method of the 'snakes' game, where points were available, and inherited for the last person to three-putt on each green. Given that in a fourball, all four players can three putt, the potential maximum number of snakes in an eighteen hole round is 54. He didn't amass quite as many, but was left with a 'no gimme' one footer on the 18th,

became a jabbering wreck and duly missed it, accruing a fine equating to around forty pounds in the process. What he didn't realise was that the other players intentionally played just short of every green, making a three putt less likely. I don't think he ever attended another outing. The 'Camels' scoring format follow a similar principle, but with bunkers as the medium of torture.

Jim even considered basing the game on Bisques, an interesting handicap system where the poorer player is given a number of strokes (or 'bisques') which can be taken at will, even more than one per hole if wished. A friend of his once persuaded a somewhat crooked opponent, and much better player, who when allocating the number of bisques he was to concede, chose to round the number unfairly, so his friend suggested an extra half bisque, which he accepted, not understanding the implication. At some point during the game, requiring to use his shots, his friend simply said "I'll take a half-bisque", resulting in an apoplectic fit from his opponent.

The 'Gotcha' system features instructions written on small pieces of paper, one per player in the fourball (to be used at their discretion just once in the round), with words or actions to be committed during an opponent's stroke, usually the drive or while putting. Examples of the instruction include noisily dropping an empty beer tin in a waste basket while the opponent is driving, and shouting loudly while a putt is being executed. Jim's experience involved a very short putt at the 18th to win the match, where his opponent stood right behind him with the message on the paper ready to be delivered. He was suitably terrified and duly missed the putt, and was surprised when no noise emerged; that was due to there being no writing on the paper!

## The tense finale

The match stayed at one in favour of Bill through the sixteenth hole, where he disappeared into the wooded area on the right of the hole to relieve himself. Due to a long-running digestion problem, he had a problem being away from a toilet for more than a couple of hours, and the enforced absence sometimes causing consternation with following golfers. Jim, familiar with the habit, kicked his heels while waiting, recollecting an instance where he had fallen foul of a 'dodgy prawn' the previous evening while on a boy's outing to Fife, and after completing the eighth hole at Lundin Links, was obliged to desperately scurry behind the adjacent brick building to seek relief. The available facility was necessarily agricultural, and Jim wondered if there might be anyone in the building, which seemed from the outside rear to be part of the greenkeeping function. On uncomfortably rearranging himself, and approaching the ninth tee, he saw the sign on the front of the building advising that it was indeed a toilet.

He laughed when he considered the posh courses of the time. Mainly all male membership, toilets were non-existent or at best rudimentary. One Royal course in the West of Edinburgh had a 'dry No 1's' toilet, reminiscent of those at Boy Scout camps. One wonders what lady golfers did when in need at that venue...

Bill survived his misfortune, but lost the hole to Jim's birdie, rendering the match all square. On the uphill 17th, despite being in two bunkers, Bill managed to chip in from around thirty yards for a net birdie, fortuitously rendering him dormie. All now rested on the 18th, where nothing better than a win would do for Jim if he were to emerge with a halved game. Both players found the fairway with their drives, albeit Jim was considerably further. Bill was always going to find it difficult to make a four from the forward tee, and indeed a five was also a difficult prospect. Jim graciously made his effort appear modest, as his ten footer for a four was conceded. The match was duly halved, which Jim, despite his keen competitive spirit, always considered a good result, bringing to mind fierce contents on the squash court against a lady opponent in the crippling heat on the non-air-conditioned courts in Bahrain. Rallies could go on forever, and while Jim could comfortably have won the required three games in the normal best of five contest without reply, he frequently allowed the match to progress to five games, prompting his confused opponent to enquire as to how it always ended that way. "It's the taking part that's important" he would say – and "you played very well", which helped guarantee further contests.

The match over, the two of them put their clubs away, Jim in his locker, and Bill in the back of his diminutive sports car. It was just as well he eschewed caddy cars and the like; his choice of small cars was bound to make transportation of more than a small carry bag difficult. Jim once showed Bill a photo of a 1929 Packard which had a small custom-made golf bag compartment behind the bench seats. That would have suited Bill's requirements in terms of bag size and elderliness!



They repaired to the bar to consider the outcome, and plan the next contest. Scottish middle-class golf clubs bars tend to follow a well-rehearsed format. Simple choices of beer, a small selection of nibbles, and a short bar menu can be found in the great majority of clubs. Silverfield was no exception, and the two enjoyed the views from the clubhouse, while enjoying the drink they both favoured – the 'John Panton'. There can't be many golfers with a drink named after them, but Panton, probably Scotland's best golfer of the post-war era deserved it. Three-time Ryder Cup contestant, 1951 Harry Vardon (best GB professional) award, and thirty nine professional wins probably cemented the Scottish honour ahead Eric Brown, his great rival. Arnold Palmer shared the honour of an eponymous drink; both used lime juice, with Arnie's being cold iced tea as opposed to the Panton blend of ginger beer and angostura bitters.

Jim had visited many such clubs round the world. In one of his less favourite golf clubs, to the south of Perth in Western Australia, the unsuspecting visitor who unwittingly fails to remove his headware on approaching the bar will be requested to purchase a round for all occupants. This somewhat draconian approach is generally waived on the first indiscretion, but members will occasionally be required to pay the fine. The objective of bars in golf clubs is, one might expect, to serve drinks and help the profitability of the club. As Jim had noted in his international travels, the habits of club bar staff were indeed consistent and often less that would be acceptable in commercial establishments. They varied from the welcoming greeting and smart service to dilatory performance. Curiously, the stature of the establishment didn't always reflect the quality of service. It brought to mind the return to what had once been the best hotel in Estoril by a group of golfers who had regularly stayed there in the past, and formed a friendship with the head doorman. He sadly had moved on, and when the group, comprising perhaps ten thirsty reasonably attired golfers took their seats on the veranda and waited for the customary high level of service, their thirsts remained unquenched. A change of doorman, and perhaps disdainful management and customer approach meant that Jim and his friends, while not being ejected, were simply and obviously disregarded.



He also recalled a visit by the same group for a week's stay at the fabulous golf resort of Hilton Head Island, more specifically at Harbour Town. The billet was immediately adjacent to the clubhouse, where the foyer is flanked by previous winners of the Heritage golf tournament, the USPGA event traditionally following the Masters. The boys took their seats on the verandah overlooking the course, and Jim, the appointed tour doyen of restaurant and bar facilities, noticed that the bar staff seemed reticent to approach the motley crew. He advanced on the bar, and suggested to the staff that as the group were thirsty Scots, here for the week, and tipped well, they should perhaps consider their position. Thereafter, on entry to the bar, a simple sign of a number of fingers relating to the number of beers was all that was required for instant smiling service. The last night's ceremonial dinner and prize giving was duly held there (the week's best venue traditionally hosting this event). The bar staff wistfully enquired when the return visit was to take place.

## Planning the next game

Bill, still somewhat rueing his failure to capitalise on his early lead, suggested a return match as soon as possible (on the grounds that he privately felt he was on good form). Jim wanted to mention the absence of his four and seven irons during the current game, and could have raised the issue of Bill's unconfirmed handicap rating, but in common with all good sports, and wishing to continue the finely balanced games, demurred. Golf is unlike the vast majority of sports, in that most games don't have the variety of devices to ensure a drawn contest, using handicapping in various ways, and a courteous approach to deciding the result of each hole. Jim had learned that finding opponents like Bill, players who simply enjoy the contest and follow the rules, got more difficult as he grew older and less tolerant. Let the battles continue!

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