

*"Stroke-play is the purest format in golf." Try telling that to anyone who has ever hooked a brand new, 'lovingly initialed', Titleist Pro V1 out of bounds from the 1st tee and watched it ricochet off the clubhouse roof across the car-park before smashing through the windscreen of the local barrister's brand new 08 topless Mercedes.*



# The Trouble with Strokes

By Guest writer, John Galvin

Fair enough that may just have been a bad dream, but if anything similar has ever happened to you before 12 noon on any given Sunday, it's just more than likely God's way of saying that you should have been at mass instead. Like all atheists in such fox-holes you probably looked to the heavens for a little forgiveness or at least a half a decent shot off the tee with your provisional while trying to remember what the twenty minutes you viewed of your six-hour-long David Leadbetter DVD collection might have advised.

As you scan the ground beneath you and battle against the sudden onset of Golfheimers, (*Medical term referring to a well intentioned plan to go to bed early on Saturday night in order to win the Captains Prize but instead ending up rarsed at 2am with a half-eaten snack-*



*box, forgetting the whole affair and lying unconscious in the recovery position until phoned six hours later by club secretary enquiring as to your whereabouts), while your playing partners stab their club shafts in the direction of the ill-chosen green-coloured tee that you're standing on, you will finally do as we all do; pick it up, feign*

a carefree smile and return to your trolley with a well disguised, broken heart.

A sudden bout of poorly handled anger-management then replaces the grief as you slam your Golf Channel purchased...*'Drive Like A Pro'...* *'Titanium 1000cc Monster'...* *'P.G.A. legal for at least another week... "It cut 3 shots off my handicap in one year" smiles Ricardo who used to play off 38;* worthless piece of junk back into the bag and decide to take your ten year-old five iron to the provisional in order to save any further embarrassment. It will of course inevitably be the best 5 iron shot hit on the course all year and will draw gasps of admiration from your playing partners who agree that you cancel your subscription to the Golf Channel immediately; following a handy tap-in for a nine at the first, you remove yourself from the company of real golfers and edge to the side of the green where you lean on your putter and look down 'in vacant and in pensive mood' thinking...*'I was sure that third putt was a left to right....What a terrible place to put the hole....There's no break on this green.....Oh Heavens! I've forgotten my wet gear!'*

As the rain pummels down on you at the second tee-box, you blink through the egg-sized drops in an effort to see your club-head and ball. *'All belonging to that family were hardy;* you hear from beneath the three umbrellas that have formed a perfect globe beside the safety of the hedge. You soldier on and as you size up your chances of hitting a wedge with your third shot to the green from the middle of the gorse-bushes on the left, the rain stops and you wait as play is delayed while all Sunderland Wet Gear is shaken, then carefully folded and returned to a sacred place. The clouds dissipate and the sun comes out to warm your day. Not an ordinary sun of course, but one that heats the earth to its very core.



Having used up your entire handicap and following a mediocre and wayward drive on the 3rd you can be seen drying out as you stride with your trolley down through the rough leaving in your wake a track similar to that of a miniature steam engine. You then take your rightful last place on the par three 4th tee-box and try to convince yourself that all is not lost even though you now owe the course five shots. Your weary playing partners stand side-by-side with heads bowed and hands clasped in silent prayer as you take fifteen practice swings and hope for the best. In the middle of your intended strike, one of them can take no more and shouts to the heavens, *'For the love of God...have you no mercy?'*

It works!

Your ball strikes one of the out-of-bounds stakes, the pin, the rope, the forehead of a priest searching for a ball from the 5th and comes to rest at the side of the green. It's an emotional moment for all. It goes on and on for fourteen more holes until finally your marker tearfully hands over your scorecard at the side of the 18th and asks, *'Is that right?'* When you confirm that it is, he faints from the mental exhaustion brought on by four-and-a-half hours of

counting and guessing where 16 of your tee-shots ended up.

Fresh from a shower and dreading the inevitable, the time arrives to face the demons. Just inside the bar door you learn that one of your group has withstood the greatest test of his golfing life and has what now appears to be the winning score.

As you walk along the bar towards the safety of the far corner you answer the question, 'Well how did you get on?' with 'Ah! Not great,' roughly translated as, 'I should be prosecuted for frightening innocent people who have done me no harm!' As the evening wears on and the bar fills, your heart is warmed with the news that an eighty-year-old member

has taken three more shots than you have and that a Junior member who started playing golf the day before yesterday was only able to equal your score.

During his acceptance speech, your elated playing partner refers to what he considers to be the finest 5 iron shot he has ever seen and graciously overlooks the other 100 plus blunders made by the striker of same. As all heads turn and nod with admiration in your direction you cannot help but feel that you have played some small part in his victory.

In the aftermath and surrounded by a barrage of invitations to play in the next Sunday morning competition, a careless moment of forgetfulness prevents you from asking your soon-to-be victims that all important question. 'Is it Strokes or Stableford?'

