

## Stornoway Golf Club – Golf Notes 30<sup>th</sup> January 2010

### ANOTHER LOST WEEKEND

When, at the precise moment that you should have been teeing off on the Avenue, you find yourself instead blowing down a tube through a straw to clear congealed powder from an overflowing washing machine, the reason that you play golf has never been clearer. You may not reach a single figure handicap. Eating snacks during and after your round ensures that golf will never give you a healthier lifestyle. The terror of the tee means that no matter how well you are playing, a disastrous drive is only a moment away; and that nervous tic on the green guarantees that any putt, no matter how short, is easier to miss than sink. Up to your ankles in water, with your head firmly lodged in the drum of a washing machine, is as good a place as any to realise that the true reason for playing golf is to avoid the things that you would otherwise be doing. The immediate problem is that for the best part of the past six weeks, avoidance has not been an option.

It is possible that some golfers have not informed their families that golf has been cancelled almost every weekend of late. It is a fairly easy deception to practise. To give the impression that the Winter League is in full swing, the golfer need only return home at his usual time with a pair of wet socks and the faintest whiff of alcohol on his breath. There is the slight quandary that reading the golf notes in the Gazette might give the game away; but golfers know only too well that their families have no desire to hear about golf and are even less likely to read about it. The principal drawback is that once out of the house, how to spend the rest of the day is another question.

The simplest solution is to visit the Club, where others of a similar devious nature will have gathered. A visit to the Shop will pass some time and give a flavour of what the fashionable golfers, like Peter Grant and the Captain, will be wearing this season. The trouble is that you are then identified as Someone With Money to Burn and it is difficult to avoid being accosted by those golfers trying to sell off

old equipment. Occasionally, there is a bargain to be had, particularly when the seller is Tex Graham. Any second hand club of his will be in immaculate condition and it is equally certain that, even if it is three years old, it has probably been round the course less than a dozen times.

Of course, despite the conditions, some golfers have managed to play. Although we always wish other golfers well, when we realise that the Greens Convener's car has been parked at the Club since early Saturday morning while he took advantage of the better climate of Harris, it is difficult to suppress the faint glimmer of a hope that he had a howler of a day. The kind of howler of a day that would make him wish he had instead done the things he would otherwise have been doing. It is a forlorn hope. If he had to improvise with an umbrella and a ball of wool, past experience suggests that the Greens Convener would be as happy as a dog with two tails.

One event that will surely beat the weather is the Golf Club AGM to be held on 17 February. Although the three letters AGM generally induce a feeling of dread, it is important for members to hear the annual report on the Club and proposals for the next year. It is also an opportunity to hold the Committee to account and to make suggestions on the running of the Club. As we are often reminded, the Golf Club exists for the benefit of the members and their involvement and support is crucial.

Another date for the diary is the Lewis and Harris Sports Council Quiz, hosted by the Golf Club on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February. Teams of four are required and you will undoubtedly leave more informed than when you arrived. Even if it is simply being informed that your ignorance is far greater than you ever realised.

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### NORRIE'S NOTES

Choosing to ignore or belittle much maligned weather forecasters seems to be the new vogue. Jokes abound about their perceived inability to get a prediction correct and their vagueness when making any assumptions at all, lest they be subject to intense locally geographical scrutiny, on radio and T.V. Why? Throw in a missed hurricane by Michael Fish in 1987, some biblical flooding latterly, the nation's inability to deal with the recent cold "snap" and collectively UKPlc appears to believe it's all the fault of the Met Office.

It isn't.

Years of somewhat "settled" patterns of weather dictated their textbooks and their computer models; the advent of weather balloons, ocean buoys and satellites had advanced their science to such a degree that we could download separate forecasts for the bottom of the garden and for Maggie Mary across the road. I have often explained to my mother that when Chrisanne next door was out planting shrubs on her knees for her herbaceous border, it would be imprudent for me to get the mower out as the forecast for Upper Aird was for rain. Lochside, though separated by just the width of the road, might as well have been Lochmaddy. I wasn't taking any chances and besides, I'd checked with the BBC and apparently the golf course was basked in sunshine.

I've tried telling her before about the power of the internet compared with her reliance on years of folk-lore and the behaviour of her two pet seagulls, but still she remains sceptical.

Global warming would latterly have appeared to have thrown everything into a cocked hat, stirred it about a bit and spewed it back out upside down.

Making predictions about the weather is now as accurate a science as making predictions about the Scottish Premier League. Who could have predicted a fourth weekend of golf lost to snow and ice? Possibly only the same people who predicted that the current league leaders

would be the worst Rangers team in several decades.

Throwing fish heads in the air and seeing which way they land would seem as accurate a science as any.

However there was a clear and definite long-range forecast which predicted snow for last Friday. They got it spot on, unfortunately for the golfers of the Western Isles.

Most golfers, that is, except for the "usual suspects" from Stornoway who made the dangerous trek to Scarista on Saturday morning last, on roads which resembled the Cresta Run.

Being the thoughtful, caring, club captain that I am; when our Greens convenor and Head Green-Keeper have gotten over the angst which follows the gut-wrenching decision to erect the course closed sign, I am always at hand to suggest a sojourn to Harris. Naturally they had already considered this alternative, so it was with a degree of good cheer and freshly brewed Spar coffee that we began our journey south. It was also with a degree of trepidation as the roads were awful and there was no certainty Scarista would be open.

Climbing the Clisham was somewhat hairy in Alan "Biddle" MacLeod's 4x4, but nowhere near as hirsute as the decent, sideways, in first gear, down hill to Ardhasaig.

Luckily Alan is a skilled driver, well versed in dealing with screaming passengers chewing frantically on styropack plastic. It wasn't looking good.

Despite our misgivings, the course was open and playable and the day was looking up.

Out in nineteen points each, I naively thought that I could influence the outcome by more regular production of my trusty hip-flask. It didn't work and had it not been for us playing off the yellow markers I would be applying for our keeper of the greens to be "cut" such was his prowess in amassing a winning total of 39 stableford points in conditions which would normally have negated any

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decent play.

Regular readers must be wondering about the relationship between alcohol and golf in this column. I must point out that most golf is played at the weekend, involves gatherings of males who are “kent” to each other, a high degree of camaraderie and many surreptitious attempts to influence a particular outcome by fair means or foul.

Foul means are seriously frowned upon.

Trying to get your opponent pissed is not.

The seniors section at Stornoway continues to be tormented by the arrival of a callow “youth” into their ranks. John MacLeod (Johnny Cloudy) seems to be thriving on his new status as “recently retired” and in order to supplement his income has taken to audacious acts of banditry, regularly relieving the hapless pensioners of their £1 sweep money.

Last week his meagre 21pts was good enough for the main kitty despite Norrie Munro’s 26 pt haul on Wednesday. Norrie won the smaller “pot” for the day but having scored but 19pts on Monday had ruled himself out of contention for the weekly jackpot. Norrie explained that the scoring system for the seniors league is so complicated that Windows 7 was designed around it its basic protocols. A cheque from Bill Gates may see heightened competition.



**Mick Butterworth**

Mick Butterworth (currently nursing a shoulder injury) leads with 238 points.

Norrie (Eggs) Mackenzie is second with 229, and three people share third spot on 225 points. Namely, Derek Smith, Duncan A. MacLean and the aforementioned Norrie Munro.

Unless you’re an American, mulligans in golf generally aren’t part of play, be it friendly or in competition. The chance to “have another go, we’ll forget about that one” after an errant effort isn’t something considered by most UK golfers or indeed my mother. Despite my regular warblings about the use of language, to come home and find the WHFP opened at this column and my incorrect use of “their” and misspelling of “off” circled in red ink and with an exclamation mark beside them for emphasis (once a school-teacher, always a school teacher!) was an embarrassing shock to the system.

I know to keep my take-away wide on my back-swing to avoid a slice and not to decelerate on my down-swing to avoid a thin or a sh\*\*k. (it’s like “MacBeth” to an actor. You’re not allowed to “say” it). That doesn’t mean I don’t still slice or sh\*\*k.

I know the differences and the correct usage (in these cases, possibly not in other areas of grammar) highlighted by my mother, but my failure to check on what I submitted and the lack of an available mulligan had herself tut-tutting at the general state of things. My “journalism” is, as I’ve said, like my golf. Amateur, unprepared, unrehearsed and often a bit of a joke.

Spellchecker, like the weather forecaster, is only as accurate as the information provided combined with the interpretation of the data regurgitated.

So they’re.