

Life Is Like The Game Of Golf

By Jeanne Loehnis

It's May in Wisconsin. The avid golfer is already shining up the clubs, checking the pro shop for the latest and greatest golf ball on the market, and itching for a favorite course to open. The golf addict has already played many times between late season snows on any course that might be open. Those who don't golf, well, they just don't understand why anyone would want to waste several hours on a gorgeous afternoon and chase a little white ball around!

Ask any golfer why they play, however, and you will hear things like:

- it feels SO good when the shot goes exactly as I'd envisioned
- whenever I surpass my score from yesterday, I am filled with hope
- despite a poor score, it's those 25 foot putts and 250 yard, straight-as-an-arrow drives that keep me coming back
- today I let my temper get the best of me but once I replace the putter I broke in two, I will prove to myself that I can shoot par

Golf is a very personal experience. The golfer is in an endless competition with self. No one else, observer or fellow player, sees every shot. No one but the caddy is likely to understand the difficulty of the shot, especially those where the ball is in a divot and a tree stands tall and dead center as you face the hole. At those times, it is vital to keep one's temper in check and be patient, hit around the tree and into the fairway, and waste a stroke in the process. Finally, on the next shot, go for the hole again. And after a double-bogey 5 on what should have been an easy par 3, let it go! Every hole is a new beginning. Carrying forward the disappointment or anger from a previous hole is a sure recipe for a repeat performance.

Life is like the game of golf. Each of us is on a journey. The only real competitor is the self. No one else sees life from our vantage point. No one else knows exactly how challenging or rewarding a given action is for us. And although we caddy for one another, offering support and suggestions, the decision for each action is personal.

Like golf, life is a process of continual growth. Some actions are awkward and executed poorly, especially in the learning process. Sometimes we "score" with a hole-in-one success and make up for many missteps along the way. Life seems to flow most smoothly when one's temper is in check and yesterday's problems are left in yesterday while moving into today with confidence. Shooting five on that long par 5 and completing that knitting project both provide reason for celebration. Yet, there is another hole, another project. Following the happy rest, we must begin again and tackle the next step on life's journey.

In life, we have a set of tools - talents, circumstances, family, friends, and opportunities. In golf, we have a set of tools - clubs, physical strength, weather conditions, course difficulty, and the latest and greatest golf ball. Our individual success depends on the quality of the tools and the skill level we develop while using those tools. It depends on the care with

which we tend the tools. There is also something to be said for our choice of course. Is it a match for our current skill level or impossibly difficult with numerous bunkers and water hazards along the way?

Life's tools, our talents, our traveling partners, can be used and abused, developed or left to rot. In life, we can choose projects which provide appropriate challenge or those for which we are yet unprepared and which are a certain setup for failure.

We can waken each day and immediately rehash yesterday's mistakes, convincing ourselves that we have nothing of value to offer. Or, we can review yesterday, acknowledge and learn from both the missteps and the successes, and then set a plan for the day. We can stubbornly "go it alone" or, we can bring our caddy, a trusted friend and confident, faith in a Higher Power, our own wise inner voice, or our own successful attitude, with us.

Today, consider approaching life as the professional golfer faces the next hole. Start fresh. Release all thoughts of yesterday. Analyze the hole in front of you. Select a club. Step up to the tee. Take a practice swing. Vision the shot going exactly where it is intended. Confidently swing the club. Then walk up to the ball. Take inventory. Consider the lessons learned. Then let it go. Consult your caddy and prepare for the next shot. One step at a time, journey forward and shoot your best round of life ever!

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