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# Adventures of a High Handicapper

The Tournament Meltdown

By Patti Putnicki

**I definitely had been playing golf.** Round after round. And although my score continued to hover at 100, I had a little more consistency in my game. I knew I had some good fairway shots in my golf bag—a long drive—and my short irons were improving. Not that anyone had seen me play. In my effort to “work on my game,” I had transformed the very social game of golf into solitary confinement. “Don’t make me play with anyone,” I’d tell the starter. In time, he just started waving me over to the back nine without talking to me at all. I became known as “the girl who plays alone.” The incognito golfer. And in six months of playing at my home course, I hadn’t met a single person or made a friend.

It’s not that I’m shy or antisocial—quite the opposite—

and I actually did want to meet new people. I just wanted to “get better” at the game first. But the fact is, I got a little lonely out there on the links, and so I decided to take action. I signed up for a tournament, something they called “The Guys and Dolls.”

Guys and dolls—that’s unthreatening enough, right? Men and women are paired in teams, a shotgun start, and every month there’s a different fun format.

My high handicap would actually help my team. We would get strokes! I would meet some potential playing partners. What could be better? I asked Joey-the-pro what this month’s format was. “6-6-6.”

Unfortunately, that format became an omen of the round to come.



My partner was an older, retired man who played golf every day and just seemed happy to have a playing partner for the event. Knowing that I might be a little nervous, he agreed that we should play the Friday before the tournament, just to work out the kinks ahead of time. Although it was an unseasonably cold and windy day, I held my own. Great shots, bad shots, typically blemished short game—but a game that would contribute something to the team. I was pumped, baby. Bring on the competition.

The day of the tournament could not have been better. Eighty degrees, sunny, not too windy. I decided to go up to the club a couple of hours ahead of time to hit some balls. Did great on the first bag. Took another bag to the chipping range. Back to the driving range with another bag. My partner arrived, I hit a few more, and . . . something happened. The balls started flying erratically everywhere but where I thought I was aiming, oftentimes just 10 feet away. I started to panic.

Plus, I was exhausted. I'd hit about 120 balls and the tournament hadn't even started. That was when I heard a voice. It was not God. It was Joey-the-pro, calling us to our carts. The tournament had begun.

Our playing partners were a couple of lawyers who both held double-digit handicaps. They seemed nice enough. No worries yet. At the first tee box, I hit one out in the middle of the fairway. My partner hit the alternate shot on the fringe of the green. I made a 20-foot putt for our birdie. Life was good.

Then, about two holes later, something happened. Something bad. It was as if some sort of golf-loathing demon took control of my swing. My golf ball was possessed. It went right. It went left. It went in front of me. It went behind me. It went everywhere but in the direction of the hole. The more bad shots I made, the more I started trying to correct them—analyzing the mechanics and pondering my options, all while endeavoring to strike the ball. You can imagine the outcome. I was hyperventilating. I was praying for Divine Intervention. I was taking mercy scores on hole after hole after hole. At one point my partner drove off in the cart before I had even teed off. He had given up on me too.

It seemed like we were on the golf course for at least 20 hours. And my foursome would probably tell you the same. Because the more my game digressed and my comfort level decreased, the more I became that irritat-

**I was exhausted. I'd hit about 120 balls and the tournament hadn't even started. That was when I heard a voice. It was not God. It was Joey-the-pro, calling us to our carts. The tournament had begun.**

ing, horrible person who constantly apologizes for herself—over and over and over and over again—until you just want to smack her. I couldn't control that either.

Five grueling hours later, we made it through the last hole. I smiled feebly. I shook hands with my playing partners. I wanted to run to my car and drive home, if only home was in a distant state. But I took the high road, went to the social gathering, and bought my partner a drink. Then I marched up to Joey-the-pro and announced that I was selling my clubs on eBay.

But I didn't. Not only because I'm not the type of person who gives in to defeat, but because I learned that the snowball—the kamikaze golf day of hell—has happened to more than a handful of golfers. People came out of the woodwork to tell me their stories.

"My very first hole of the club championship, I took a twelve. I wanted to quit, but it was a shotgun start and I was out in the middle of the course."

"I had a bad hole, and I couldn't recover—and we hadn't even hit the back nine."

"I don't know what happened . . ."

"I couldn't fix it . . ."

"I thought I was going to die . . ."

Clearly my experience wasn't unique. In fact, the following week I saw it happen on national TV to none other than Tiger Woods. And I watched him suck it up and rally the next day to win the tournament.

If he could do it, so could I. Well, you know what I mean. I could at least give it a shot.

So I scheduled a lesson with Joey-the-pro, who has now taken on the role of both coach and golf therapist. We're working on thinking less and swinging more freely. Just focusing on the target and the shot at hand. He even went so far as to find me a new, unsuspecting Guys and Dolls partner and convinced me to play. "Quit worrying so much and you'll be just fine." Thank you, Dr. Phil.

But he was right. I played well at the next month's tournament. Our team didn't win, but we finished quite respectably. The golf demons evidently set their sights on some other poor, unsuspecting soul that day. Will they come back? I expect that'll be up to me.

But here's what I learned: The mental part of golf is tougher than finding that ideal swing, the ideal mate, or the six winning lotto numbers. I'm not sure if personality type plays a role, but I do know from personal experience that Type A, overachieving, perfectionist females like me face an extra challenge on the golf course. The same person who can get up in front of 500 people and give a speech without flinching can be reduced to a bumbling Barney Fife by a worm-burning 5-iron. And I'm doubtful that picturing my foursome in their underwear will help. Hmmm . . . gonna have to talk to Joey about that one. **TWG&L**

**Patti Putnicki** is a freelance writer with two published humor books. Visit her Web site at [www.pattiwrites.com](http://www.pattiwrites.com).