



Links Players

Words Fitly Spoken

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. (Proverbs 25:11, ESV)

The legendary sports writer George Plimpton proposed an ingenious theorem about the quality of sports writing. The gist was this: “The quality of sports writing is inversely proportional to the size of the ball.”

Let’s test Plimpton’s theorem. How many great writers can you think of who covers basketball? I know — “crickets.” When we downsize a notch to football, it’s not much better. With baseball, some quality begins to appear.

Among the worthies are Roger Angel, Ring Lardner, and Bernard Malamud. But when we come to the little white ball, there’s a surplus of riches. The greats include Herbert Warren Wind, Bernard Darwin, John Updike, Dan Jenkins, and Michael Bamberger, to name only a few.

Let me add my nomination based on one book: *Golf in the Spirit*. The author is M. Scott Peck.

Peck is best known for the best-seller, *The Road Less Travelled*. He was a psychiatrist who leveraged his experience healing troubled minds to become a best-selling author. A recent biographer called him “the baby boomer’s guru.” I propose two installments on Peck for Links readers—the first on why we should read him, the second on seeing his life as a warning.

Golf in the Spirit is a delightful book, partly because it’s unusual. It’s not a how-to guide; it’s not about the professional tour or a travelogue about the best places to play the game. It reflects on the meaning of golf; its impact on the soul of those who play.

It’s divided into *The Front Nine* and *The Back Nine*. The book leads us around the imaginary “Exotica Golf Course and Country Club” with Peck as our playing partner, who talks about how golf impacts the inner life.

Here is how Peck reflects on “par,” one of the most basic terms and one of the most widely used golf words outside of golf:

No expression from golf has become so deeply embedded in our everyday language as “par for the course.” This expression is routinely used by people who have never been near a golf course and know nothing of the game. When they say, “Well, that’s par for the course,” what they generally mean is, “Well, that’s to be expected.” It has come to connote what’s average or roughly equal to the average. As such, it is the most deceptive and fallacious expression in existence.

This gives you a taste of the book. You learn how fully golf has affected our language and culture. You also sense the wisdom it can bring. Par is what's expected, but it is by no means easy to come by. If you or others are meeting expectations, you should be deeply thankful, even awestruck.

Peck tells us how he became a golfer at age 32. For many years he had been an accomplished tennis player. Golf had no appeal to him. But then he finally conquered the weakness in his tennis game – his backhand. Having conquered it, the game now bored him.

He called Norm, a friend who had been trying to get him to play golf for several months, and said he was willing to try it. Peck saw Norm as his golf mentor. This leads to a discussion of mentoring. Peck has some wonderful things to say about it:

Ordinary teachers are usually assigned to their pupils; mentors choose theirs. Thus Norm repeatedly invited me to play golf, and even after I'd made it dramatically clear that I was no born golfer, he continued to invite me to play with him. He wanted me. There is something extremely empowering about being wanted. Consciously or unconsciously, good mentors know that it is far more their task to empower than it is to teach. Or perhaps they know that the best way to teach is through empowerment.

Peck reflects on what Norm did for him and the lesson he learned: "Look for mentors. At the same time, recognize that often it is the mentors who find us. So, to find a mentor, the key may be to simply be open to their invitation and our need for their influence. Another key sentence is one that every Christian learns as a member of the body of Christ: "I have come to believe that no one can do much alone."

Peck takes up the question of what makes golf addicting. There is good news for us that golf's addictive power doesn't necessarily lead to sin:

Why is flight so attractive to humans? Think of how often we envy the birds. The words freedom and power come to mind. They are related words. One who has great power is usually free to do much that is beyond the reach of the less powerful...Strange though it might seem, our intense attraction to the flight of a golf ball, I suspect, has much less to do with the temporal, political kind of power and freedom than with the spiritual kind. I am reminded that angels in mythology have wings. Could it be that in the flight of a well-hit golf ball, we may receive an indirect and tiny taste of glory – not the false glory of this world but that true glory that is always and only an attribute of God? I do believe so.

This is the sort of inspiration that Golf in the Spirit gives us. Read it to deepen your awareness of what God is doing when you play. You may be escaping from trouble and care when you head for the course, but you are not escaping from God. You may find him there in unique ways.

Prayer: Father, open our eyes to see you in all things!

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Steve Carter

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