



TRIBUNE SPORT



Bernard Shapiro (President) presents John Walsh with his Special Dedication Award at the Renmore AFC Awards presentations. Also included is Dermot Coll (Chairman).

by John Cunningham

ONE of the most colourful characters in world golf has to have been a part native-American called Ky Laffoon – no mean golfer in his day and a member of the American Ryder Cup team in 1935, though, in view of the stories about his putting, maybe it is hardly surprising that he is recorded as having ‘played one - lost one’ in that Ryder Cup.

Laffoon appears not to have been one to store-up the old putters like a doleful collection of former friends such as appears in some garages. You know the ones – the now slightly decrepit shifty and shameful creatures that were once part of great moments; the ‘bosom buddies’ that somehow turned traitor over a four-footer for a fiver and now sit cast out in the exterior darkness among ‘also rans’ that cost £5 in Clerys. (However, as you prepare for the new season, don’t cast them away lightly! There might be a glory day left in one of them . . . and I recently heard a story of an ‘original Ping’ which is reputed to have been worth more than £1,600 to a collector).

Ky Laffoon was famous for his treatment of offending putters. A missed putt was likely to send him into paroxysms of anger . . . on one occasion he was seen to leave a green and, first having tried to choke the offending article, he then shoved it into a water hazard, accompanied by imprecations of ‘drown you son-of-a-bitch!’

Worse was to come. For, in those days when pros in the US usually drove the vast distances between tournaments, Laffoon was known to drive a yellow Cadillac in which other pros sometimes hitched a ride. Laffoon took an offending putter, tied it to the handle of the door, and left for the new tournament with the putter leaving a shower of sparks along the roadside! It was known as ‘putting manners on it.’

There were also other hazards to be encountered on

the way. Laffoon would open the door and ‘grind’ of little bit off the sole of a wedge if the humour took him, and, being a constant tobacco chewer and spitter, those unlucky enough to have taken the back seat, were always somewhat in danger if Laffoon took to spitting out the window while driving at his usual seventy miles per hour, while simultaneously grinding-down a wedge sole.

That’s just one of the stories on putting in the marvellous George Plimpton book ‘The Bogey Man’ – part of whole passages devoted to the crazy business of putting. For instance, Plimpton recalls that the great Bobby Jones, who gave up competitive golf in his late twenties when he had won everything in the game, gave up ‘when he couldn’t keep oatmeal in his stomach’ when he had the putter in his hand. Even the legendary ‘Calamity’ putter had let him down. It put Ben Hogan out of competitive golf when he shot a round of 72 – including his then regular 36 putts.

Of course, there are all sorts

of cures . . . not least the ‘long-putter’ which brought people like Sam Torrance, Bernhard Langer and Ian Woosnam back from the edge of distraction, and at the start of the season, I have never seen so many different designs of styles of putters, including a whole new range from Ping. Read on – you can even buy your own green at a snip £5,000!

Plimpton got one ‘cure’ from no less a person than Andy Williams, in whose tournament he was playing. The singer suggested studying the shorter putts . . . and then closing the eyes while striking the ball to prevent any intrusions from outside sources. However, poor old Plimpton, rapidly losing faith in his fellow man, thought what a total eejit he might look if he adopted this method and one of his regular foursome nipped in and took away the ball while his eyes were closed!

There seems to be no explanation for the love-hate relationship which most often typifies golfers. It finished the top level career of Tony

— and woes!



The new artificial green which has been pioneered by Huxley Golf.

Jacklin; it is the reason why Nick Faldo is only a shadow of the man he was; it has Monty scowling . . . and, whisper it, it may be the only chink in the armour of Tiger Woods, who always looks capable of beating the world, but sometimes simply does not put away those four-footers.

These are the distance which give a slightly gelatinous feel to the knees, which make the light lunch of an hour previously feel like a shovel of plum pudding . . . the body that a few minutes ago sent a ball tearing down the middle of a fairway, is now incapable of rolling a ball four feet on a straight line. This perfectly tuned athletic instrument (well . . . kinda!) is

now a quivering mass that can only produce a convulsive jerk.

Never fear . . . as ever, help is at hand, or so you’re led to believe. I have a putter that can’t miss, as pioneered by Payne Stewart. This one has a red dot on the head which is only covered by the shaft when you look down, when the head is perfectly square to the line. So why does the head look ‘closed’ and why do I pull every putt with it? (Another one for the doleful line-up in the garage!)

The latest addition to the practice area seems to be the kind of artificial green now being pioneered by people like Huxley Golf – while you could

for years buy a strip of stuff that looked like baize and put it on the floor of the garage for about £12, people like Darren Clarke and Ian Woosnam (the latter tortured from four feet), are having this stuff laid in their gardens, not to mention golf clubs using the all-weather surface for practice areas, and also for teeing grounds in winter.

Guys like Clarke and Woosnam have been swearing by the artificial turf . . . however, a word to the wise . . . trade-in all those decrepit and forgotten creatures in the garage – for a hunk of this stuff fifteen foot by twenty foot will cost you £5,000.



Dermot Coll (Chairman) and Eoin Corcoran pictured with Conor Cleary (U-17 Player of the Year) at the Renmore AFC Awards presentations in The Huntsman Inn.