



Query

Well, it's all over. Golf season, I mean. And now that it is over, I'm left with mixed feelings. Was it all worth it? The embarrassment, the soreness? Triple bogeys on Par-fours do not make for much satisfaction. People "playing through" three times in a game does not inspire confidence in oneself. Should I keep going?

I don't think what I do can be called "golf." I strike the ball with an inept swing, part hockey slash, part imitation of what I've seen on tv. Sometimes I miss the ball, whiffing over top of it. Other times I take up big divots on either side of the ball. And when I do "hit" the ball, it usually skiffs across the ground, going perhaps fifty feet. When I'm lucky, I actually do get some air, yet the ball slices to the left and I'm in the woods.

I'm relatively new at this, I've only been out a few dozen times, but I'm out for a reason: I want to do what other doctors do. I can't count the number of times I've been asked informally whether I wanted to go golfing with acquaintances, and each time I shamefacedly tell them I don't know how, that I'd only slow them down. It's frustrating — I do want to go, I do want to socialize, but I never learned when I was young and I've never made the time to learn as an adult. It's become an embarrassment, I've been asked so many times. I feel like I'm being left out.

So I've asked my brother to teach me. We go to the local ratty course and play out eighteen, my 7–10 strokes per hole to his 3–4. But I'm determined to get better; I've booked time with the local pro for a lesson, and in stolen moments I go to the driving range and hit a bucket of balls.

Why do I do all this?

I can't say that I have a passion for the game. It bores me to tears on television. I look at it as work, as a set of skills to

master. I want to play golf in order to fit in, in order to be like my colleagues, who will blow off an afternoon and hit the course with their friends as if it is a perfectly natural thing to do. That sounds like something I'd like to do. Most of all, I'd like to say, when asked, that Yes, I'd love to play, when were you thinking?

I want to go for a day on the green, I want to hit the ball straight and far, I want to tease other guys about their bad shots (like my brother is doing to me), I want to bet things like dinner to the guy who gets the lowest score, I want the camaraderie that I'm denied by my current golflessness.

I'd like to say I want to golf for the sheer sake of golfing, for the love of the game, but what I want is what golf provides: the friendships, the rivalry, the exercise, even the laughable frustration. I don't have a mania for putting the ball in the hole, I have a desire to fit in. I think that, as motivations, they're pure enough.

Well, there's one that's not so pure. One day I want to beat my brother.

Which, if it were ever to be realized, I'd have to practice. I'd have to go this winter to indoor driving ranges and putting courses, I'd have to submit to lessons. I'd have to get serious. It had to happen sooner or later: not for much longer can I trade on my "I'm just starting" status. That wears thin after a while. So, now that I've had a taste of the sport, and after being so indescribably bad at it that I can't profess a love for it, even a mere enjoyment of it, I'm left to contemplate it as a hopefully acquired taste. Do I give up, or do I continue? Will my winters be spent in preparation for something I don't actually like all that much, time spent just to be not bad at something?

— Dr. Ursus