

Why Can't All Sportsmen Be Like Golfers?

Male professional golfers are amongst the world's highest paid sportsmen, regularly competing for prize money in excess of half a million euros. Yet despite the high rewards these men remain sportsmen in every sense of the word, competing hard but fair, and this is part of what makes them so eminently watchable.

In May the European professional golf tour descended upon Casares as twenty four of the world's top male golfers competed in the Volvo World Match Play tournament at the spectacular Finca Cortesin course. In fact since the World Match Play event started in 1964, this was the strongest ever field with seven of the world's top ten golfers taking part. This was certainly a massive compliment to the Finca Cortesin course and Volvo the tournament sponsors.

Unlike some of their sporting counterparts, these young men did not come complete with "WAGS" intent upon creating their own media circus, or "red top" journalists seeking a scoop about who had taken out the latest super injunction. Yet the fact that they were here on this little corner of the Spanish coast, was nonetheless an incredible draw.

Like all highly paid sportsman their presence was accompanied by a small army of followers, both professional and amateur. The inevitable media presence was there with both the written and spoken word being well represented by TV, radio and press who were extremely well looked after by both Volvo and the staff of Finca Cortesin. I was fortunate enough to have been able to attend the tournament on the final weekend so I saw for myself how the media are catered for, and I can only thank all concerned for being great hosts. I look forward to the tournaments return with added expectation now.

Whilst I thoroughly enjoyed the golf, and Ian Poulter is to be congratulated for a fine weeks work culminating in his 2&1 win over the excellent Luke Donald, I have to admit to spending some time watching what was going on the periphery of the actual tournament and what an education and entertainment that turned out to be.

Perhaps I am being naive but I have always assumed that those attending a golf tournament do so primarily for the golf. Not unexpectedly I did observe a certain level of “networking”. Sometimes this involved potential business partners taking place in the hallowed ground that were the VIP areas. Other times it involved the media eagerly cultivating future contacts. This perhaps is understandable but I did see a number of members of the crowd who clearly had either made a mistake when deciding to attend, or who had been dragged along against their better judgment without any choice in the matter.

For example I saw at least two dogs obediently sitting by whilst their owners enjoyed the golf. The dogs clearly weren't golf fans because they paid no attention to any of the players and adamantly refuse to acknowledge a good shot when they saw one. I remember seeing the same dog on both the Saturday and Sunday so I applaud him or her for their perseverance, but I suspect that they won't be back next year.

It was also interesting to see how a number of pushchair confined babies reacted to the fact that they had decided to accompany their golf loving parents on a weekend jaunt to the golf course. Like their four legged counterparts they paid scant attention to the play that was going on around them and, apart from occasionally voicing their displeasure at being dragged away from their toys, steadfastly refused to enter into the spirit of the occasion.

It also seemed that long suffering girlfriends and boyfriends were much in evidence over the weekend. I recall witnessing at the sixth green two young couples with clearly differing views as regards why they were there. Oddly enough it was the two young girls who were remonstrating with their boyfriends over the golf. The girls clearly wanted to watch Ian and Luke play the short par three. Yet their respective boyfriends, indifferent to their pleas to stay by the green, merely headed off in the direction of the tented village where they said *“we would find the best place to get a beer.”* Even the timely intervention of a friendly marshal did nothing to persuade the lads to remain watching the golf, and all four strode off in the direction of a cold San Miguel, two clearly more willing than the others!

So although I was royally rewarded both as a people watcher and a golfing fan over a glorious weekend turning back to the golf it was a refreshing experience for a sports watcher to see professional sportsmen behaving in a manner which was a credit to their chosen profession.

I for one saw not one occasion when golfers surrounded an official and berated them for making a decision they did not like. Nor did I witness any golfer rip off their shirt when they sunk a winning putt and run towards their opponent's supporters. Instead I saw many instances where a player's tee shot was greeted by "*Good shot*" from their opponent, and I can't recall having heard those words spoken by one footballer to another during a match featured on Match of the Day!

And how many professional sportsmen finish a game and head straight for the practice ground as we saw everyday at Finca Cortesin. I even saw the Korean Noh Seung-yul on the driving range the day **after** he was knocked out of the tournament when most people would have headed home.

Of course as it was match-play we also witnessed numerous examples of players conceding putts that the average club golfer would have viewed as anything but a "*gimmee*".

So it is easy to see why we golf fans love our golf and golfers. What we love to see are true professionals competing against each other within the rules and spirit of the game, for the entertainment of us mere mortals who can only marvel at a skill we find it impossible to replicate during our own games at our local club. Long may it continue and I for one look forward to their return to this small corner of Spain.