

5-6 MARCH 2016 | THE BUSINESS TIMES WEEKEND

Swing

by sphgolf

Clive AGRAN

FORGET HANDICAPS
AND PLAY THE GAME
LIKE MY HERO

SPENCER ROBINSON

CAN SOCK HWEE
REVERSE THE CONS
AS A PRO?

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CAN WE GET OFF
TIGER'S SORE BACK?

Illustration by Cel Gulapa



OYSTER PERPETUAL
ROLEX DEEPESEA




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BY
CLIVE AGRAN

PLAY IT LIKE **MY HERO**

Everybody has a golfing hero – a player whom they admire above all others. Well, mine's not Tiger, Phil, Lee, Ernie, Darren, Luke or even the lovable Monty... it's Eric. No, he's not a pro. Far from it, he's just about the worst player on the planet. He has an absurdly strong grip, an appalling stance, dreadful posture, a half-hearted shoulder turn, a loopy swing that resembles an arthritic octopus falling out of the upper branches of a towering conifer, a short game that he deploys everywhere except when he's close to the green and a putting stroke that's rougher than the seas around Cape Horn. He plays, if that's the right word, off 26 and, frankly, his handicap flatters him. But I admire him enormously for one simple reason...he refuses to accept strokes.

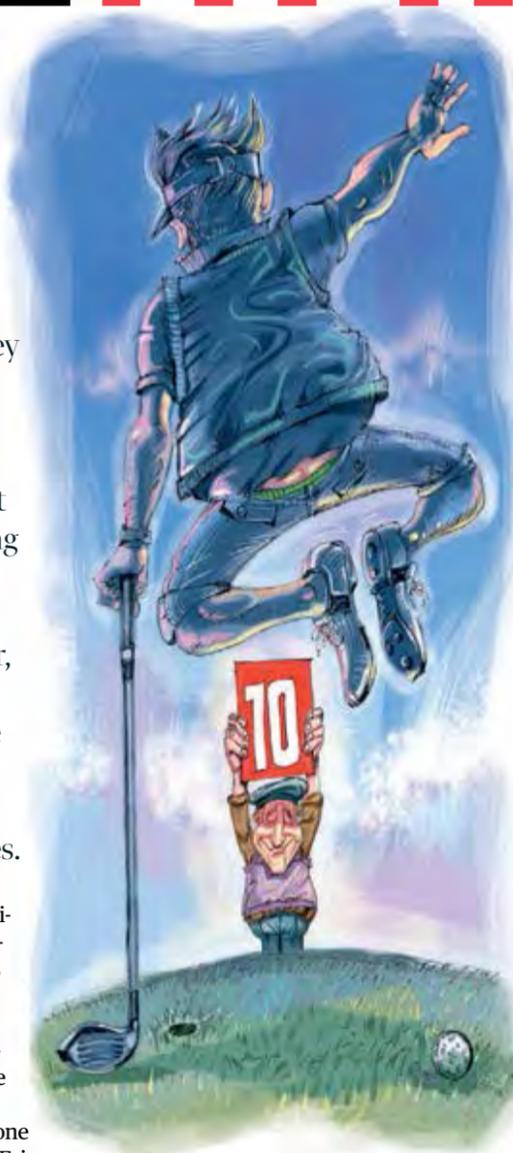
Eric and I have a game about once a month. Although I really ought to give him 12 shots, he refuses to accept 'charity' and so we play level. Consequently, he almost invariably loses, never complains and pays up like a Christian. He is, in many ways, the ideal opponent, which is only part of the reason I like and admire him.

However, on the extremely rare occasions that he somehow contrives a win, he is absolutely insufferable. Euphoric beyond measure, he gloats horribly and lets everyone within bawling distance know that he has just won a game of golf. Tough though it is to take, it would be supremely churlish to spoil Eric's ex-

ceedingly infrequent moments of triumph by asking him to exercise restraint. Quite simply, he lives for his very occasional wins, records them in capital letters in his sportsman's diary, recounts the highlights for several years to come and cherishes the memory of every one.

Putting the ugly triumphalism to one side, what appeals to me most about Eric is his sincerely held belief that whoever plays the better golf on the day deserves to win.

Adjusting scores to take account of respective levels of incompetence is, for him, a complete anathema and, in my opinion, he is absolutely right.



The accepted wisdom that the handicap system is an integral part of golf's enormous appeal is dangerously misguided. It enables the best and the worst, so the weary argument goes, to play against each other and enjoy a jolly good game. Does it really or does it

merely encourage mediocrity? What genuine incentive is there for a player to improve and lower his handicap if his reward is to receive fewer shots from, or give more to, his opponents? Why work hard on the driving range to effectively reduce your chances of winning?

The flawed handicap system, as we all know, is also manifestly open to abuse, most especially from players unattached to a club who seem simply to pluck a conveniently inflated figure from the air and regularly rack up 40+ Stableford points. Why should they be allowed to carry home the booty when genuinely talented single-figure players know that the likelihood of their beating these massive totals is less than the chances of there not being at least one blonde among the wives and girlfriends of the US Ryder Cup team?

Let's scrap all the stroke index nonsense, stop worrying about whether or not you get or give a shot on this or that hole and play one another on a perfectly level fairway. As well as encouraging us all to improve, scrapping the handicap system will simplify the game by removing the arithmetic headache of it all.

One of the reasons for the regrettable decline in greensomes is that fewer and fewer of us seem capable of working out three-fifths of the lower handicap plus two-fifths of the higher handicap and then subtracting the lower team total from the higher team total at 7.45 on a Saturday morning. If you find that difficult, you might care to recall that until recently it used to be seven-eighths of the difference.

Quite simply, we should consign the handicapping system to the same bin we stuffed the stymie and follow Eric's excellent example of allowing the better players to win.

Illustration by Cel Gulappa