Calendar

Polite Handicap

The Un-Spoken Rules of Golf Etiquette

"The golf industry is flat right now," says James S. Simpson of San Marcos. "It isn't going down," according to the district sales manager for In-Sink-Erator, who keeps track of golf facts for personal reasons. "But it isn't growing, either, not even with Tiger Woods and the insertion of new golfers into the game."

The economy is one reason, of course; another is fear of faux pas. "The National Golf Foundation found that people who played once were intimidated," says Simpson. "They didn't know how to act, weren't sure how to dress, didn't want to make fools of themselves. So they didn't play again."

LOCAL EVENTS

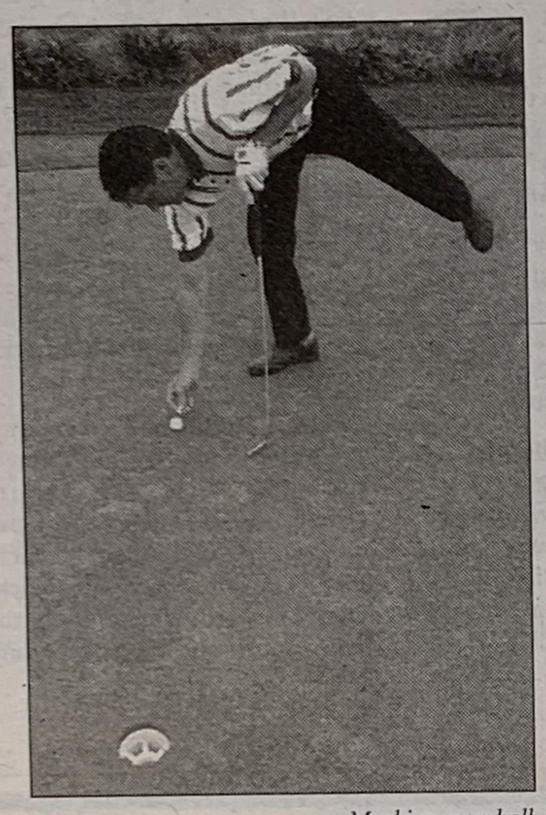
Reading Simpson's *The Un-Spoken Rules of Golf Etiquette* one gets the impression that would-be golfers are wise to be afraid of gaffe-making. For example, Rule 2-B: "Watch everyone tee off in the event you're asked to help locate the ball." But isn't everyone responsible for his or her own ball? Apparently not. Rule 11-A: "Don't remove your ball from the hole with your putter head." Why not? "It can easily damage the edge of the cup." Oh.

Other rules in Simpson's self-published book are so commonsensical, you may not want to play with people who need to be told them. Rule 1-B: "Allow the group ahead to be out of range before teeing off." No kidding. Rule 1-A: "Welcome each player in your group." Who wouldn't?

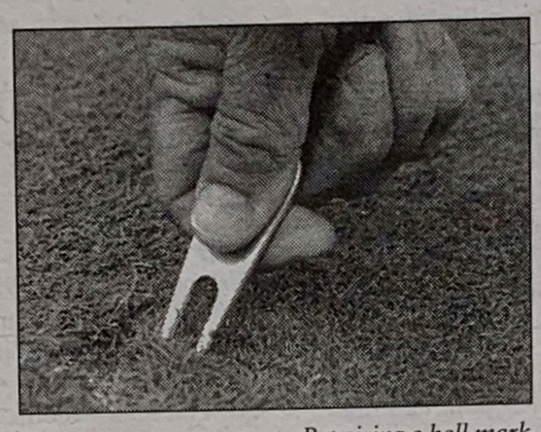
"You wouldn't believe how many guys don't introduce themselves. They get there in the nick of time and tee up. Some people are shy, and that's where people with Type A personalities, like me, will come in and say, 'Hi, I'm Jim Simpson. Hey! Play well!' But you get guys who'll cruise up in the cart, and it's as if the rest of us aren't even there!"

Maybe that's their way of speeding up play, it's suggested, for Simpson is keen to keep the game moving. (Rule 13-C: "Be ready to hit when it's your turn." Rule 15-C: "Avoid holding up play by giving golf instruction.") Simpson disagrees. "How much time does it take to shake a hand? The best players in the world shake on the first tee and again on the 18th green, with their hats off."

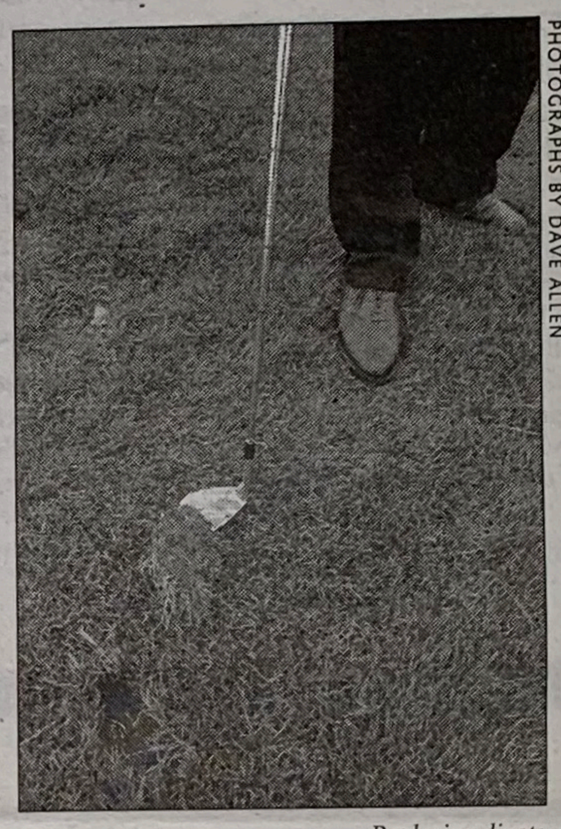
Told of the anxieties that his book has unwittingly fostered in this would-be player, Simpson protests: "But once you've learned the etiquette, it doesn't change. It's the same as it was 50 years ago, as it will be 50 years from now."



Marking your ball



Repairing a ball mark



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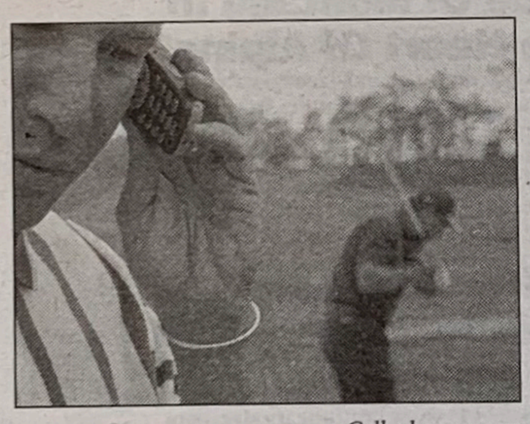
Replacing divots



Cell-phone usage

Tearing of Velcro during a putt

Throwing clubs

But 50 years ago there were no cell phones — and no Velcro — both of which are problems on golf courses today, says Simpson, who was born in 1959 and has been playing golf for 3½ decades.

People really bring cell phones out there? "Are you kidding me? That's a huge dilemma! Arnold Palmer said one day he hopes they're banned. Some courses already do ban them."

But in the past, golf was promoted as a game that took people away from phones. "Well, now they bring them because they're big swingers. They gotta sell their stocks, dispatch a workforce, let us know how important they are. And the phone rings in the middle of your swing!"

That must be worse than the Velcro glove. (Rule 8-A: "Be courteous when removing your glove.") "How many times have I been swinging when somebody's glove goes *squoooosh*? People need to be aware they're not the only person out there and that nobody's bigger than the game."

Another reason to be fearful of golf: it can be dangerous. "On courses throughout the world, many serious accidents involving the use of golf carts have occurred," Simpson writes. (Rule 16-D: "Use good judgment when operating a cart.") It's getting dangerous even for nongolfers, since houses are being built closer than ever to fairways. (Rule 5-C: "Be responsible for damage caused by an errant shot.") "If a golfer strikes a house, breaks a window, knocks off stucco, he needs to go up to that house and take responsibility," says Simpson, who, having once been hit in the chest with a ball, also discusses the necessity of yelling "Fore!"

Simpson says he wrote his book to speak the rules that have so long gone unspoken. "In so many situations you would love to say, 'Hey, guy, could you pick it up? You know, you're taking five practice swings.' But in the spirit of the game, you say nothing. You're a gentleman, not the police dog."

But you wish like crazy that these guys could be told? "Oh! You wanna tell them! But you bite your tongue. You look at your playing partner and you go, 'I wish this guy would *hurry up*!' But you're saying it under the cover."

Jim Simpson

That tack is reminiscent of the finer points of Rule 16-C. ("Resist using abusive language.") "Profanity on the course is never called for," writes Simpson, who will be signing his book this weekend at a local bookstore. "If you feel you must utter profanity during a round, mutter under your breath so nobody else can hear you."

— *Jeanne Schinto*

Author signing with
James S. Simpson
"The Un-Spoken Rules
of Golf Etiquette"
Saturday, June 8, 12:30 p.m.
Barnes & Noble
1040 North El Camino Real,
Encinitas
Free
Info: 760-943-6400