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Golfers can be quite difficult, withdrawn and hard to talk to, especially before, during and after an important game – in other words, all the time.

THE NEVER-ENDING PAGEANT

You may think you can hold your own when conversation around the dinner table settles on golf's inexhaustible fascination. Don't get overconfident: golf's greatest exponents don't claim to understand, or have mastered, the game. 'Deceptively simple and endlessly complicated, rewarding and maddening' was Arnold Palmer's definition; at least, we think it was golf he was talking about, not Mrs Palmer. Mark Twain is credited with 'a good walk spoiled', a common reaction after a round that started well but ended in disappointment. Neither is exactly the last word on 'that never-ending pageant, which men call Golf' (PG Wodehouse).

Often dismissed as a pastime for old buffers, golf is in fact the bluffer's game par excellence. At its simplest, it is about pretending to be a better, or a worse, golfer than you are. At a more advanced level, it is about bluffing your way to victory, or at least a less ignominious defeat,

in any number of ways that come under the broad umbrella of psychological warfare. Your greatest strength is the extent to which you are successful in reading and playing your opponent, not the ball.

“ Golf is deceptively simple and endlessly complicated rewarding and maddening ... the greatest game mankind has ever invented”

Arnold Palmer

By your words, actions, body language, deployment of the rule book and even your choice of outfit, you can bluff your adversary into using the wrong club, conceding a putt or accepting a penalty. You can inspire in him* thoughts of self-fulfilling defeatism or lift him up to an exalted plane of fatal overconfidence. You may even be able to bluff yourself into playing a better shot. All of these invaluable tricks of the trade will be explained in the pages that follow, along with the

* Gender matters. Golf is a game of few words, or should be. It is in this spirit of economy, and not out of any gender bias, that we have employed the shorter and simpler forms ‘he’, ‘him’ and ‘man’ in preference to the longer ‘he and/or she’, ‘him and/or her’ and ‘man and/or woman’. As any bluffer will tell you, egalitarianism is alive and well on the golf course. Though not necessarily in the clubhouse...