

BILL MAPLESON

A good professional preparing for a round will be on the practice range two hours before tee off time. After working his way through the clubs he will proceed to the practice green for a solid putting work out. This will be on top of whatever time he has spent practising the day before after his round.

We too have our professionals. On Saturday, at about twelve o'clock, Bill Mapleson, Jack Gardiner, Tex Devlin, Rick Fenby and sometimes John Gwynn meet for the afternoon's golf. Unlike golf professionals they do things a little differently. They gather in the lounge, down a few beers, make sure the afternoon race bets are on and talk casually, usually about the defects of each other. And then they make a decision: golf or not? The weather is a factor. On the day I met them they were intimidated by the prospect of rain well, actually it was hail and maybe even snow and thought they would wait a while. In the meantime another beer was in order. At this stage I thought I had better leave because they can be very naughty boys. With better weather prospects they will head off in a group of 4, 5, 6 or 7, suitably armed with liquid refreshments because to die of thirst would be a horrible death indeed. Of course as a matter of honour they have to be the last group. Just as Geoff Closter's group need to be the first on a Saturday, Bill's group has to be last.

Who are these dedicated professionals? Bill Mapleson joined in 1964. He was attracted to the game by his father, Hugh, who had a ten year stint on the Committee beginning in 1961. Hugh was responsible for the only attempt to document the Club's history to date, a marvellous memoir called, "The Dust Never Settles." It recounts the renewal of the Club in 1955 to his death in 1971. Read this if you want to understand where your club has come from; you will also quickly decide he wouldn't have been a bad bloke to be in the trenches with you.

Tex Devlin joined in the early 1970's thanks to another club stalwart, Jim Burke. He knows how to talk and has probably propped up the bar and held forth often enough to have part of the Club House named after him. Of course, he is better known as the husband of the Ladies' President, Marion. (This is a joke, Tex)

Jack Gardiner also joined in the 1970's and is simply part of the woodwork. Rick Fenby had better things to do and was absent the Saturday I was there although this didn't stop his good mates talking freely about him.

In days gone by the group comprised Joe Collins, a long standing President and also a Life Member, who steered the Club through some interesting times in the eighties. Once a year Joe held court at Breakaway Creek near Hamilton where the boys would be ... well... boys. Jack Gillespie, who was Captain for 4 years in the nineties and worked with Bill on Match Committee, joined the group from time to time.

I met with the group mainly to get Bill's story but it wasn't long before the stories started to flow. Bill had served on the General Committee for five years dating from 2000, a particularly important phase in our Club's history. Bill was on the Course Management Committee responsible for the new nine. This was a major undertaking. Prior to this, the course had been basically developed by the voluntary labour of members over many years. On this occasion an outside contractor was engaged at a considerable cost but it was basically the Course Management Committee that was responsible for overseeing the project. Perhaps in the light of this experience, when the refurbishment of the Club Rooms took place, the Club chose to employ a site manager.

During Bill's time on course management his pet idea was to enlarge the tee boxes. He appears to have had little success in convincing the Club to spend the money but it is hard to argue with his logic. He reasoned that for the Club to remain viable it had to have a blossoming membership and a

steady number of green fee players. This meant providing a course that could withstand heavy traffic. One of the ways to protect your course is to have a variety of positions from which to start the hole. It is interesting that there are now moves afoot to improve the positioning of some of the tees, the 5th for example, that reflects this thinking.

Bill was also involved in the Committee decision not to build a new Club House off Fairway Drive. For him it was all about security. With the major entrance to the course so far away from the proposed new club rooms how could you guarantee the security of buildings and equipment located there? This is without regard to how you prevent interlopers having a game at their own pleasure.

Bill was not on the Committee during the bloodletting period while we argued how we were to finance the refurbishment of the new Club Rooms but he never doubted the need to do something. His main concern was to provide a proper facility for Anthony believing that to lose him would be a major loss to the Club. On this point I doubt that he would have encountered any argument.

Bill started golf as a mad keen junior in the company of people like Anthony Rogers, Rod McLeish and Keith Anderson way back in 1964. I had assumed Bill is what most of us are - a hacker. Maybe not. In 1985 he was the handicap winner in the A grade Club Championships with a 3 round score of 203 that included net rounds of 62 - yes 62 - 70 and 71. Pretty impressive so it seems a shame to mention that in the same year Brian Soutar won B grade with a net round of 197.

In 1991 he was part of the winning Division 4 Pennant team that included Robert and John Piner, Graeme Kennedy, Robert Harland, Max Corby and Phil Adams. We had had success in 1971 and 1983 with our Junior teams but this was the first for the men. In the same year Shane Dwyer led the Division 1 team to victory.

He also has another achievement that is going to take some beating. Playing in a 36 hole event one day and off the back tees he had 79 off the stick in the morning to give him a net score of 55 which he believes might still be the club record. Angus McArthur tells the story of a junior who had a net result of zero but that was with Jack Kerr's special handicap system and was only for nine holes. None of us believe in fairy tales so it shouldn't surprise you that the afternoon round saw Bill return to "form" when he returned a 96. Golf certainly is character building although some of us would think that our character is formed enough thank you very much.

And so to the stories.

Having played a truly inglorious shot on the 20th, the club slipped out of Rick Fenby's hands to land on the adjoining green very near Barry Cunningham who, not surprisingly, took offence.

"I'll report you."

"You can stick it up your..."

Nothing came of it but you have to feel sorry for Barry. He spent his time in Canberra dodging bullets; he didn't expect to have to do the same on his golf course.

Intimidated by the water and bunker on the 2nd, no doubt many of you have thought about ricocheting your tee shot off the back door of the house on the left and then landing the ball softly on the green. Tex Devlin said not to bother. He tried it and it didn't work. Of course he doesn't have the skill with the shank that Doug Scott has.

"Fiery" Fred Neilson's name cropped up on several occasions. I didn't have to ask the origin of his nick name. Playing at Warragul one day he was congratulated by a smug member for, "finally seeing the light and playing on a decent course." Fred's response was immediate, "Why don't you just replace the holes with electricity outlets and make this place the caravan park it deserves to be." He didn't protect his own though. A dispute arose at the pool table with Geoff Wadham. Geoff was one of the true characters of the club - his machine gun laugh gave him away all the time - but he

could also be a little pedantic. His complaint, “Young fellow, I was a navigator in the war” cut no ice with Fiery who replied, “I don’t care if you were flying the plane upside down, you’re still wrong.”

We all know where Lang Lang is and plenty of us admire the course. Bill certainly does but it is a little hard to understand how, having played in a comp there one day, it took him three days to get home. Maybe you need to know that he got “lost” with some good friends, Keith Anderson, Jack Kerr, John Bannon, John Blake and found himself playing some of the better sand belt courses. Of course he wasn’t married then so it probably didn’t matter. Of course if he had his dairy farm the cows would have said it certainly did matter.

Jack Gardiner, Bill Mapleson and Kevin Heatley were playing at Cobram when Jack landed in a bunker. Before he could play his shot, the strong wind blew his buggy into the bunker. Of course his playing partners penalised him two shots for every club grounded in the bunker giving him a 30 for a simple par 3. Not correct of course but it shows why it is good to play with friends.

And the professionals are friends. They give us a glimpse of what the Club once was. Tex described it as a family and this is not a bad description. In the early days before television came to dominate our lives the Golf Club was a key social meeting place for the town. Dinner dances, balls, card and game nights and even a little bit of quiet drinking were the order of the day. People stayed for the presentations and then often stayed a bit longer after that. The old days couldn’t last forever and in 1990 President George Nicholson commented that, “it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract members to the Club socially.”

This is certainly the reality today. We gather to play the game, share a drink afterwards and then leave. It might mean that we don’t know half the Club’s members because our paths don’t cross. While it is a shame that this might be so there is no point in bemoaning this fact because it simply reflects the reality of a changed world.

Thank goodness though for the professionals. They are there when stumps are drawn just as in the old days when there was always a crowd for the presentations. No doubt they look after their mates just like Alan Fielden did when he drove a worse for wear Charlie Morley home and copped a drink driving fine. How did the copper know? Alan was driving too slowly. The professionals thought this was hilarious.

The final word should go to Bev Warren because she has to put up with them as a part of her job. Of Bill Mapleson she said, “He’s probably the most sensible of the lot” – talk about damning with faint praise. “They are loads of laughs but of course they do talk a lot of bull...” unfortunately I couldn’t quite hear the rest of this word... “but when they are in here they play by my rules.” You’d better believe her when she says this because when she worked the Dandenong hotels she happily swept the drunks out of the men’s toilets. Still, you gotta love our professionals.

Written by George Shand