



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL WITTE

The Games Golfers Play

by
Bob
Seligman

Through the years golfers have devised a host of ways to add a little spice to their weekend foursomes. Herewith our list of the most ingenious



They have legendary names like Arnies, Seves and even Tigers; they have silly names like Bingo Bango Bongo and Barkies; they have names that bespeak the dark side of our obsession with our favorite sport, like Criers and Whiners, Gruesomes, Trouble and — most descriptive of the state of our game for many of us — Disaster. They're the games golfers play and they are as many and varied as the motley company of linksters who partake in them. Some of the games can get expensive but, as Doug Sanders, one of golf's greatest hustlers, says, golfers gamble during rounds because it builds up their confidence.

"I think everybody likes to be able to feel like they have a little advantage," Sanders says. "When you feel like you've got the best of it, that's when you want to get out there and try to play."

Here are some of golf's most popular games, and how to play them. Just don't forget to bring your wallet (cash included, of course), and settle up after the round is over. And remember, as Sanders says, it should be fun.

NASSAU

The granddaddy of them all. Nassaus typically include three bets in one: winner on the front nine, on the back nine and over the full 18. Stroke or match play applies. The \$2 Nassau may be the most common bet in golf, but the fact that it can be pressed and repressed more often than a badly wrinkled shirt often makes the game considerably costlier and even more exciting. (For the uninitiated, a press amounts to a double-or-nothing wager.) In many cases, a press is automatically invoked when a team or player is two holes down, starting another bet for the remaining holes. With all the pressing going on, make sure one of the players in the group is a CPA.

SKINS GAME

No, this isn't the basketball game of Skins and Shirts. Wrong playing field, chum. It's just one of golf's most popular and well-known games, in which Skins — or points — are accumulated by winning holes over your opponents. Should no member of the foursome win

the hole outright, the hole is declared a push and the skin is carried over to the next hole. Successive pushes can produce some serious pressure as the skins at stake on each successive hole continue to mount.

WOLF

One of golf's howling betting successes, Wolf can be played either as a three or four-person game. When played by a threesome, the golfer with the middle-distance drive (or second closest to the hole on par 3s) is the wolf and his opponents are the hunters. In order to get back to the den with a victory (and the cash), the wolf's doubled net score must be less than the Hunters' combined net score. If Wolf bites man, he collects from each. If man bites Wolf, it makes the front page of *The National Enquirer* — and the men collect a double wager from the woeful Wolf. Ties, of course, carry over. In a four-person game, players rotate being the Wolf. On each hole, the player designated as the Wolf has to choose whether to play 1 against 3, where he or she can make more money by going

alone, or 2 on 2, where the Wolf has to choose a partner. Added pressure in the foursome configuration arises from the Wolf always teeing off last and having to decide to partner with a given player after each drive is made and before he has made his own. If he passes on all three drives he is designated the “Lone Wolf” and must beat all three other players to collect a double wager.

ACES AND DEUCES

Aces and Deuces (aka Acey Deucey), is a bet in which there is a winner, two modest losers and one big sufferer on each hole. The low scorer on each hole wins a certain amount from each of the other three players, while the high scorer on each hole owes each of the other three. Traditionally, the ace (winning) bet is twice the amount of the deuce (losing) bet. Let’s use the formula of the ace bet being \$2 and the deuce bet being \$1. On a given hole, A makes 3, B and C both make 4 and D makes 6. A, as the “ace,” wins \$2 each from B, C, and D. D, as the “deuce,” owes \$1 each to A, B and C. Therefore, A wins \$7 (\$2 each from B, C, and D, plus another \$1 from D). B and C both lose \$1 after paying \$2 to A but getting \$1 from D), while D is down \$5 after paying \$1 to each player for being the deuce, plus the \$2 owed to A for his “ace” score. With this kind of action on just one hole, the wins and losses can rise quickly, especially if you elevate the stakes on the ace and deuce.

“AUTO WIN”



BINGO BANGO BONGO

Bingo Bango Bongo has three points available on each hole and rewards different parts of a player’s game: long, short and putting. Depending on how you play, the first point goes either to the player hitting the green in the fewest strokes or to the first player to reach the green, which gets the Bingo. The Bango, or second point, goes to the player closest to the hole. The Bongo goes to the player who either holes out first or has the lowest score on the hole. In some versions, players winning the Bingo, Bango and Bongo get double points. Bingo Bango Bongo is also known as Bingle Bangle Bungle.

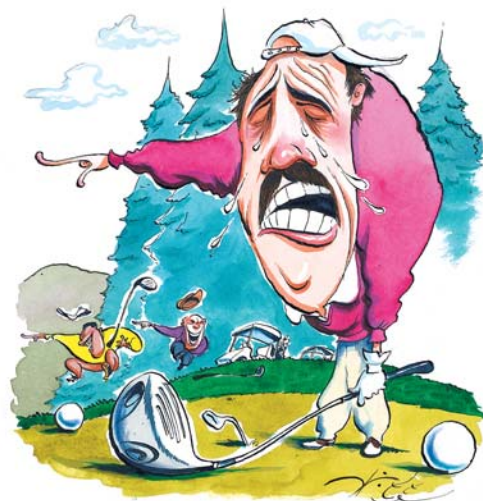
VEGAS

You can really gamble on Vegas, where winners are crowned by combining the two net scores of each team to make one two-digit number. Let’s say you’re on a par 3. Team A’s players make a par and bogey, for a 34. (Remember, low score first.) Team B gets two bogeys (44). That puts Team A 10 points up on Team B. Keep a running total of the point difference (and don’t be too conservative in your wagering as Maalox Moments can be interesting). Variations on Vegas can make things even more interesting. If one team gets a net birdie, the other team’s higher score goes first, making the point differential even greater. The same thing applies if a team’s players fail to make at least a net par. Higher individual score goes first. And, making a double-digit score on a hole can really hurt the pocketbook.

CHICAGO

In Chicago, players receive a negative quota of points, based upon their handicaps, that they have to hurdle in order to win. Scratch players get -39 points, one handicaps get -38, two handicaps get -37 and so on to 36 handicappers, who get -3 (and our condolences for their level of play). On a net basis, players then receive one point for bogeys, two points for pars, four for birdies and eight points for eagles.

“CRIERS AND WHINERS”



The player who clears his hurdle by the most points wins. If no one clears the hurdle, the player closest to zero wins.

CRIERS AND WHINERS

Criers and Whiners, or No Alibis, is a game of mulligans. (Now, do we have your attention?) Golfers are known to cry and whine about their screwed up shots and this game is golf’s version of a Shut Up toy, the kind worn-out mothers buy their howling children to gain some peace and quiet. In C&W, chronic kvetchers are allotted a given number of mullies before the beginning of a round, based upon their handicap. Strategy is key because once the mulligans are used up, players can’t dip into the Federal Mulligan Reserve Fund for more. Two more things: You can’t take a mulligan on your opening drive and you can’t replay a shot twice. If that’s what you want, go cry and whine somewhere else. Also known as Wipe Out, Play It Again Sam and Replay.

LAKWOOD GOLF

You just have to love this game. Lakewood Golf, which supposedly originated in Dallas, takes golf out of the quiet of the library and puts it smack dab into the middle of rush hour. Players use any method they can to distract their opponents, like screaming, yelling or maybe blowing air horns. According to legend, Titanic Thompson, one of golf’s greatest hustlers, was shaken to the nubs when his friend drove a golf cart straight at him

THE FIRST BIG-MONEY MATCH

Many years ago, long before the \$2 Nassau was a thought, much less a reality, one of the most famous big money matches of yore celebrated what golf historian Michael Beckerich calls the sporting blood of golf, not to mention the pride of several of the game's most renowned Scottish golf clubs of the day.

The year was 1849 when Allan Robertson and Old Tom Morris (below in 1880) of St. Andrews tangled with Musselburgh's brother duo of Tom and Willie Dunn for what Beckerich calls the then "ungodly sum" of 400 pounds.

"It's one of the biggest money matches ever on record," says Beckerich, publisher of *Classics of Golf*, a purveyor of fine golf literature based in Stratford, CT.

The 400-pound winner-take-all prize, which was offered by local gamblers and what Beckerich calls "the royalty of the day" was only one aspect of the stakes involved in the match, which was played over St.

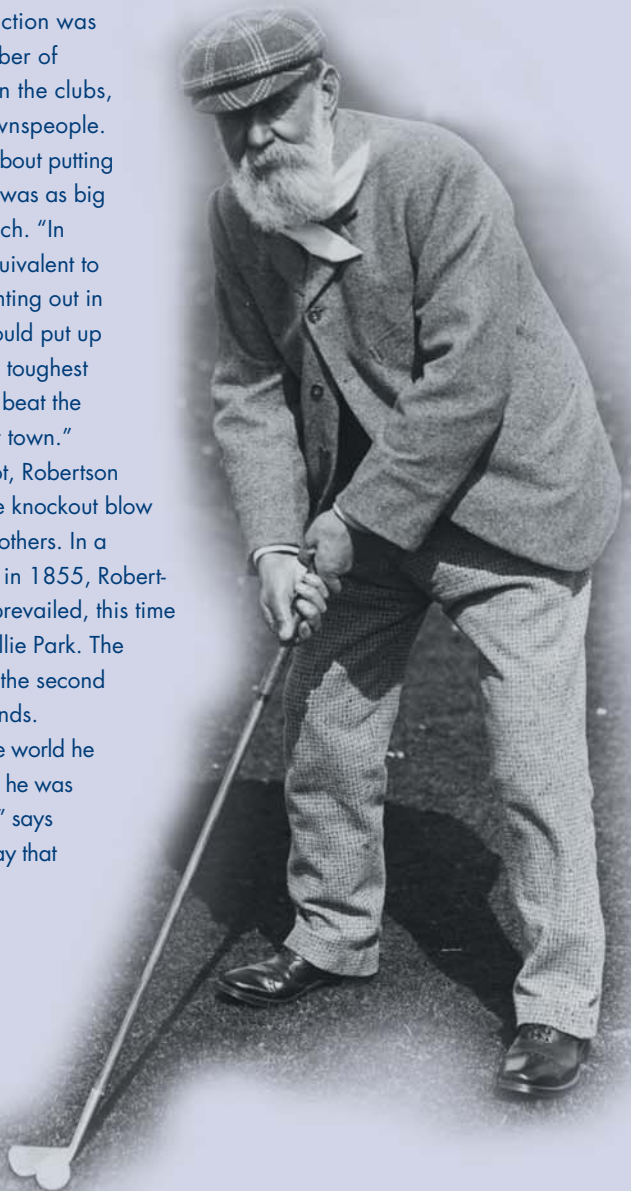
Andrews and Musselburgh as well as a third course, North Berwick. The biggest action was in the tremendous number of large side bets between the clubs, gamblers and local townspeople.

"If you want to talk about putting wagering together, this was as big as it gets," says Beckerich. "In America, the closest equivalent to the match was prizefighting out in the West. The towns would put up money and say that the toughest guy in their town could beat the toughest guy in another town."

Playing alternate shot, Robertson and Morris supplied the knockout blow by beating the Dunn brothers. In a rematch six years later, in 1855, Robertson and Morris again prevailed, this time over Tom Dunn and Willie Park. The winners got even more the second time around—500 pounds.

"Allan always told the world he never lost a match when he was paired with Tom Morris," says Beckerich. "Historians say that was probably true."

The pride of St. Andrews, Old Tom Morris teed it up for the honor of his town, the Old Course and 400 pounds, the equivalent of \$47,000 US Dollars today.



when he was getting ready to hit a shot. Now that's a distraction! (Note to members: You might want to come up with forms of distraction that can't be heard three fairways away.)

CHOOSE 'EM

Choose 'em or lose 'em, that's what we say. Perfect for a threesome, this game requires all players to hit their tee shots before the designated player, which changes on every hole, sides with one of the other group members. The loner must beat the other two players to win the hole. This is a more benign form of Wolf, which forces players to pick or reject a potential partner after each individual drive, rather than after all have hit.

BRIDGE

Bridge (aka Name That Score) will not only test your ability but also ask you to determine how confident you are in the state of your game. Great for either a two-some or foursome — since there's nothing odd about Bridge — points are applied to each hole before the round begins. Before each hole, a team will bid on the number of strokes they'll make on that hole. Let's say you'll take an 11 on a par 5, which is less than what you feel the other team will have. The opposition can either take the bet; take the bet and double it; or make a lower bid — say 10 strokes. The first team then is faced with the same three options. If you keep redoubling the wager, Bridge can become more vicious than the betting in backgammon.

GRUESOMES

Gruesomes matches two-person teams against each other. After each player tees off, the other team chooses the drives your side has to play. Logic dictates they'll select the worst — or most gruesome — drive. Most commonly, the hole is then completed in an alternate shot format, although the person hitting the gruesome drive may also hit the second shot.

DISASTER

Less is more with Disaster, where points are "awarded" for poor play, like hitting into

the water, driving out of bounds, three-putting, etc. Points can be given any value you determine, so the less points you score, the better. In some versions a (blessed) par can wipe out all accumulated points. Also known as Trouble.

BEST AT SOMETHING

This is definitely for stroke play, where points are the determining factor, along with your ability to add and subtract. Add points for things like hitting fairways, reaching greens in regulation and one-putting. Subtract points for transgressions like losing a ball, hitting into a bunker or three-putting. The variations and mutations are almost endless. The player with the most positive, or least negative, points wins.

AUTO WIN

This is one of golf's versions of sudden death, in which you instantly win holes by doing such things as chipping in from off the green (not the fringe), holing out from a bunker or stiffing an approach shot from 150 yards or more — even if your opponent may have been poised to make a lower score. Carryovers from hole to hole elevate the stakes.

ROUND ROBIN

Hooray for “Hollywood,” another name for the game, or Sixes, a third alias. In this game, two members of the foursome team up against the other two. The partners rotate after the sixth and 12th hole, so all partner combinations are explored.

PLAYING FOR “JUNK”

In addition to the match and stroke-play games already described, there are a number of other little bonuses—frequently known as junk—that are often added to a round to make things a little more interesting. They don't affect the overall match, but are fun nonetheless. Be sure you designate before the round which, if any, are in play and what they're worth to the player who achieves them.

Author Bob Seligman is a writer from New York.

SAVING THEIR SKINS

Don Ohlmeyer's refusal to take “No” for an answer enabled him to win one of the biggest gambles of his professional career: getting *The Skins Game* on network television and making it successful.

“You love to do those things that people say won't work,” says Ohlmeyer, the former Executive Producer of NBC Sports and former President, NBC West Coast. “When you find something you have a passion for—that you believe in—and the conventional wisdom is that it won't fly, that gets the juices flowing a little more. It's always much more exciting when it does work.”

That's what happened with *Skins*. In 1983, when Ohlmeyer and his partner, Barry Frank, created the concept for *The Skins Game* and tried to sell it to what was then television's ruling triumvirate—ABC, NBC and CBS—they ran into a roadblock of resistance. Frank, now Senior Corporate VP of IMG, which now runs *The Skins Game*, and Vice Chairman of TWI, the production brand of IMG, says part of the problem was that it hadn't been done before.

“In sports, golf was not quite as big a deal then as it is now,” says Frank. “There was no such thing as the Silly Season. We actually created it with *The Skins Game*. Nobody thought you could buck football with golf.”

Using his firm, Ohlmeyer Communications Company, as the lead blocker, Ohlmeyer and Frank did an end run around the networks by buying the airtime for the broadcast and then selling the advertising. Ohlmeyer also made a critical decision to hold *The Skins Game* on Thanksgiving weekend at the visually spectacular Desert Highlands in Scottsdale, AZ. —a choice that had to be made before the NFL schedule was announced.

“I thought we would do fine against college football, which we did. The conventional wisdom was that NFL football would kill us, but I wasn't concerned about it except for one game,” says Ohlmeyer. “At that time it was Dallas-Washington, and the only week that Dallas cannot play Washington on Sunday is Thanksgiving because they play on Thursday. That's why we played on Thanksgiving weekend.”

Even with a star-studded foursome of Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Jack Nicklaus, and Tom Watson playing in the initial event,

Ohlmeyer (in 1978) is proud of the success he achieved with *The Skins Game*.

it still looked like OCC and partners were not only going to lose their skins, but also their shirts and everything else this side of their Fruit of the Looms. Five weeks before the initial telecast, Ohlmeyer says they were facing a \$1 million loss. But like a Palmer charge of old, they came back to make an \$11,000 profit.

During its 22-year run, *The Skins Game* has had many memorable moments, starting with the \$170,000 putt Player sank on the 17th hole in the first *Skins Game*, at Desert Highlands. Desert golf had become the rage.

“It was more money than he had ever won in a year on tour,” says Ohlmeyer. “He was hyperventilating so bad on the 18th tee that he could hardly take the club back. He could not believe he had won that much money.”

The following year, also at Desert Highlands, Nicklaus canned a \$240,000 putt on 18th hole and threw his putter into the air, something he'd only done once before, when he won the British Open.

Skins' most memorable moment probably occurred in 1987, when Lee Trevino made the *Games'* only hole-in-one, on the 17th hole on the Stadium Course at the TPC at PGA West in La Quinta, CA.

“He said something like ‘I don't know why everybody's surprised. I've been practicing that shot my whole life,’” says Ohlmeyer.

As unforgettable as those shots were, the most memorable moment to Ohlmeyer was getting *The Skins Game* on the air, feeling that he did a good job, and seeing the next morning that the audience agreed with him. “There's nothing more gratifying than that,” he says.

“Things are successful because they please the audience, and the audience thinks they're important because the audience enjoys them,” adds Ohlmeyer, who is now retired. “Barry and I made a gamble that *The Skins Game* would please the audience and they'd enjoy it and get a hoot out of it. And they did.”

