

Two Great Sports and One Fact

Steve Sorensen © 2004
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By the way...

A hunter on the hillside above a beautiful golf course is captivated by the mysteries of the natural world. He is stimulated by the crispness of autumn and enjoys the brisk, invigorating air. In the quiet of the woods, the hunter whispers to himself, "Life is good." Moments later he pulls the trigger on a regal spring gobbler, his shotgun blast echoes through the valley, and a beautiful animal dies.

A golfer in the valley below also enjoys the beauty of nature and the peacefulness of his surroundings. He breathes deeply and feels the warmth of the sun on his shoulders and the cool breezes on his face. He hits a long, straight drive and whispers to himself, "Life is good." Moments later a shot echoes from the hillside and the golfer thinks to himself, "I'm glad the game of golf does not involve killing."

Or does it?

It is true that the hunter cannot seriously set out to hunt without knowing that his action may result in the death of a deer or a pheasant or a duck. For that death, and for the intention to bring death, some will lay a load of guilt upon the hunter. But is the golfer free from similar guilt?

While some hunts do end in the death of at least one animal, no round of golf can be started without being preceded by the untimely deaths of many animals. Hardly a golf course exists that has not been constructed without the deaths

or displacement of many wild creatures and the destruction of their habitat.

Trees are cut to create fairways, destroying nesting sites for songbirds. Even dead trees offer cavities that are home to squirrels, raccoons and other species. Edge habitat is altered, moving woodchucks and skunks from their burrows. The earth is plowed, excavating rocks and roots, to provide smooth greens for golfers.

A pleasant, though artificial, landscape is created that has beauty, but another beauty

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has been sacrificed for the golfer's athletic pursuits and aesthetic appreciation. Chemicals are applied which kill insects, birds and small mammals. Cover is eliminated, forcing large mammals into the remaining smaller spaces. Every golf course represents at least a 100-acre reduction in carrying capacity for wildlife. In varying amounts, so does the construction of every parking lot, housing development, road and shopping center. That's not to say construction and development is bad. That's just the way it is.

The golfer didn't kill the animals, and he is probably years removed from the disruption of animals and their habitat in the construction of

the course. But still, he could not be playing golf without someone else doing the deed to make his enjoyment of the sport possible.

Golf is a great game, one that demands well-manicured courses in beautiful and serene wooded locations. Each course is an economically viable business, and requires supporting industries. Equipment manufacturers, construction workers, apparel merchandisers, publishing, and the list goes on.

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No golf course in Warren County is without its own beauty, each one being nestled against some of the finest habitat for game animals. Cable Hollow, with its scenic view, Jackson Valley with its steep challenges, Conewango Valley with its rolling terrain, and Blueberry with its hilltop majesty all offer wonderful opportunities for communion with nature and observation of wildlife. Although the golf courses were carved out of that habitat, they give golfers increased opportunity to observe the animals that live on and near golf courses.

Golfers routinely hear the mating gobble of turkeys in the spring, and they often see the



young flocks of poultts chasing grasshoppers and other bug life in the summer. They observe bushytails busily squirreling away nuts in the fall. They also see deer, bears, woodchucks and other animals prowling around the edges, and of course, geese paddling in the ponds and making a nuisance of themselves on the fairways. Some of the golfers who play these courses are also the hunters who harvest the animals in the adjacent forest during the hunting seasons. Others don't give it a thought. The idea of killing animals is far removed from their consciousness.

But it doesn't alter the fact that, even though the golfer is not a direct killer, he is complicit in the destruction of habitat and the deaths of animals. The golfer, the hunter, the motorist, the shopper, everyone is complicit because for man to live, animals must die. It is a fact of life. It's just that with hunters, the relationship is more direct. And there's nothing wrong with that.

Steve Sorensen lives in Russell with his wife and Greta. He has been a puppet, a pauper, a preacher, a poet, a pawn, and he knows a king. He pounds on the keyboard because he thinks that a word is worth a thousand pictures. He's seen it done, but hasn't yet succeeded in writing that word himself. Maybe next time. Greta, by the way, is a miniature dachshund, just to clear up the pictures that word created.