

“The Back 9: Life Lessons Learned Later in Life”

Hole #14, “Integrity”



“The Scorecard”

“Golf is a game of integrity. There are no referees out there. We all respect each other.”

Jordan Spieth, Champion Golfer

Golf is a game of integrity. The scorecard says it all. There are no referees. Golfers all respect and trust each other. Their word is everything. Players are responsible for their own actions and personal conduct on the golf course. Golf is unique from other sports in that players call penalties on themselves and record their own score. Arnold Palmer once offered humorous advice to young golfers, *“I have a tip that can take five strokes off anyone’s golf game: it’s called an eraser!”*

As we continue our round on the Back 9 Holes of our lives, Hole #14 is where I learn that integrity is the core value of the game of golf, and of life. Who we are is more important than what we accomplish. A true champion is not just someone who plays the game well, but one who plays it honestly. No eraser needed.

Jordan Spieth is a true champion and a young man of integrity. By the age of twenty-one, he won the Masters and the US Open. Even more impressive than his accomplishments on the golf course is Jordan’s life off the course. His younger sister, Ellie, was born with a neurological disorder that left her with a developmental disability. Her life is a source of inspiration for Jordan and keeps the game of golf in perspective for him. There are more important things in Jordan’s life than professional golf. His faith, his family and friends serve to keep Jordan grounded in life.

Hole #14: Integrity

Integrity is “*adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty*”. The Apostle Paul was a man of deep integrity. He walked his talk. People around him learned about integrity from observing his life. On one occasion, he wrote a letter to the Philippian church encouraging them to live lives of integrity before God and others.

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

(Philippians 4:8)

Paul understood the influence of our thoughts on our lives. What a person allows to occupy his/her mind will eventually determine his/her speech and ultimately his/her actions. Paul’s exhortation to “think about these things” precedes a second exhortation to “put it into practice.” The combination of the virtues listed (whatever is true, honorable, just, pure lovely, commendable, excellent) is sure to produce a wholesome thought pattern, which in turn will lead to a life of moral integrity and honesty. I believe Paul would have been a champion golfer!

The young believers in Philippi were watching Paul carefully to see if his life matched his words. Did he say one thing and practice another? The same is true for us today. The younger generation is watching us as we complete the Back 9 Holes of our lives. Are we walking our talk? Is our life speaking for us about what is true, honorable, just, pure, commendable and excellent? Our children and grandchildren are watching!

The true champions of the game have left their legacy for many young professionals like Jordan Spieth to follow. Jordan’s life has won the respect of his peers and fans around the world. What he has accomplished on the golf course at a young age is impressive. Who he is becoming as a person is more impressive. Shortly after his twentieth birthday, Jordan established the Jordan Spieth Family Foundation. His younger sister Ellie was part of the inspiration, and through his work, the Foundation provides awareness and financial assistance to community organizations within four philanthropic pillars: special needs children, military families, junior golf and pediatric cancer. The game of golf, like life, reveals who we are.

Although the 14th Hole is the easiest par 5 on the Back 9, I made a double bogey 7 (for non-golfers that is not good!). I had a bad lie under some low-hanging branches in the trees and completely missed the ball twice while trying to pitch it out. No one noticed. I could write down a par 5 on my scorecard and no one would ever know...but I would know. I walk to the 15th Tee Box at peace with myself, my playing partners and this silly old game. I do not carry an eraser.