

# New Books Help Winter Fly By

**By Lorne Rubenstein**

In the time it takes to play a round of golf, you could read one of the numerous worthy books published about the game this year. Why not give yourself time to do that this winter? Here are some suggestions.

Start with *Tommy's Honor*, Kevin Cook's charming evocation of Old Tom Morris and his son, quite naturally known as Young Tom. Old Tom, the first keeper of the green at the Old Course in St. Andrews – hence the word "greenkeeper" – won the Open Championship four times between 1861 and 1867, while his son won it four times between 1868 and 1872.

Cook evokes the romance of the game in St. Andrews so long ago. It was a world of challenge matches for big money, played with gutta-percha balls, cleeks and play clubs. Scoundrels abounded. Cook tells a crackling good story.

If Cook has whipped you into a frenzy for the game across the Atlantic, then you'll want to examine the new edition of *Links of Heaven*. Authors Richard Phinney and Scott Whitley take you not to Scotland, but to Ireland. Their book is an immersion into the game there. They write, for example, of Pat Ruddy, the visionary behind the European Club near Dublin and the more recent Sandy Hills links at Rosapenna.

"The mental juices ferment on it," Ruddy says of ground he calls "turbulent hill country. It's high drama all the way."

Ruddy wrote his own book this year. It's the story of the European Club, and it's called *Fifty Years in a Bunker*.

Ruddy's quite a character. He was offered nearly \$60-million last year for the place, but said no. "Truly, golf is a game for the possessed," he said.

It's possessed Christopher Smith, a teacher at the Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club near Portland, Ore. Smith is a top-notch speed golfer who has shot 66 at Pumpkin Ridge's Ghost Creek course while using six clubs and taking only 48½ minutes to play. The faster you play, he contends, the better you'll play.

Smith's book is *I've Got 99 Swing Thoughts but 'Hit the Ball' Ain't One*. He's referring to all the ideas that clog a golfer's brain. Smith advocates John Daly's "point and shoot" approach and promises to turn the reader into a "freewheeling, react-to-the-target golfer who feels the game, plays faster, shoots lower scores, and has more fun."

For more fun, and a different book, settle down by the fire with a wee dram of your favourite single malt and read Andy Brumer's *The Poetics of Golf*. Brumer's a philosopher of the game. He looks at a course as a work of art, and the swing as not a swing at all, but a sculpture, because

it takes place in three dimensions. Brumer manages to get the novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sam Snead in the same sentence. He's not one-dimensional, for sure.

Meanwhile, back in the dimension of professional golf, where the idea is to win and win again and again, there's Martin Davis's lavish book *Jack Nicklaus: Simply the Best*. The New York Times's recently retired columnist Dave Anderson contributes a splendid essay on Nicklaus, while the inimitable Golf Digest writer Dan Jenkins reminds us that not only did Nicklaus win 18 professional majors, but he also finished second 19 times. Match that, Tiger, Jenkins writes.

The game has many dimensions and much worth pondering. In *Don't Ask What I Shot*, Catherine Lewis, an associate professor of history at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Ga., studies U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's influence on the game during his two terms in office. Eisenhower served between 1953 and 1961, a period that coincided with Arnold Palmer's rise to prominence. Palmer won the 1958 and 1960 Masters, while Eisenhower made 29 trips to the Augusta National Golf Club during his presidential tenure. The game couldn't help but grow during his time in office.

In the end, after all these fine books, one is truly haunting. It's *A Gentleman's Game: The Life and Legacy of Lewis Chitengwa*. Chitengwa, a Zimbabwean professional, was 26 when he died suddenly of a bacterial infection on June 30, 2001, during a Canadian Tour stop in Edmonton. Alan Rae, his Vancouver-based friend and benefactor, put this labour of love together. It's a book of reminiscences, to which many people, myself included, contributed stories. Chitengwa was a wonderful young man who could, and did, inspire people.

Golf is all about stories. It's a privilege to write about the game, and, year after year, to enjoy the feast of books that writers around the globe produce.