

# Faster (and better)

100-plus holes in a day reveals the joy of picking up the pace

BY DAVID OWEN

**P**layed 136 holes at Doral—what a resort—tees, fairways, greens, you name it—other stuff, too—meant to take notes—didn't have time—saw some ducks—ran out of tees—finished at sunset—7½ rounds in 11 hours—probably my limit.

Sorry. I'm still catching my breath. Before my trip to Miami, my one-day golf-endurance record had been 55 holes; at the Doral Golf Resort & Spa, I passed that mark before 11 in the morning. I was participating in 100 Holes in One Day for Junior Golf, a charitable golf marathon that raises money for kids. Hey, I love kids! For me, though, the main attraction was having a legitimate-sounding excuse to go on an all-day golf bender.

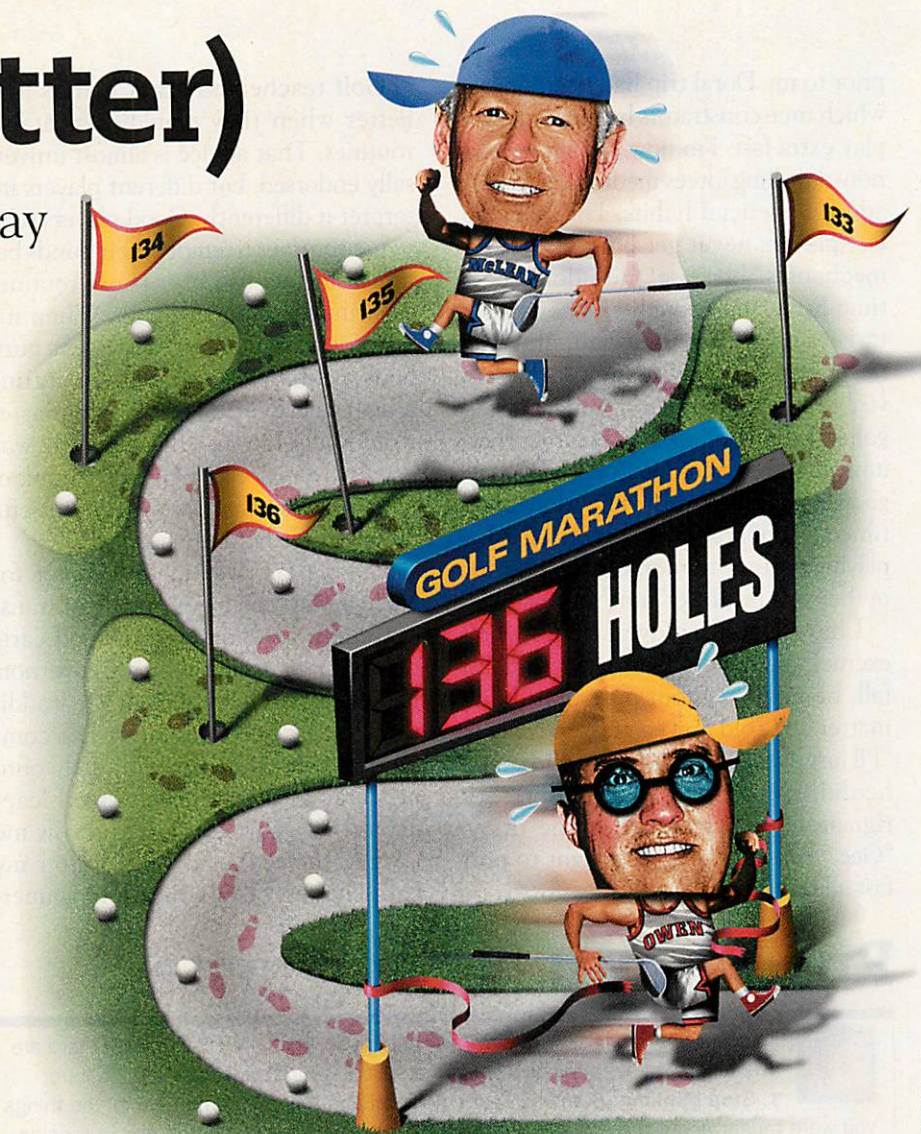
My partner for most of the day was Jim McLean, who is the director of instruction at Doral. McLean also runs his own golf schools, appears frequently on The Golf Channel, and is the author of an instruction book called *The Eight-Step Swing*. Time was short, so we used a technique of mine called the Two-Step Swing, in which the first step is "grab a club." We never took a practice swing, plumb-bobbed a putt or made a non-germane remark (such as "Got wife?"). McLean was able to finish only 100 holes, because he had to go watch two of his kids compete in a golf tournament, but he's no slouch when it

comes to fast play. In last year's event he played 203 holes, and he quit only because of a thunderstorm.

McLean and I teed off just after sunrise on the Blue Monster—the most famous of the resort's five courses, and the home of the Genuity Championship. The greens hadn't been mowed yet, and the dew was so heavy that a small-craft warning was in effect. That's about all I remember. Then we played the Great White course, Doral's newest. Then we played the Red, where we were

slowed somewhat by the rough, which was too thick for high-speed ball-finding. Then—it was getting on toward lunchtime now—we moved to the Silver Course, which had been closed to nonmarathoners. We stayed there the rest of the day. I finished my 100th hole, which I birdied, at 2:22 in the afternoon.

"After 70 or so holes," McLean had said as we began, "you'll be surprised at how well you're swinging." He was right about the swinging, although I wasn't surprised. Two of my year's best rounds



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prior to my Doral trip had been ones in which time constraints had forced me to play extra fast. I'm now convinced that non-dawdling forces mediocre golfers to adopt beneficial habits. For instance, fast players never get bogged down in mechanics, because they don't have time for swing thoughts. They pick a target and whack their ball, and they never fret about how many knuckles are visible on their left hand. And when fast golfers have bad holes, they forget them immediately, just as Dr. Bob Rotella says good competitors must. They don't have time to rehearse their pivot, or ask a playing partner to monitor the position of their left buttock. Time's a-wastin'!

I have a golf buddy at home who's excruciatingly slow. During a round last fall, he had a 20-foot putt that didn't matter, so I told him to pick up his ball. "I'll just putt out quickly," he said—and he did. He skipped his usual preshot rigmarole, and he drained the thing. "Gee," he said, "maybe I ought to putt fast all the time."

Golf teachers say that golfers play better when they employ repeatable routines. That advice is almost universally endorsed, but different players interpret it differently. Good players tend to use routines to empty their minds before swinging; bad players use routines as swing-tip cram sessions. When my slow friend stands paralyzed over a putt, he is mentally reviewing every putting lesson he's ever taken. Playing faster would help him use his brain the way good players do: as a big, soft chunk of inert material that is sometimes useful in helping to hold the head still.

Playing fast was made simpler for McLean and me by our mode of transportation: gasoline-powered golf carts on which the speed-reducing governors had been disabled. I shaved a few additional seconds off my inter-shot commuting time by stomping directly onto my cart's accelerator each time I leapt aboard, causing the cart to throw me against the seat as it surged after my ball. The best Doral course for hammer-

down ball-chasing turned out to be the Great White, where the fairways are flanked by vast waste areas filled with crushed and compacted coquina shells—an ideal surface for Le Mans-style oversteering. The White course also has steeply banked coquina-shell turns along the edges of its water hazards, as well as a forest's worth of palm trees spaced like slalom gates.

When McLean departed in the afternoon, I was joined by Brad Hansen, who is the founder and director of the 100 Holes program. Hansen, 51, came up with the golf-marathon idea in the late '80s, when he was trying to think of an interesting way to raise money for the school his children attended. The response was so encouraging, he eventually quit his regular job as the head of a small marketing firm. He now devotes himself to golf-athons full time.

"We had our first pilot tournament on June 1, 1989," he told me as we rocketed over the crest of a mound. "We had a shotgun start, and we had two dozen players, one of whom was a professional. That event raised \$43,000 for a ranch for throwaway kids. The pro played 123 holes, and when he walked off the golf course he came up to me and said, 'I was only seven over par for the day, and that was the most fun I've ever had.' That's when I knew I was on to something."

My best round at Doral was a 76—a good score for me—and I played one nine in two under par. I butchered plenty of holes, too, of course. But I don't think I had a complete 18 all day in which I played as poorly as I'm capable of playing if I really put my mind to it.

After four or five rounds, I didn't even feel that we were hurrying. An hour and three-quarters began to seem a perfectly reasonable period of time in which to play a round of golf. The game has a natural rhythm, and you can feel it if you pick up your pace. (Just don't ask me to describe any of the holes.)

## Rush hour: Playing faster

**I**'m not telling you to always play fast, but to use your time economically. Here are five things you need to know before you put on your track shoes and tee it up:

**1. Stop thinking.** Standing over a golf ball and trying to remember all the things you were taught about the golf swing not only takes time but also contributes to tension. It's much easier to stand over the ball and just swing. Be decisive. Whatever happens, happens.

**2. Play safer shots.** On a tight par 4, you might hit a 5-wood off the tee just to keep the ball in play. Sure, you can probably rocket a driver 75 yards past your maximum 5-wood distance, but your tee shot also might wind up in the woods. Searching for a lost ball takes time.

**3. Go with what you know.** If you normally hook the ball into the fairway, then hook the ball into the fairway. Don't waste time trying to change your swing in the middle of a round. Save the experimentation for the practice tee.

**4. Forget about your score.** Even more important, forget about your last shot. Don't berate or punish yourself for bad shots. Move on. If you're playing fast enough, you won't have time to worry about the last one. Go hit the next one.

**5. You're on the clock.** A great way to learn how to play fast is to set a time goal and then compare your score with another round that took much longer to play.

On a day when the course isn't so crowded, try playing 18 holes in 2 hours, 30 minutes or nine holes in 1:15. Guess what? They do it in Scotland every day.

**Golf Digest Teaching Professional Jim McLean**

**Jim McLean**  
offers tips  
for fast play.

