

INTERVIEW BY BILL SCHEFT

HANDICAP YOUR ENTHUSIASM

GOOD PLAYERS, GOLF SHORTS AND RYDER CUP POMP MAKE **LARRY DAVID** SICK

Southern California golf is ubiquitous in the television series "Curb Your Enthusiasm." The weather is perfect, but a storm is always brewing when the lead character bumps against the game's social norms. Whether he's facing country-club expulsion for not cleaning his locker or exile for precipitating a slow player's death, the star's passion for golf never wavers. We invited Larry David and his good friend Bill Scheft (staff writer for David Letterman and the nephew of legendary golf writer Herbert Warren Wind) for a round at Winged Foot. All afternoon, Larry's lanky strut and creative cursing could be recognised from two fairways over. Here, the co-creator of "Seinfeld" answers questions from Scheft.

In July, you completed a successful run on Broadway with your play "Fish in the Dark," despite the gruelling schedule, you found time to regularly hit balls at Chelsea Piers and play a dozen rounds

For years, I never understood how I could hit the ball so well on the range, and then at the course it all goes away. Then I started working on the play and realised it's the perfect analogy for the disparity. I was so great in rehearsal. That was easy. But then you add an audience. All of a sudden, there are obstacles.

You played some renowned courses in the area, including Baltusrol."

I played terribly. Baltusrol was like going to bed with a beautiful woman and not getting it up.

I once saw you shoot 38 on the back nine at Riviera. The last four holes, you had a gallery of maintenance men and gardeners.

My best back nine ever. I've shot 80 three times, never broken it. All at Riviera. At Farm Neck [David's home course on Martha's Vineyard], I once parred every hole on the front nine for a 35. I'm thinking, I got this. All I need is a 44. I shot 50. I'm the guy who used to beg the coach not to put him in at the end of the game: "Please. You don't want me."

Any thoughts on Jordan Spieth?

He's going to be a bald man. He's going to be wildly bald. This makes him way more appealing to me. It's one thing to handle the pressure of the back nine at Augusta; let's see how he does when he sees all that hair in the tub. That's pressure. I'll be watching him very carefully. He's 22. He's got three years, maybe four. He's done.

How would you describe your game?

I'm a 15-handicap. I can reach a lot of par 4s in two. The reason I'm a 15 is that at the end of the day there are three 7s on my card. But I'm a 15 you

don't want to play against. There was a movement in my Saturday game to switch to medal play because I was winning too often.

I remember you as being a great lag putter.

That's all gone. I now have four styles of putting. I use the long putter. That will work for a round or two, then I move to sidesaddle. That will work for a while, then I switch to a regular-length putter. Then my last resort is looking at the hole instead of the ball. You have to keep rotating the system and be ready to switch the second things stop working.

You've played with President Obama. Was that intimidating?

No. He's a great guy to play with, great disposition on the course. You can tell how somebody handles adversity by how they are on a golf course. What you learn about me is that I'm not a guy who can handle adversity. And I'm not that funny.

You expect us to buy that?

Look, I play in these charity events. A lot of the time I'm paired with people who paid a lot of money to play with me. They expect to be entertained for 4½ hours. You cannot believe how disappointed these people are by the end of the second hole.

How long have you been at Riviera?

I joined in 1994. I'm there a month before the O.J. murders. I saw him in the dining room the day of the murder.

When I think of O.J. Simpson playing golf after his acquittal, I think of scenes like this: "O.J., I got you for a 5 on that last hole... ok, 4!"

My biggest concern after the acquittal was running into him in a restaurant with Laurie [David's ex-wife].

One time I asked her what she would do if she saw him eating. She said, "I would stand up, point to him and scream, 'Murderer!'"

And I said, "Well, we're not going out to dinner for quite some time."

You have so little tolerance for pomp and elitism. How do you put up with all of this at a private club?

Look, you're going to hate yourself anyway; what's another log on the fire? I understand there's a class system in place. And as piqued as I get, sacrifices have to be made. Will I forgo out of seven! Take after take!

"Curb" is a show where you make the point that when it comes to social conventions, you've had quite enough. And yet, you're drawn to golf, a game built on social conventions. Are there any that particularly gall you?

Where do I begin? Taking the hat off at the 18th hole? Let's talk about that. I'm not doing that. I'm sorry. Another thing: I play with guys who have the four fingers of the glove sticking out of the back pocket. Always four fingers! Has to be four! Look, etiquette has to be observed. You can't talk when someone is swinging. But I won't participate in the other stuff.

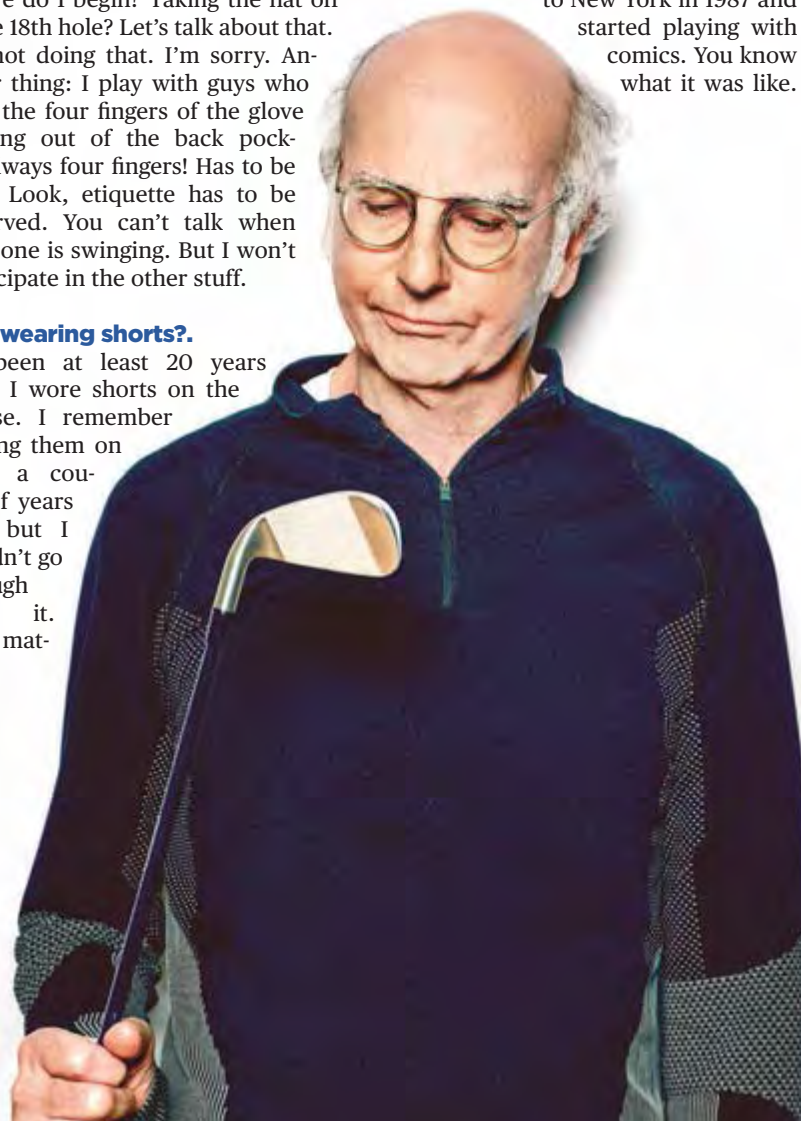
Like wearing shorts?

It's been at least 20 years since I wore shorts on the course. I remember putting them on once a couple of years ago, but I couldn't go through with it. As a mat-

ter of fact, I once disproved this tabloid story about me abusing someone in a Martha's Vineyard parking lot, because I was described as wearing shorts. I told the guy, "I defy you to find someone who's seen me in shorts."

Growing up in Brooklyn, I'll guess you came to the game late?

When I was 14, I went to Camp White Roe in Livingston Manor, N.Y. It was a converted hotel next to a nine-hole golf course. Bess Myerson was the camp director. So, I try the golf thing. I was terrible. I took it up again in L.A. in 1980. I loved the game, but no improvement. I moved back to New York in 1987 and started playing with comics. You know what it was like.



We'd go to the munys in Jersey. We'd get up at 5 a.m. and get in line, and then it was six hours to get around.

In 1988, a friend takes me to St. Andrew's Golf Club [in Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.]. He tells me it's \$5,000 to get in. I didn't have any money, but I thought, Maybe I can do this. So, I did the interview, I put on my most responsible act, and I got in. I had a car, and I remember the first time I went there.

I go up the Saw Mill Parkway and make the turn, and it was like Magnolia Lane. I had the whole course to myself. I was only there a year and a half. Then, I go back out to L.A. to do "Seinfeld," and I'm back playing public courses, like Rancho. Back to the six-hour round. That's when I joined Riviera.

Ever played with any guys from the PGA Tour?

In charity tournaments, I've played with Phil Mickelson, Keegan Bradley, Rickie Fowler, among others. Mickelson would describe what club he was going to use, and why. And he was all about what the grass will do. Keegan Bradley hit a tee shot, and I said, "Nice shot." He looked at me, and I said, "I guess that's like saying to Willie Mays, 'Nice catch.'"

What have you done to improve your game?

Golf is the only sport where you can practice every day for six months and not get any better.

The swing is unnatural. You can spot a good golfer a mile away. There's a supreme air of confidence that's sickening. They have a swagger that just reeks of good golf. They're immaculate. There's not a crease. There's not a stain.

You can take a microscope over the outfit, and you will not find a dot. Often there's a part in the hair.

What kind of Ryder Cup captain would you be?

My thoughts on the Ryder Cup are public knowledge. If it's against one country, fine. If it's against China or Russia, fine.

But you're telling me our arch enemy is Europe?

They're our NATO allies!

And why all this importance placed on the captain? What's he doing?

He's picking the teams like we did in the schoolyard. And they revel in that captain title. It's all very maritime.

"Captain Watson, a word...I feel I should tell you...the men and I are not pleased with your performance. I

know you've spent a lot of time with the pairings, but we want to play with our chums.

I'm very keen on Bradley, and yet you have me paired with Fowler, whose hat I find disconcerting. I cannot abide that hat."

"Are you countermanding my orders?"

"Captain, if I may..."

"No, you may not! I've made my decision. There'll be no going back."

"Fine. I'll play with Fowler and that flat-billed spectacle he fancies. If you want to suffer the ignominy of losing to our former 18th-century oppressors, let it be on your head."

If you were the most powerful man in golf, what would you do?

Two things. I would retroactively award Roberto De Vicenzo the 1968 Masters. They should have never let that happen.

Everyone saw the leaderboard. It's a clerical error. Bob Goalby should have said, "No, you take it." Not a day goes by when I don't feel sorry for poor Mr. De Vicenzo.

Second, I would outlaw the white leather belt. How could you not have a problem with that? It's a major distraction. It's disco. ☹



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