

## The Talking Golf Ball: An On Course Review.

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### **Talking Golf Ball!**

It comes in a wooden box of one.

The drive I hit with the new ball was ok; not great, not bad. I was wondering how the new tech in the ball would effect distance, and then I heard, faintly, down the fairway, “Bitch.”

I feel funny enough about about playing golf right now, but can play alone so grabbed the chance, lowered the volume of my earbuds and walked to my drive, 250-ish in the first cut on the right, I scrolled through the Talking Golf Ball app on my phone to see if I’d heard correctly.

TGB was on auto mode: it had already skimmed my online presence and chose a personality: Broseph, with Attitude set to Guff, (more than halfway between Chill and Douche), then delivered geo-located pop-up ads based on my height and weight, scanned off my social media. TGB decided I should hit it farther and texted me a coupon (“Here, wuss” was the heads up) to join a strength and flexibility program at a gym 2.7 mi from where I was standing AND one 5.7 mi from my home address. Thanks.

I looked under Playing Partners, a list of pre-set character bundles and dialed up Significant Other, (*Holds you more accountable than you'd like!*):

The seismometer picked up my footsteps and a voice similar to my wife's complimented the drive with "Nice, honey" and directed me to "Hit that green, handsome!"

Distracted, I tugged an 8 iron long and left, plugging in the green side bunker.

"You'd rather do this than go to brunch with my mother?"

Kidding, babe. How about a sandie?"

It sounded suggestive, I imagined what that might be and if it was intentional. Maybe I've seen too much WestWorld. The first strike dug the ball out of the hole but not out of the trap, "Tsk, tsk, if you're going to spend this much time away from the people you claim to love, at least play better."

Where did my honey go? I read the only print on the box aside from the product name .

If you have "lost" Talking Golf Ball you are mistaken.

Activated, its location can always be ascertained, so you have chosen not to retrieve it.

It's someplace you won't go unless you have no choice, like a baby shower, or the proctologists office.

Women's version: a fantasy sports draft, or your brother-in-laws anything.

I can't really imagine a talking golf ball without a sense of humor. I left that Playing Partner in the bunker, and used

the option of Accent/Attitude, choosing Irish from a global list and “Competitive” from the menu as I walked onto the green. My 12 footer ran by the cup and elicited “What a shame” in a singsong lilt. I started to pick up the two-footer until I heard “Isle be seein’ dat, boyo”!

Other combos on the next few holes:

A soft-spoken Korean woman set to “Humorous” swore a blue streak after every shot, good ones, bad ones, with a quiet exuberance that was funny, then disturbing, then cool, then sad.

Surprisingly, an elderly German man telling me everything I did on the course was great, made me happy.

I dialed the Attitude from “Encouraging” to “Existential” and found myself nodding along with the unlocked Werner Herzog option: to be alive *is* to control your hopes and fears, no one will decide my fate but myself, I lay my soul bare in this manufactured nature. And it *was* a nice up and down, Danke, Werner.

Speaking of father figures, two of the “Dad” options in Playing Partners are:

-Dear Old: a collection of ‘atta boys! on shuffle. Miss a shot and the pep talk ends with “Champ” and you feel it. The app advance orders a hot dog and an age appropriate beverage waiting for you on the turn.

-The Stoic: Good shots get an “alright then”, the bad get “hmm”.

Bask in the approving silence of a single nod or bear down after the Quiet Sigh of Disapproval(tm), you can almost hear him shaking his head.

After each missed shot there was a commercial plug, in the character of your current Playing Partner;

-Discount on lessons at the pro shop...Hey your birthday's coming up, pal! (Thanks, Good Old Dad)

-Eyoo cud eyoos a drink aht thuh 19th hoowl - (insert bar name) has a Duffers spayshul.

(A pint sounds good, Competitive Hard to Understand Irish Guy)

-Tennis league openings 2.1 mi away. (I don't think this is working out, Honey.)

When I hit a green in regulation, piped a drive, or sank a putt of any distance or for par, TGB acknowledged with a variety of applause from golf broadcasts. Even a tap-in bogey earned a smattering from a late Friday grinder in Tampa on the Korn Ferry, but when you sink your one fifteen footer for the day the Sunday afternoon crowds on 18 at Augusta light you up. My pulse, ramped up by a licensed soundtrack (?!) was picked up by my smart watch, sent to the app, which:

-Led me through a walking micro-meditation to settle myself: in through the nose out through the mouth.

-Offered to deliveryservice me a kale/cucumber/echinacea/dragon fruit/CBD smoothie from a juice bar 3.8 mi away. (They disclosed their partnership with JuiceRides and will not use them.)

-Played a song chosen to calm me by an algorithm using all the songs on my playlists cross-referenced with contemporary music trends (by my age and cultural signifiers) idea of relaxation via popular media combined

with recent scholarly research. Came up with Claire de Lune by deBussy and Rubber by Yuck. Both right.

AI combined with gyro-technology and geo-location make for a highly sensitive piece of tech; when TGB knew it was sitting on the edge of a water hazard, just touching the mud, it detected my footsteps, and asked,

“What’s the only thing worse than losing a good ball in the water because you don’t have a ball retriever?

I don’t..

HAVING A BALL RETRIEVER!!!”

I chuckled and told TGB, Not a bad joke for a golf ball.

Whenever I spoke to it, like earlier when I set it to College Buddy and it called me over in the woods saying,

“Hey eat these mushrooms, bro!! Chest bump that tree!”

and I said no thanks, and isn’t that a lot of liability?

it responded loudly with “Hey, I’m not a listening golf ball, that would be weird!”

I held up TGB thinking of the tech inside and chuckled as I thanked it for the round; its voice and tone dropped, “My pleasure, you know every golf ball listens, right Tom?”

It was the only time it used my name, I was a little stunned, was there a hidden empathy pre-set?

“It just doesn’t give a shit!, HAHHAHAHAHAHA”

On the way to my car I tossed Talking Golf Ball into a pond, “Glubglubglub” in my earbuds.

They were right, I didn’t lose the ball.