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Let There Be Pebble: A Middle-Handicapper's Year in America's Garden of Golf

Zackary Michael Jack
The University of Nebraska Press (June 2011)
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Unlike some religions, golf has three Meccas. The first is Scotland's St. Andrews, often the host of the British Open; the second is Augusta National, in Georgia, home of the Masters; and the third, running along the beautiful California coast, is the site of many a memorable US Open—Pebble Beach. Augusta National is so exclusive, most readers couldn't play a round there if their lives depended on it. (Bob Hope once remarked that Augusta National had just finished a successful membership drive—it drove away thirty members.) Curiously, however, the other two are public courses open, in the case of St. Andrews, to those with patience and a low handicap or, in the case of Pebble, to those with deep pockets ($500 a pop). Or, as in the case of author Zachary Jack, a press pass with a sports magazine—GolfTribune.com, to be precise, circulation uncertain.

One of the pleasures of Jack's book is to see just how far a press pass will still get you. In an era when everybody and nobody is a journalist, the folks in and around Pebble Beach give the author the benefit of the doubt, and this modern-day Walter Mitty takes full advantage. Although this is a book about a golf course, it's not really a book about golf. The single chapter where Jack describes his lone round at Pebble is the least interesting. The author spices up the round with (literal) cliff-hanging shots, dismal lies in distant bunkers, and a partner's hottie girlfriend, but there's only so much you can say about a pitching wedge.

Jack is at his most insightful, and often very funny, when he plays around the edges of the great course, talking with the caddies, greens keepers, Carmel coffee shop baristas, and club employees who make Pebble Beach the legend it is. There's caddy Casey Boyns, who can beat the pants off most of the people he carries for; local *wunderkind* Bobbie Clampett, who grew up with Pebble Beach in his backyard and puts the beauty of the course in personal and loving terms; and the generous and welcoming local residents of Carmel-by-the-Sea, who belie the town's snooty reputation. And of course there is Bill Murray, the affable, wacky Pebble Beach golf nut who appears at a pro-am "all witness protection in frayed, faded denim, deck shoes that look like they'd been stewed in bilge and gender-bender shades." Murray shows up a few times in Jack's book, each time just as approachable and daffy as you want him to be. He really is Carl Spackler, the sling-blade wielding, gopher-hating grounds keeper in "Caddy Shack."

Like the author himself, the reader of *Let There Be Pebble* won't play golf one bit better at the end of the book. But there are enough laughs, and even a few poignant moments in between, to satisfy any golfer. One minor criticism—does every book about golf have to be eighteen chapters long?
JACK SHAKELY (May / June 2011)

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