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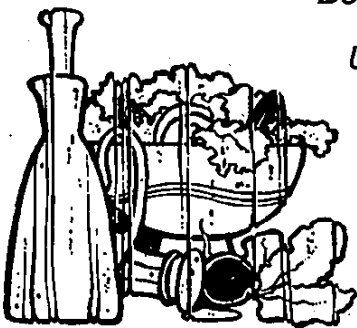
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By Doug Funke

It wasn't meant to be - par beats sports pros

All kinds of thoughts ricochet around the mind as the sportswriter who loves golf better than he can ever hope to play steps up to the 10th tee at Oakland Hills.

• Those who can, do; those who can't, write about it.

• Neither man's greatest fears nor fondest hopes are ever realized.

• Head down, turn at the waist, smooth swing and follow through.

Everything was fine until he strikes the ball. Then it starts pouring rain.

Four Observer & Eccentric sportswriters — Dennis O'Connor, Marybeth Dillon, Marty Budner and this commentator — had the opportunity to play the fabled Oakland Hills a month prior to the U.S. Senior Open there.

How did it go?

Sam Snead, Roberto DeVicenzo and friends have nothing to worry about now or in the next 25 years when all of us will be old enough (50) to compete in the Senior Open.

To say that the course is tough would be akin to making such bold proclamations as tomorrow follows today, dogs bark or diamonds glitter.

After four hours of hacking our way through deep rough, into bunkers and over slick, undulating greens, we surrendered. The course was too challenging. Par won. It was not a fair fight from the very beginning.

what it would be like to play one of the most difficult and highly respected golf courses in the United States.

We lived that dream — at least 14 holes of it. After 4½ hours of hacking our way through deep rough, into bunkers and over slick, undulating greens, we surrendered.

It was a bittersweet experience, at least from this point of view.

The beauty of the course, grounds and clubhouse and the knowledge that, yes, it's actually me hitting a golf ball here made for a tremendous high.

MOST PEOPLE CAN only dream about

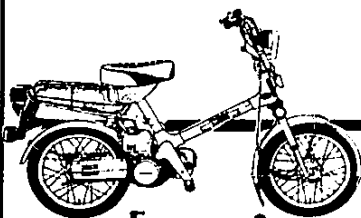
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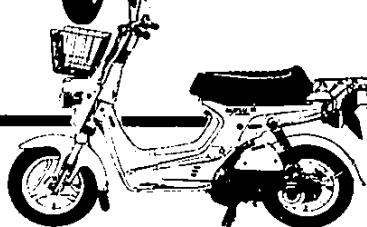
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