Jews and Golf

Golf, with a history of exclusivity and tradition, was not a welcoming sport for Jews. Golf clubs, particularly the most prestigious and well-established ones, generally maintained unwritten but strictly enforced policies of exclusion based on religion, ethnicity and race. Jews were denied membership and entry into tournaments. The "No Jews Allowed" policies of top clubs such as Augusta National and Pine Valley led to Groucho Marx's famous quip: "I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member." In response to the restrictions, Jewish communities established their own country clubs, which also served as social hubs for Jewish families. Locally, the Lafayette Country Club was such a place.

Jews playing golf was also the subject of a famous Jewish joke: *The rabbi was so addicted to golf that he snuck out to play between the morning and afternoon services on Yom Kippur. Up in heaven, Moses said, "What a disgrace! A Jew playing golf on Yom Kippur. And a rabbi to boot!" The Almighty responded, "I'm going to teach him a lesson." Out on the course, the rabbi stepped up to the first tee and bombed his drive down the fairway. His ball bounced off a sprinkler head, cart path and bunker rake, hit the green and rolled into the cup. "This is how You teach him a lesson, Lord? He got a hole in one!" exclaimed Moses. God replied: "Sure, but who's he going to tell?"*

In that spirit of levity, here is Michael Gordon's glossary of **Yiddish for Golfers.**

Yiddish for Golfers

By Michael Gordon

Yiddish, with its manifold and nuanced expressions of irony, sarcasm, and misery, should be declared the official language of golf. While other languages certainly have robust vocabularies, few can match Yiddish for conveying the agony, frustration, and futility that so many of us experience on the course. They also don't have words that are quite as biting when you're fully engaged in friendly banter/character assassination.

Here's a brief listing of Yiddishisms that can come in handy from tee to green:

KEY **Term**
Meaning
Golf Context

Alta kaka
Literally "old defecator"
Everyone in senior league

Bashert
Fate
Used to blame the golf gods instead of your own incompetence

Bisl
A little bit
"Missed holing that putt by just a bisl"

Bupkes
Absolutely nothing (originally goat turds)
"I put all that money in the betting pool, and you know what I won?
Bubkes!"

Hokn a chaynik
To nag incessantly
"He just won't stop hockn a chaynik about playing a reciprocal"

Chochem
A brilliant person (or a total fool who thinks he's brilliant).
That guy who offers up endless swing advice, most of which is ridiculous

Chutzpah
Audacity/balls
"Can you believe the chutzpah of that idiot jumping ahead of us?"

Cockamamie
Far-fetched/absurd
"He's got this cockamamie scheme for scoring I just don't get"

Dreykop
Confused guy
Looks for his ball in the left rough when it's in the right pond

Farblunjet
Wandering because you're lost
"I wish the course was better marked because we're farblunjet right now"

Farklempt
Choked up emotionally
"I was farklempt when ol' Ernie finally won"

Farshtunkene/Feh
Rotten/Stinks
Used for truly bad shots, as in, "What a farshtunkene putt that was"

Fres
To wolf down food
When you grab a burger at the turn, even though you should be on the tee

Ganif
A crooked person/thief
The cheater who welches on golf bets

Gantseh megillah
Make a big deal or a major issue out of nothing
When your partner goes into endless detail about all the many imagined factors that caused his bad shot

Gornisht helfen
Hopeless, nothing could help
If I asked the pro to fix my swing, I'm sure he'd think, "gornisht helfen"

Geshray
A scream
Often accompanies a shank

Halevai
G-d willing/May it be so
A good response to your partner suggesting you hit a high fade over water onto the green 160 yards away

Kanipshin
A fit or a tantrum
"He had one bad shot, threw his club, and had a kanipshin"

Kvell
To glow with pride
What you say when someone you're instructing hits a great shot: "I'm kvelling"

Kvetch
Complain
When a good golfer whines about his shot, even though you couldn't hit one as good in your dreams

Loch im Kopf
Hole in the head
What you say when it starts raining: "I need that like a loch im kopf."

Maven
An expert
"He's the club's chipping maven"

Mazel Tov
Congratulations
What you shout when someone scores an eagle

Mechayeh
Delight, pleasure
"That breeze on this hot day is a mechayeh"

Mensch
Decent, honorable person
Someone who doesn't kick the ball out from under a tree even though no one is looking

Mishuga
Crazy
(Mishuganah is a crazy person)
"It's meshuga how long he stands over the ball before he swings"

Mumzer
Bastard
"That little mumzer chipped in to beat me"

Narishkayt
Silliness
When someone tells you that a certain club or technology makes a huge difference

Nicht gefährlich
Not dangerous/terrible
Weak shot, but could have been a lot worse

Oy Gevalt/ Oy Veh/ Oy Veh is mir
Expressions of suffering, as in "Oh, no!"
Used in desperate situations, like when your ball lands behind a tree and between two roots.

Patshki
Experiment, play around with
When we obsessively try tips from YouTube videos (usually to find out they cause more harm than good)

Plotz
Collapse/faint
"If I play any worse, I'm gonna plotz"

Putz
Jerk
"Nobody will play with that guy because he's such a putz"

Rakhmonis
Mercy
When you give someone a 3-foot putt for a triple bogey

Schlep
To carry or drag
"I can't believe I have to schlep this golf bag up that hill"

Schmatta
Rag, old clothing
"Did you see that schmatta Abe is wearing? You'd think he could put on a nice golf shirt for once"

Schneid (Off the)
End a losing streak
When you finally win a skin (or get a point in a game like Wolf)

Schnorrer
Beggar/sponger
"I've hosted him at our club five times. Do you think that schnorrer hasever hosted me?"

Schvitz
Sweat
"I'm taking a cart so I don't schvitz in this heat"

Shanda
Shame, disgrace
You hit the longest drive of your life and then duff the next shot

Sheyne
Beautiful
What you say when someone hits a good- looking shot

Shikker
A drunk
"If he wasn't such a shikker, he wouldn't have driven the cart into the pond"

Shlemiel
Clumsy person
"That schlemiel just ran over his partner's foot!"

Shlimazel
Unlucky person
The partner whose foot got run over

Shmooze
Gossip, chat
The superficial chatter men have while playing golf (and at most other times)

Shmutsik
Dirty
Why g-d made "lift, clean, and place" rules – schmutz on the ball

Shpilkes
Impatience
When you tee up your ball on a par 3 even though the group in front hasn't even made it to the green

Shtarker
Strong man
"You hit that like a shtarker" (similar to "You hit that like a goy")

Tsuris
Trouble, aggravation
"Why do I subject myself to all this golf tsuris?"

Vershimmelt
Shook up, rattled
"Suddenly I started slicing the ball and became vershimmelt"

Zei gezund
Be healthy, be well
What you tell your buddies as you're about to head home