

The Plaque on Hole No. 9

While I am not a golfer, I sometimes watch the drama of a Professional Golfers Association tour event – especially the final day – on television. It's easy to see that any golfer can have a really bad hole – even a Hall of Famer like Arnold Palmer.

For him, one of those times came at the 1961 Los Angeles Open at the peak of Palmer's career. On the par-5 ninth hole, his last of the day, Palmer hit a good drive and wanted to try to put the ball on the green with his second shot. He would be in position to attempt a birdie, getting one stroke closer to the leaders.



With his 3-wood, Palmer hit what he believed was a good shot. But as the ball sailed, it faded to the right, hit a pole, and bounced out of bounds onto the driving range. Palmer dropped the ball, took a penalty stroke, and tried again. This time, his ball hooked to the left and flew off the course into a road. Again, he dropped a ball and took a penalty stroke. He repeated this process, hitting the ball out of bounds several times.

Finally, he put the ball on the green. By then, he had accumulated 10 strokes. It took him two more strokes with his putter to hole the ball. He finished with a 12. And because of that, he went from a few strokes behind the leaders to scoring so poorly that he was out of the tournament.

Today, more than 50 years later, if you go to the ninth hole at the Rancho Park Golf Course in Los Angeles, you will find a bronze plaque that states: "On Friday, Jan. 6, 1961, the first day of the 35th Los Angeles Open, Arnold Palmer, voted Golfer of the Year, took a 12 on this hole. As an inspiration to all golfers, the L.A. Jr. Chamber of Commerce dedicated this monument."

Commenting on that event and its commemoration, author and internationally recognized leader expert John C. Maxwell, said that good golfers "don't dwell on bad performances – not if they want to remain good golfers. And that has always been true of Arnold Palmer. Once when asked about his performance at the Open on hole nine, he said, 'That doggone plaque will be there long after I'm gone. But you have to put things like that behind you. That's one of the wonderful things about golf. Your next shot can be as good or bad as your last one, but you'll always get another chance.'



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“The same quality that makes a professional golfer effective enables any person to overcome failure and become a strong achiever – the ability to put past events behind him and move on,” Maxwell said. “That quality positions a person to tackle current challenges with enthusiasm and a minimum of burdensome personal baggage. In contrast, someone who is unable to get over previous hurts and failures is held hostage by the past. The baggage he carries around makes it very difficult for him to move forward.”

Maxwell is right, and his thesis is biblically based. The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3:13: “One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

That was Paul’s secret of success. It can be ours as well. Forget about past mistakes – whether a broken relationship, a financial disaster or a moral failure – and think about how we can do better in the future.

– Beecher Hunter

