

Arts & Letters

FILM

[*Bobby Jones—Stroke of Genius*]

Fairway to Heaven

By Steve Sailer

ONLY THREE GOLFERS have made a substantial impression on non-golfers: Tiger Woods today, Arnold Palmer in the 1960s, and Bobby Jones in the 1920s, when he was one of the five horsemen of the first golden age of sports, along with Babe Ruth, Red Grange, Bill Tilden, and Jack Dempsey. The Georgia amateur is now memorialized in the solid little biopic "*Bobby Jones—Stroke of Genius*," starring Jim Caviezel of "*The Passion*."

Even mighty Jack Nicklaus meant little to those not bitten by the golf bug. Football, while complicated, so resembles two armies contesting a battlefield that newcomers can quickly grasp its appeal. But golf is a more curious affair that people either get or they don't. While most ball and stick games are played on standardized fields, golf courses are constructed at colossal expense to resemble, according to the latest sociobiological theory, our Stone Age mammoth-hunter ancestors' idea of a happy hunting ground.

The game is frustrating to put on screen. Each hole's action usually diminishes into anticlimax. A pro typically wallops a 290-yard drive, followed by a

150-yard approach, a 25-foot putt, and a six-inch tap-in. Fortunately, nongolfing spouses should be able to tolerate being dragged to the movie because Jones's human story was so strong.

Most of today's big-money sports emerged out of the Victorian era, but only golf retains many of its Victorian virtues. Even tennis, golf's country-club colleague, long ago surrendered to its stars' on-court tantrums. Jones, who once lost a U.S. Open title by penalizing himself for accidentally moving his ball such a negligible distance that no one else saw it, is the man most responsible for golf's continuing traditionalism. Jones was the idol of Nicklaus, who is in turn the idol of Woods, so Jones's style is likely to live on.

Caviezel, who was so memorable as Jesus, here plays a man who was also greatly admired. During his 95-year lifespan, the late Alistair Cooke met countless prominent people. Yet Cooke called Jones "one of the three or four finest human beings I've ever known ... A whole team of investigative reporters, working in shifts like coal miners, would find that in all of Jones's life ... he nothing common did or mean ... Bob Jones radiated goodness, yet without a smidgen of piety."

Jones, a Georgia amateur, exemplified the best in the Southern gentleman, the sporting equivalent of Generals Washington, Lee, and Marshall. This paladin was not just the greatest player of the mashie-niblick era, but also a lawyer who often argued before the Supreme Court, a gifted prose stylist, a lieutenant colonel in WWII, and founder of both the world's most prestigious golf club, Augusta National, and most exciting tournament, the Masters.

Indeed, some have argued that golf, a notoriously time-consuming sport, con-

tributed to the downfall of the WASP ascendancy. Jones, though, played an average of only once or twice per week during his competitive career, which concluded in 1930 when he was merely 28 with his never-equalled Grand Slam of winning all four major championships.

Paradoxically, golf was the one thing that didn't come easy to this paragon. At age 14 he electrified the sporting world by nearly winning the U.S. Amateur. No golfer, not even Woods, was the object of more pressure to triumph at a younger age than Jones (at least until 14-year-old Hawaiian prodigy Michelle Wie arrived last year). But for seven lean years, Jones had to grow up in public as he struggled to control the temper that made him a club-throwing terror on the links. When a flung iron accidentally struck a lady spectator, he was suspended by United States Golf Association president George Walker (great-grandfather of United States president George Walker Bush).

Even during the subsequent seven fat years when he won 13 of the 21 major championships he entered, he was tormented by his sensitive emotions, which caused him to lose 15 pounds during tournaments, and by his declining health, which eventually put him in a wheelchair three years after he returned from combat in Normandy.

In a film without villains, drama is delivered by stressing Jones's pain. For cinematic suffering, Caviezel is definitely the new go-to guy. Refreshingly, in his dialogue with Jeremy Northam, who steals scenes as Jones's opposite, rival, and friend, the raffish pro Walter Hagen, Caviezel also achieves delightful screen chemistry. ■

Rated PG for post-foozled shot expletives.

BOOKS

[*How Israel Lost*, Richard Ben Cramer, Simon & Schuster, 307 pages]

A Friend's Lament

By Scott McConnell

IN THIS SNAPPILY WRITTEN book, Richard Ben Cramer argues that Israel has been corrupted by its 37-year-long occupation of the Palestinian territory on the West Bank and Gaza. The occupation has diverted the country from its historic mission—providing “a place where Jews could live the best life ... in accordance with their values”—to something less ambitious and admirable. Its energies and spirit sapped by measures to control an embittered foreign population, Israeli life has begun to coarsen. Some of the consequences are internal: domestic assaults, road-rage killings, school violence, are now part of the social texture. The once appealing smallness of the country, Israel as a modern village in which everyone felt mutually connected, is now gone. Gone too are such noble aspirations as the doctrine of “purity of arms” through which the army tried hard to avoid harming innocent Arab civilians; some of today’s top commanders don’t even pretend to care. Cramer writes with great empathy about the life Israel has inflicted on the Palestinians, a captive people, shut off from all foreign contacts, locked into a hopelessly uneven contest against one of the best armies in the world.

Though seldom voiced in the United States, such arguments are expressed often by Israelis unreconciled to Likud’s policies. In Cramer’s colloquial American idiom, they are sharp and refreshing. The “How Israel Lost” of the title sets down a challenge for admirers of

Begin, Shamir, Netanyahu, and Sharon (including, it is now clear, George W. Bush) who would deny that Israel has suffered meaningful loss at all. But Cramer recalls how luminous Israel’s reputation used to be in the United States and in much of the world, and that clearly has been lost. Was that reputation entirely deserved? “A land without people for a people without land”—this was the most commonly heard shorthand for the Zionist project 40 or 50 years ago. It was popularized in the movie “Exodus,” with Paul Newman as a Jewish underground fighter and “shiksa-goddess Eva Marie Saint as his home-from-the-holocaust honey” (a clause which could come with a “don’t try this yourself” warning). But the “land without people” slogan was an element of what Cramer calls “hasbarah”—Hebrew for “explaining” or spin—and one of the Jewish state’s most successful exports. This bit of *hasbarah* was a work of genius, as deeply burrowed into the American subconscious in the 1950s and ’60s as (Cramer puckishly notes) “Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should.” Back then, most of America felt part of Israel’s venture.

That sentiment is almost entirely gone. Relatively few believe the land of Palestine was “without people”—and while there is scant perception of moral equivalence between Israel and the

Inquirer’s Mideast correspondent. He arrived buying into the whole *hasbarah* package but as he looked around him it began to wear off. He began to write in his paper about the Arabs—who were, quite often, hospitable, dignified, rational, and oppressed. Above all, they were there. His pieces earned him a Pulitzer prize ... and several campaigns by committees of Jews trying to lose him his job. “Is it really Ibn Cramer?” they would ask.

The argument of this book is drawn mostly through the portraits and stories of individual Jews and Arabs. Cramer has a real gift for bringing to life the people caught up in the endless struggle—even, or indeed especially those whose politics are not his own. His portraits are usually sympathetic (Mariam Farhat, the “mother of martyrs,” a Palestinian woman who has raised several suicide bombers, is an exception); some, like that of Menachem Furman, a charismatic leader a West Bank settlement, are exquisite. The portrait of Yehuda Meshi-Zahav, an ultra-orthodox Jew who has organized the ultra-orthodox *haredim* to gather body parts of the victims of terror bombings for ritually proper burial, seemed to me journalism as an act of love.

Nonetheless, the backdrop to all these conversations is an occupation that impinges on Palestinian life at every

“A LAND WITHOUT PEOPLE FOR A PEOPLE WITHOUT LAND” WAS A WORK OF GENIUS, AS DEEPLY BURROWED INTO THE AMERICAN SUBCONSCIOUS IN THE 1950S AND ’60S AS “WINSTON TASTES GOOD, LIKE A CIGARETTE SHOULD.”

Palestinians, no Israeli (or American) leader is now likely to say, as Golda Meir once did, “There are no Palestinians.” Yes, Golda, there are, several million in the West Bank or dispersed throughout the world, many with the keys and title deeds to what were once their families’ homes.

Cramer discovered this for himself in the late ’70s, as the *Philadelphia*

level—shutting off three million largely innocent people. When Sharon completes his fence, Palestinian encirclement will be complete. The most banal journey in the West Bank is determined by Israeli military checkpoints. Cramer describes the trip of one Palestinian man who sets out to visit his elderly mother thirty miles away. He wants to avoid the checkpoints (which can take hours), so he tacks back