

He came out of the last taping on a nerved-up high, convinced that he had advanced his quest for vindication. The encounter sessions with David Frost behind him, Richard Nixon had planned to return at once to work on his million-dollar memoirs. Instead he blurted, "Hell, let's take a break," and over the next two days he plunged into a compulsive binge of golf, playing 55 swift holes at the nearby Estrella Country Club. On the familiar, accommodating greens, he scored impressively—a 79 on one round, he confided. Between holes, in the driver's seat of his rented golf cart, he talked an even better game, half jest, half fantasy: "Now I'll hit that one and go in for my birdie . . . Now I think I'll chip it in." It scarcely mattered that he missed both the birdie and the chip shot. What registered was the combative new optimism that buoys Richard Nixon on the golf course and off.

The past few months have been un-

visitors of his views on the Mideast and other trouble spots as if he were briefing his Cabinet.* One abiding regret, he told a recent caller, is that he was forced to break off the effort that earned him his highest Presidential marks. "If only I had had more time to put the roots down in China," he said. "They seem shallow, now that Mao and Chou are gone . . ."

Privileged guests, like son-in-law David Eisenhower, insist he no longer wallows in the past. But he is deeply immersed in the work on his memoirs, which his publisher hopes to

ON THE REBOUND

commonly cheering for the defrocked Chief of State. Visitors have found him tanned, fit-looking and in livelier spirits than at any time since the Watergate malaise. The phlebitis that developed in his leg just before he left office is no longer a serious problem—though he still takes medication daily. "I'm feeling quite well and keeping busy," he told NEWSWEEK's John Lindsay last week. Patricia Nixon, likewise, has fought back from the stroke that felled her last July. "The only residual problem is her left arm—there is some stiffness there," Nixon said. Nixon's financial health is much better, too. Thanks to a \$175,000 advance on his half-completed memoirs, the \$600,000 up-front fee for the Frost interviews and \$359,000 from the President Nixon Justice Fund, he has managed to defray some of the debt and back taxes hanging over him.

For all that, Nixon still seems to be playing out his aborted Presidency. He works at his office desk between two flags, surrounded by memorabilia of the Washington years. He frequently calls old friends—including Henry Kissinger, Mel Laird and John Rhodes—to talk politics or baseball. He digests the White House intelligence reports he gets every few weeks as diligently as if they awaited his own momentous decisions, and he frequently informs

bring out next April. Up before 7 every morning, he heads out of the Spanish-style gate surrounding La Casa Pacifica in San Clemente and walks the 300 yards to his walnut-paneled office in the Coast Guard's Loran station. Customarily, he dictates into a tape recorder from material prepared by his three researchers. At around noon, he lunches on a low-cholesterol "Hawaiian hamburger"—a slice of pineapple with cottage cheese—then resumes work until late afternoon, when he breaks for a swim with Pat in their heated pool.

COMMUNITY ON THE FAIRWAYS

Nixon remains semireclusive in his habits, guarded in his contact with outsiders. But with the Frost tapings out of the way, he has picked up on his golf outings. At least twice a week, right after lunch, he gets into a limousine for the fifteen-minute trip by freeway to Estrella. While he plays, usually with his chief of staff, retired Marine Col. Jack Brennan, he is under surveillance by five of the twelve Secret Service men assigned to guard him. (All still address him as "Mr. President.") Other golfers are gently persuaded to let the ex-President play

*Under Presidential transition law, Nixon and Gerald Ford get classified briefing material. It is cabled to Ford in Palm Springs, then hand-carried to San Clemente.

through if he overtakes them. Nixon tends to play "winter rules" year round, moving his ball to favorable lies and ignoring the two-stroke penalty for out-of-bounds infractions. But he is swinging well. Unable to break 100 when he left the White House, he regularly shoots in the low 80s now.

Golf has become the center of Nixon's life, in a way his only community outside the family. He bought the Estrella club a ball-washing machine for Christmas last year, contributes generously to the Christmas funds for employees and engages in "Hi, there" chitchat with neighbors whose porches overlook the greens. But mostly, he plays in silence. "Sometimes you get the feeling his mind is a thousand miles away," says an old friend who golfs with him occasionally. "But it is probably a good form of therapy for him." There have been few incidents of harassment. Another golfer once called Nixon "Tricky Dick" in a voice loud enough to be overheard by him. And the Secret Service men intercepted an ominously long-haired spectator, who still won a handshake from Nixon when he called out to him: "I never agreed with you



Photos by Art Grupe

On the tee at Estrella: Shooting in the low 80s

on anything, but I admire your guts."

Pat Nixon's stroke last July imposed a further measure of austerity on the household. The Nixons have only occasional dinner guests now, and they are off to bed by around 9:30. Though Nixon insists Pat has made "a great recovery," daughter Julie Eisenhower offers a less sanguine appraisal. Her mother, says Julie, has not yet regained full use of her left arm and leg and walks with a slight limp. Her recovery has been slowed by "very bad arthritis" and sudden fluctuations in her blood pressure. Easily fatigued, she limits her activities to heavy reading, light gardening and strolls on the beach. "She's not up to a trip or anything pressured," says Julie.

SENTIMENTAL OUTING

Others report that Pat's speech is normal again—though a little hesitant—and that her morale is high. The day before Easter, Julie drove Pat to her brother's house in Belmont Shores, and last week Pat joined the family on a rare outing to Nixon's native Whittier. There Nixon helped Julie and David buy a two-door Cutlass from Oldsmobile dealer Clint Harris, an old football teammate. Then Nixon took Julie on a nostalgic tour of the Whittier campus, and Pat viewed a flower-bordered fountain dedicated to her on the outskirts of town.

Julie and David sublet their New York apartment—where they felt "cramped"—last February and have settled in California for at least a year. Julie's book, "Special People," a set of personality profiles, is due for release next month, and she is helping David "full time" on his own first opus, a

lengthy biography of his grandfather, Dwight Eisenhower. Both David and Julie have decided for the moment to pursue "writing careers," Julie says, though she acknowledges a political career for David in Pennsylvania, where he grew up, is still a possibility. "There are still people interested in having him run," she says. Tricia Cox, the Nixons' other daughter, visits often. But according to Julie, Tricia prefers New York, where husband Edward is practicing with the blue-chip Wall Street law firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore, and she follows a light-hearted regimen of antiquing, visiting museums and calling on college chums. Tricia "paints a little," says Julie, but has no career plans.

Nixon's own plans are clouded by Pat's health and his own finances. He draws an annual Presidential pension of \$66,000, in addition to an estimated \$18,687 in retirement benefits from his years of service in the military, in Congress and as Vice President. Congress also appropriated \$152,000 for his office and staff expenses this year. But his legal fees are still growing as he tries to recover custody of his voluminous Presidential papers and tapes. And he is still burdened by medical bills. Last year, the Nixons sold their Key Biscayne houses for a total of \$710,000, some of which they presumably used to pay their \$560,000 debt on San Clemente. Nixon has also paid a back tax bill of \$386,700, though there is no evidence that he has yet paid the additional \$148,000 that he promised but does not legally owe. His financial worries would disappear if his book sells well. Royalties could reach \$2.5 million.

When his finances are settled and his memoirs completed, Nixon hopes to travel abroad. Foreign policy is still his first love and if he can regain a measure of public acceptance from the Frost broadcasts and the book, he would like nothing better than to become an elder statesman whose views on world affairs are sought and respected. But for the time being, he seems to have found a measure of peace on the fairways at Estrella and in the walled isolation of La Casa Pacifica.

—DAVID GELMAN with JOHN J. LINDSAY and JANE WHITMORE in San Clemente and DEWEY GRAM in Los Angeles

With Brennan: A buoyant new optimism



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