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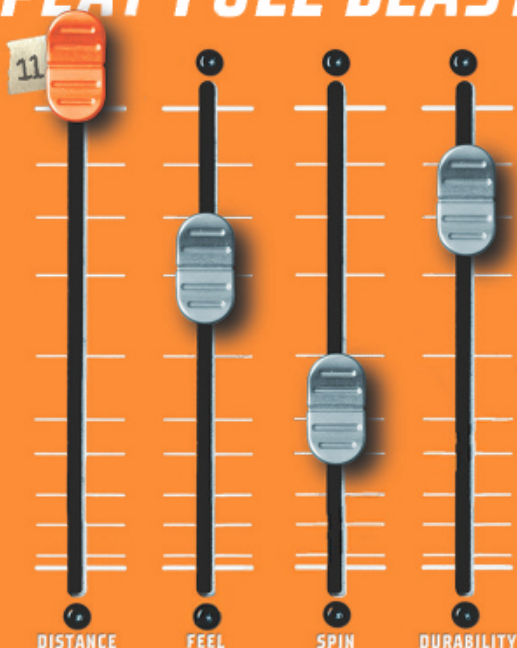
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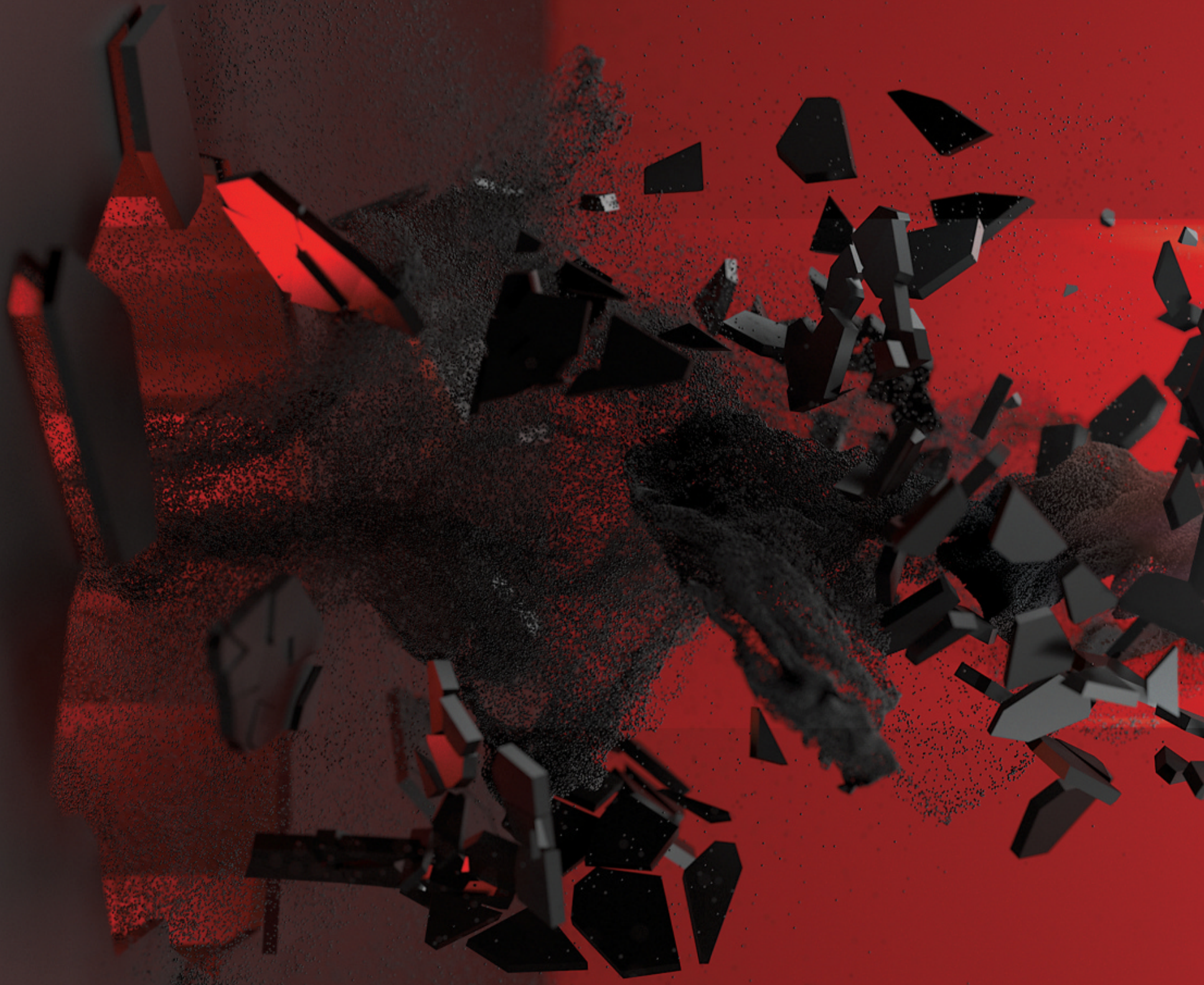
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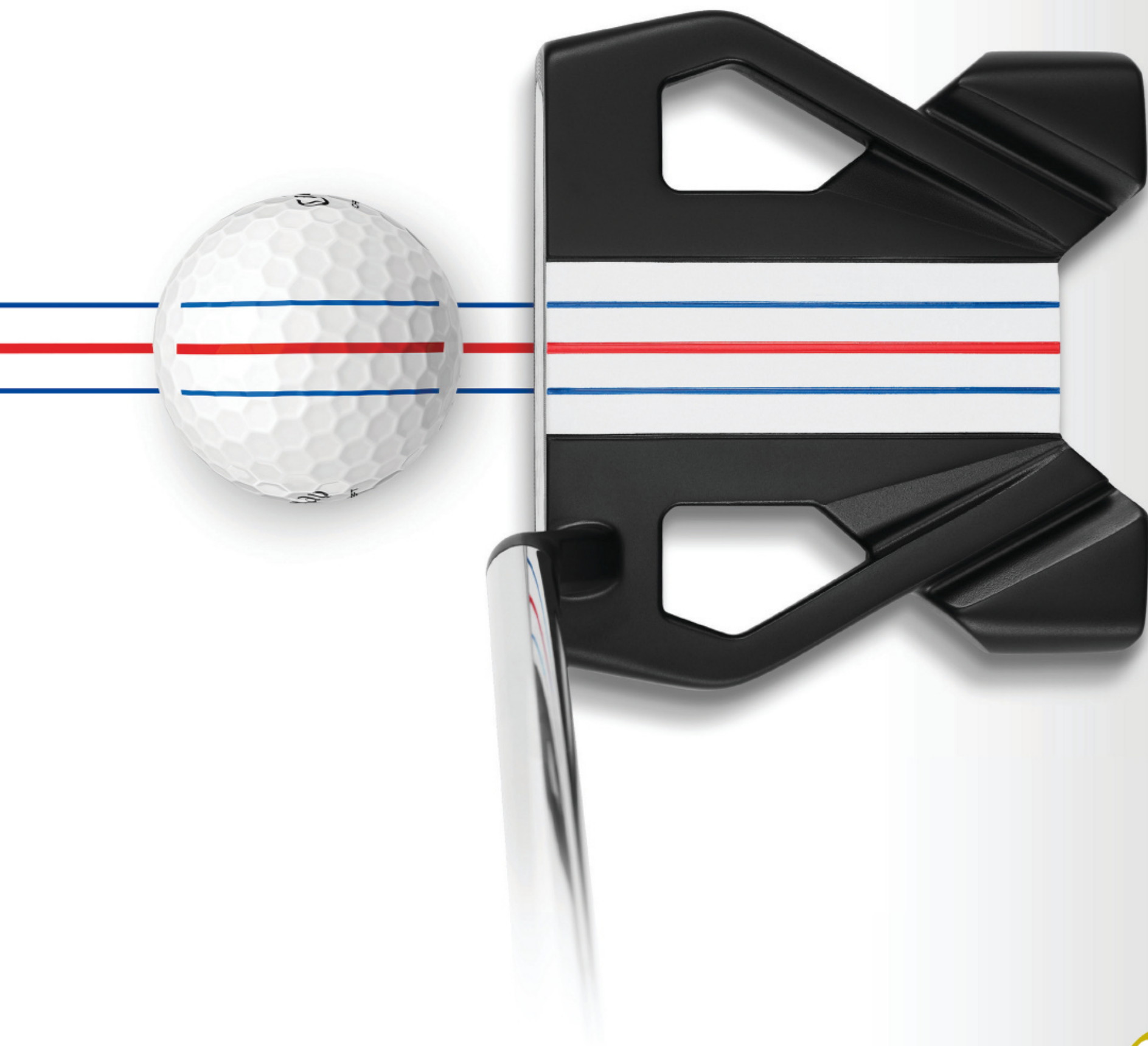


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"I tell parents they're going to be amazed how much their son develops as a person."

From 1 suitcase to 18 events in 9 countries

Claudio Rivas makes the PGA Tour Latinoamérica a unique option

BY MAX ADLER

IN THIS ISSUE we go deep on the PGA Tour's premier event, the Players. Dean Knuth, who created the Slope Rating system for the USGA, calculates what normal golfers would shoot on TPC Sawgrass in tournament conditions (brace yourself), and our undercover survey of pros asks whether the event should become a fifth major (a not-insignificant number say yes). In a rare photo dug from our archives, we glimpse the early transformation of a snake-infested bog to the Stadium Course, and our final page is a tribute to that greatest digger of all, Pete Dye, who left us this year at 94.

Head to Ponte Vedra this March to take in the Players and you'll notice that construction of a new PGA Tour headquarters is underway. More than 750 employees will move in when it's finished in January 2021. But one person who won't need a desk is Claudio Rivas, tournament administration manager on PGA Tour Latinoamérica. Built like a middleweight boxer, he quietly leads one of the most interesting lives in golf.

Like other executives who ran the previous Tour de Las Américas, Rivas began with PGA Tour Latinoamérica as an independent contractor. In 2014, Rivas was at a tournament in Colombia when he received word that violent political protesters were edging near his apartment in Caracas, Venezuela. Immediately, he put his wife and two young sons on a plane to Miami. They met there and hunkered down for a month, and rescue came in the form of a full-time offer from the PGA Tour that generated the paperwork to apply for a U.S. visa. And so Rivas began his life in Florida with one suitcase, which had only a few golf shirts, slacks and a set of waterproofs.

Rivas fields a lot of anxious phone calls from parents. "I tell them not to worry. If your son goes and stays where we tell him, he's going to love it. I tell parents they're going to be amazed how much their son develops as a person. Even for the player who finishes last, it's a wonderful experience learning how to travel and interact with other cultures."

For every location, Rivas' team creates a detailed fact sheet for players, including if Uber is available and which neighborhoods are safe for Airbnb. Indeed, making correct rulings about knee-height drops is the least complex part of the job. When a schedule of 18 tournaments moves across nine countries,

just having everybody show up is a win. Golfers, and even officials, have boarded the wrong plane. The alternate list is volatile, and Rivas routinely rings golfers after midnight, and they're glad to get the news and any help arranging last-minute travel.

As a rule, Rivas expects two sets of clubs lost or delayed per tournament. "We tell host clubs to have a couple of really good loaner sets ready," Rivas says. He laughs when he remembers Erik Barnes going low with a set a caddie scrounged for him, and then after the round the caddie charging him a rental fee. Caddies have endured 26-hour bus rides for the chance to work. The ultimate dream is to get hitched to a golfer who advances to the Korn Ferry Tour and brings you along. Suddenly, a tour card and a green card can hang in the balance.

Two seasons ago in Argentina, neighboring farmers decided to raze their fields, and the smoke made it nearly unplayable. Three years ago in

Ecuador, play was interrupted every hour when a government helicopter fighting a wildfire gathered water from a pond on the course. On the northern tip of Patagonia, Rivas got lucky when the snow melted just in time.

"What makes our tour great is each event has a unique identity, whether it's the layout, the food, the people. Typically, we're going to the best course in each country, and the members are proud and go out of their way to treat players warmly."

Rivas foresees a day when PGA Tour Latinoamérica awards more than five promotions. As such, he roots for past graduates like Lanto Griffin, Sebastian Munoz and Keith Mitchell to keep winning on the big tour as emphatic validation.

Of course, seven years after the death of the authoritarian president Hugo Chavez, the unrest in Venezuela still hasn't settled. Rivas nor his family has returned to Caracas since their rushed exit. His sons thank him for getting to grow up in Florida.

Max

BUILDING WINNERS

Claudio Rivas, 46, lives one of the most interesting lives in golf.



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► **GOLF TRIP!** The par-4 16th at Bandon Dunes, which tops our ranking of the 23 Best Summertime Buddies Destinations.

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YOUR GUIDE TO WHAT WE'RE DOING BEYOND THE PAGES



COURSES

TPC Sawgrass

Enjoy an immersive tour of the Stadium Course, home of the Players Championship, in our "Every Hole at TPC Sawgrass" video, as well as a sneak peek of the exclusive tour-pro range.

EQUIPMENT

Hot List TV

Need help finding the right clubs for you? In a new video series, our equipment experts Mike Johnson and Mike Stachura answer common questions and discuss the clubs that made our 2020 Hot List. The Mikes are geeks so you don't have to be.



INSTRUCTION

70th Anniversary

We've been helping golfers improve since 1950, but does our instruction advice endure? To find out, we put some old concepts to the test—like why is former tour player Frank Beard swinging a feather in this '74 photo?





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ASK GOLF DIGEST

Q The Rules say clubheads must have only "one striking face." What about putters like the one Notah Begay used where he could putt either left- or right-handed, depending on the break?
R.H. KENNEDY, SAN DIEGO

A The USGA made an exception for putters (see page 54 of the Equipment Rules) because it understood many golfers still have putters like the iconic, flat-on-both-sides Bulls Eye and believed it would be unfair to make them illegal. Note the exception requires both sides to be identical. You can't use a putter with an all-steel face on one side and an insert on the other.

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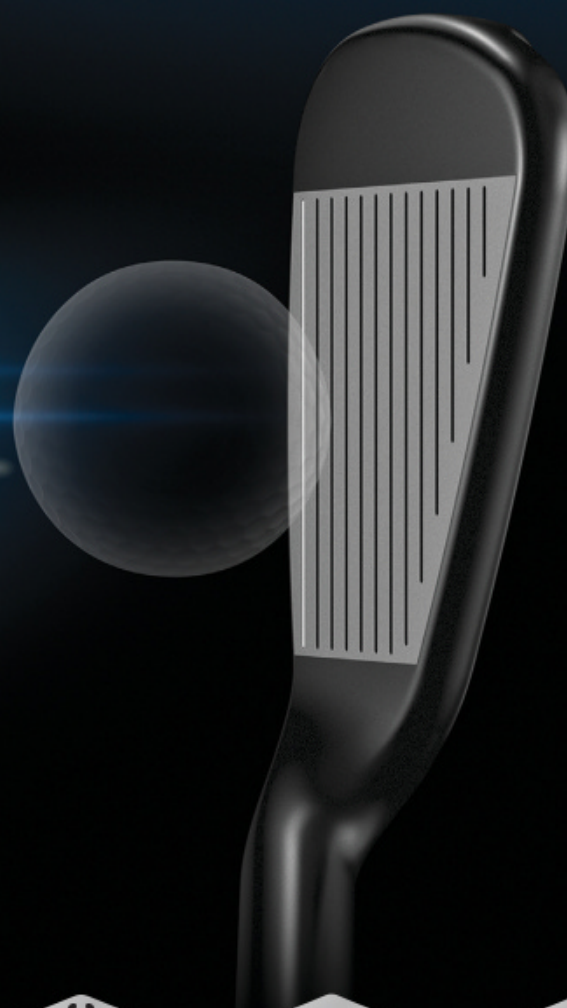
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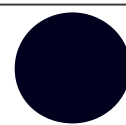
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"When I was
on the first tee
at Augusta,
the shaking ..."



Play



Pitch Perfect

Astros ace Justin Verlander on his favorite off-season sport

JUSTIN VERLANDER can handle more pressure than most. The Houston Astros ace has won two Cy Young awards, a World Series, pitched three no-hitters and surpassed the 3,000-strikeout mark. “If I’m in front of 100,000 people, put a baseball in my hand and I’m comfortable,” he says.

Yet put him on a golf course and he feels butterflies. “With golf, if there are five people and a ball on the ground, I’m like, *Oh, God,*” he says with a laugh.

The most nervous he has ever been was the first time he played Augusta National. “When I was on the first tee at Augusta, the shaking . . . I don’t know if I’ve experienced that anywhere else,” Verlander recalls. “It’s pretty intense.”

Verlander, 37, got into golf back in high school. After a football game, his buddy Daniel took some clubs out of his truck and teed up a ball. “He told me to hit it through the uprights. I smoked it, felt like 300 yards, right through the uprights. He was like, ‘Dude, you’re coming out for the golf team.’”

Verlander’s high school golf career didn’t amount to much. “I was so bad, they didn’t even count my scores,” he says, laughing. He played with a set of clubs cobbled together from friends and his parents. His dad wasn’t a golfer but would take him to the range now and then.

There’s one club from that set Verlander remembers best: “My first full round of golf ever, I knocked one in from 230 yards with a women’s Jack Nicklaus 3-wood. I was hooked for life.”

He has refined his game quite a bit since then. In peak form, Verlander’s a 4-handicap—though he and his wife, the model Kate Upton, have a 1-year-old at home, so he hasn’t been playing as much as usual.

Verlander likes to work on his game alone, at the range, but took a rare lesson before teeing it up at the Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions near Orlando in January.

He says it’s helpful that Kate understands golf. “She’s been great leading up to this [tournament]. I’m like, ‘Honey, I’m gonna go hit balls and practice.’ She knows when my focus starts to kick in.”

Even when Verlander’s not playing a tournament, he and his buddies have a game, usually a nassau or wolf. “I like the competitiveness of it,” Verlander says. “You can play whatever games you want, with whomever you’re playing with.”

He also enjoys the way it lets him disconnect. “I like to do my thing, put my phone in my bag, and get away from everything,” he says. “It’s nice to be wherever you’re at, and be present for four hours. It’s very peaceful.”

—KEELY LEVINS



Sergio Garcia

Still purring the ball after all this time

SERGIO GARCIA turned 40 in January. This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, he's been on the PGA Tour longer than recent tournament winner Matthew Wolff has been alive. Second, Garcia is still competing at a level that makes him a threat to win.

"He's one of the greatest ball-strikers I've ever seen," says Golf Digest Teaching Professional Jim McLean.

Garcia was a top-25 performer on tour in strokes gained/tee to green and strokes gained/approach the green in 2019, two key statistics that verify his ability to consistently work the ball any way he wants.

"And he's got all the power he needs to compete," McLean says. "The way he loads, creates width and unleashes all that energy in his signature downswing has always been impressive. Last year he averaged well over 300 yards off the tee—not bad for a guy around 40."

Here are some keys to his swing. —RON KASPRISKE

SHORT, BUT SWEET

► Sergio's never had a long backswing, because he doesn't need it, says Golf Digest Teaching Professional Jim McLean. "You can fully load into your right side without letting the club run off. When the shoulders stop turning, the arms should stop swinging."

SIGNATURE LAG

► "We've marveled for decades at how far behind his hands the clubhead lags," McLean says. "He describes it as a pulling motion, but it's more like his arms are falling as he unwinds from the ground up. Note how his right elbow dives into his right hip."

"I'm not trying to lag the club. It's just my natural move."

SERGIO GARCIA
40 / 5-10 / 180
Castellon, Spain

DRIVER
TaylorMade Sim
(9.5 degrees)

AVERAGE DRIVE (2019)
302.5 yards

CLUBHEAD SPEED
121 miles per hour

BIG TILT, SOFT KNEE

► Garcia's spine tilts away from the target as the clubhead approaches the ball, so he can hit up on it, McLean says. And he delivers the club with some flex in his lead knee. "So much for thinking that leg needs to be braced straight to generate power," he says.

LETTING GO

► Full extension of the arms and club through impact is a sign of a great driver swing, McLean says. "A good feel for this is to let the lead shoulder move up and away from the target line as the club releases. And keep grip pressure light. No holding on!"

“Before or after a round, these moves will give your game a boost.”

Better Than Yoga

Poses designed with golfers in mind

BY JENNIFER FLEISCHER

MANY OF MY CLIENTS who play golf have asked me if they should be doing yoga. My short answer: Sure, why not? Yoga is great for improving flexibility and strength, while relieving stress. But my longer answer is that if you're interested in enhancing your golf game at the same time as those yoga benefits, there are better moves you can do. In fact, I've built a whole program for Golf Digest Schools that was yoga-inspired but is much more sport specific. The “Better than Yoga” videoseries is at golfdigest.com/betterthanyoga. To give you a taste of what it's all about, turn the page for four exercises that look like yoga, feel like yoga but are supercharged poses for golfers. Give them a try. They're a great warm-up if you're playing today. —WITH RON KASPRISKE





◀ A STRETCHES

YOGA INSPIRATION
Downward Dog

BODY FOCUS
Hamstrings, mid-back

KEY POINTS
Start on your hands and knees and push up, driving your pelvis toward the ceiling. Extend through your mid-back and press into the ground equally through your feet and palms. (*top left*). Next, grab your right calf with your left hand (*left*), hold for a few seconds, then return to the pike position. This exercise will help you stay in posture when you swing—reducing fat shots—and improves your ability to separate movement of the upper and lower bodies. That's key for generating power and swinging with good sequencing. Do two sets, five reps, each side.



▶ TORQUE LUNGES

YOGA INSPIRATION
Crescent Lunge

BODY FOCUS
Thighs, hips, mid-back

KEY POINTS
Step back into a lunge position with the left knee just above the ground (*near right*). Extend your arms out to your sides so they are parallel to the ground, and rotate your torso clockwise until your left arm is aligned with your right leg (*far right*). Keep your lower body still and repeat this 90-degree rotation three times before standing up and starting another rep. This exercise trains the combination of upper-body mobility and lower-body stability, which is needed to generate torque in the golf swing. Do two sets, five reps always rotating toward the lead leg.



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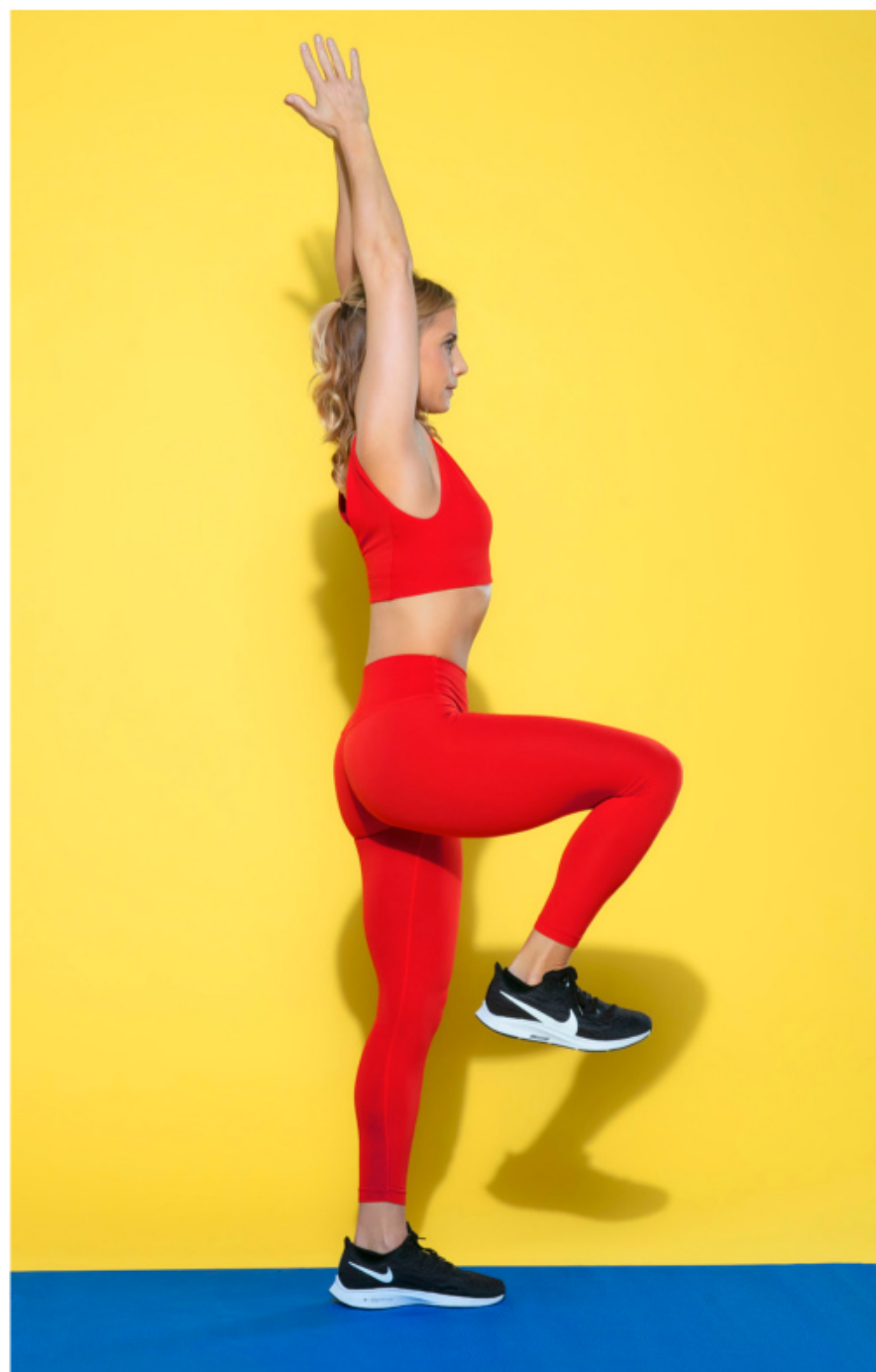
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◀ SINGLE-LEG DRIVERS

YOGA INSPIRATION

Swan Dive

BODY FOCUS

Hips, hamstrings, calves, abs

KEY POINTS

Stand and lift your right knee until the thigh is parallel to the ground, then reach your arms to the ceiling, pressing your palms together (*left*). Next, slowly bend

forward from the hips while extending your right leg behind you as your fingers drop toward the ground (*above*). Hold for a few seconds before returning to the standing position. (You can use a golf club if you need additional support.) This pose improves lower-body strength and flexibility and mimics the hip-hinging mechanics and ground-force production needed for more swing speed. Two sets, five reps, each leg.

► KICK-OUT STRETCHES

YOGA INSPIRATION

Thread the Needle

BODY FOCUS

Shoulders, lats, adductors

KEY POINTS

Start on your hands and knees (*small photo, right*), and extend your right leg out, planting the foot nearly flat on the ground. Drive your hips back as you move your left arm under your right and across your chest, touching your right knee. This stretch improves shoulder and upper-back mobility, which will help you swing on plane. The kick-out stretch trains your adductors (inside thigh muscles) to help prevent swaying when you swing. Do two sets of five reps, each leg.



JENNIFER FLEISCHER, one of Golf Digest's 50 Best Fitness Trainers in America, is based in San Francisco.



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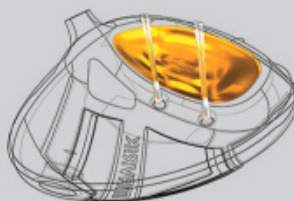
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Kicked to the Curb

Can a club expel you for playing too much golf?

J OIN A PRIVATE CLUB and you'll probably see him the next time you drive in the parking lot. ► The lifer. ► Usually retired (and almost always a man), the lifer is ready to tell you all about what a travesty it is that new members like you are paying a quarter of the initiation fee he did—while simultaneously extracting enormous value from his dues by getting ready to play his sixth round of the week while using a pull-cart and discount balls he bought online. ► Granted, listening to grouching about the new assessment for grillroom renovations is easier to endure when the lifer is paying the appropriate dues. That concept of economic fairness came up for a challenge recently at the venerable and exclusive Sunningdale Golf Club, southwest of London. ► Like many U.K. clubs, Sunningdale has a discounted rate for members who live overseas, and it's clearly a thriving business. The club has more than 1,000 members, and the vast majority are nonlocals—who ostensibly use the club during their occasional visits to London.

The letter and the spirit of the law are different things.

Australian John Cawood had been an overseas member since the mid-1990s, but he attracted the ire of the club (and full-status members who had paid \$80,000 to get in) when he became too much of a regular.

After two seasons, the club said it warned Cawood he was playing more than the 30 days of golf overseas members get for their \$1,200 yearly dues. As a part of the second warning, in 2014, the club asked him to convert his membership to full status, and its \$4,200 yearly fee.

Cawood declined, and on the third strike he was out: The club terminated his membership in 2015 after he used his club-issued payment card on 94 days in 11 months—suggesting he was living in the United Kingdom full-time and no longer eligible for overseas membership. Cawood protested that he was at the club more than usual because he had temporarily spent more time in England to tend to his partner's sick relative, but he didn't actually play golf on most of those visits. The retired lawyer sued the club, demanding reinstatement and \$13,000 in damages.

The case took a while to wind through the legal system, but in December, the Central London County Court ruled in Cawood's favor, requiring the club to reinstate his membership and pay him \$325 for "embarrassment." The court said the club hadn't proved a violation of its overseas membership status—and that evidence Cawood presented revealed the ejection was more because the club captain didn't like him and his "boisterous behavior" and was just looking for a reason to kick him out. In fact, Cawood had presented a draft letter from the captain to other members that implied they could face disciplinary

action if they invited Cawood as a guest.

What makes the case all the more fascinating—and awkward—is the shotgun remarriage Judge David Saunders imposed in his ruling. He said the club and its 36 holes, expansive clubhouse and huge membership roll was big enough that "any tension or conflict could be easily managed and avoided."

Of course, the judge probably won't be the one who scores an uncomfortable pairing at one of Sunningdale's Golf Society Days this spring.

The Ethicist is still trying to find out if the club had the cheek to pay Cawood off in shop credit, but in the meantime, the main lesson both parties learned the hard way should not be lost on the rest of us club-joiners. The letter and the spirit of the law are different things, and the gray area between them are where harmonious club relationships go to die if they aren't tended to carefully.

You can be the unpopular member who exploits every loophole in the club handbook about the frequency a guest can come and play, or your club can be the place where a 4-year-old's denim jumper means the entire family has to find someplace else to eat dinner. There are plenty of similar stories out there where only the names and locations have changed. Bad manners, naked selfishness, penny-ante nitpicking and ham-fisted abuse of power will make club life obsolete for anybody under 50 faster than you can say "OK, Boomer." **G**

ARE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW INVOLVED IN A TRICKY, AMUSING OR JUST PLAIN STRANGE GOLF SITUATION?

► Tell us about it, and the Golf Digest Ethicist might write about it in an upcoming column. To submit, describe your issue or send a news link to GolfDigest_Ethicist@discovery.com.

ASK GOLF DIGEST

Q My club has a two-day tournament that wraps up with a shoot-out on the 18th hole. Normally it's a par 4, but we convert it to a 150-yard par 3 for the shootout. If someone aces this, should it count as a hole-in-one?

GERRY FEHLING
MENDHAM, N.J.

A Absolutely. The USGA says the tournament committee should make that determination, but it has some recommendations. Among them: A hole-in-one should be considered valid even if made on a hole from a temporary tee marker. See Rules FAQ on its website, usga.org, for more.



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Chipping Clinic

Which technique is best?
The one that produces
solid contact

BY TIGER WOODS

THE LOWDOWN

- ▶ Read your chips like a putt
- ▶ Go with whatever produces good contact consistently
- ▶ Only change your technique if the lie forces you to

“My short-game motion is a miniature version of my full swing.”



MY WEDGES

► When I first came on tour, we all played balata balls that spun like hell. You really couldn't chip with a 56- or 60-degree wedge very much, because if you nipped it, the ball would land and stop dead.

Now balls spin less, and greens are typically faster than they used to be, so I use my TaylorMade Milled Grind 56- or 60-degree wedge on more than 90 percent of my chips (I don't carry a gap wedge). And the grind on them allows me to create different shots.

I have a pretty severe “C” grind, meaning there's less bounce on the bottom of the club near the hosel and the toe than there is in the middle. This lets me lay the club flat when I want to hit a high, soft shot, or set the heel off the ground when I want to hit a low spinner.

SOME PLAYERS VIEW chipping and pitching as separate entities from the full swing. They have their full-swing feels, and they have their short-game feels. I've never thought of it that way. My short-game motion is a miniature version of my full swing—same grip, same rhythm, same release pattern. I like to have a continuous feeling in my hands through the bag, no matter if I'm sending a driver or nipping a short-sided spinner off a tight lie. It's just easier for me to stay consistent that way.

That's what it's all about: Find the technique that gets you making solid contact most often, and stick with it unless, in rare cases, the situation forces you to do something different. You might think you have to mimic tour pros' short games by learning a bunch of shots. There's no need. When I went through my short-game woes a few years ago, to fix it I got back to the basics and focused on simply making solid contact. You should do the same. If your chipping is poor, you're wasting a ton of strokes.

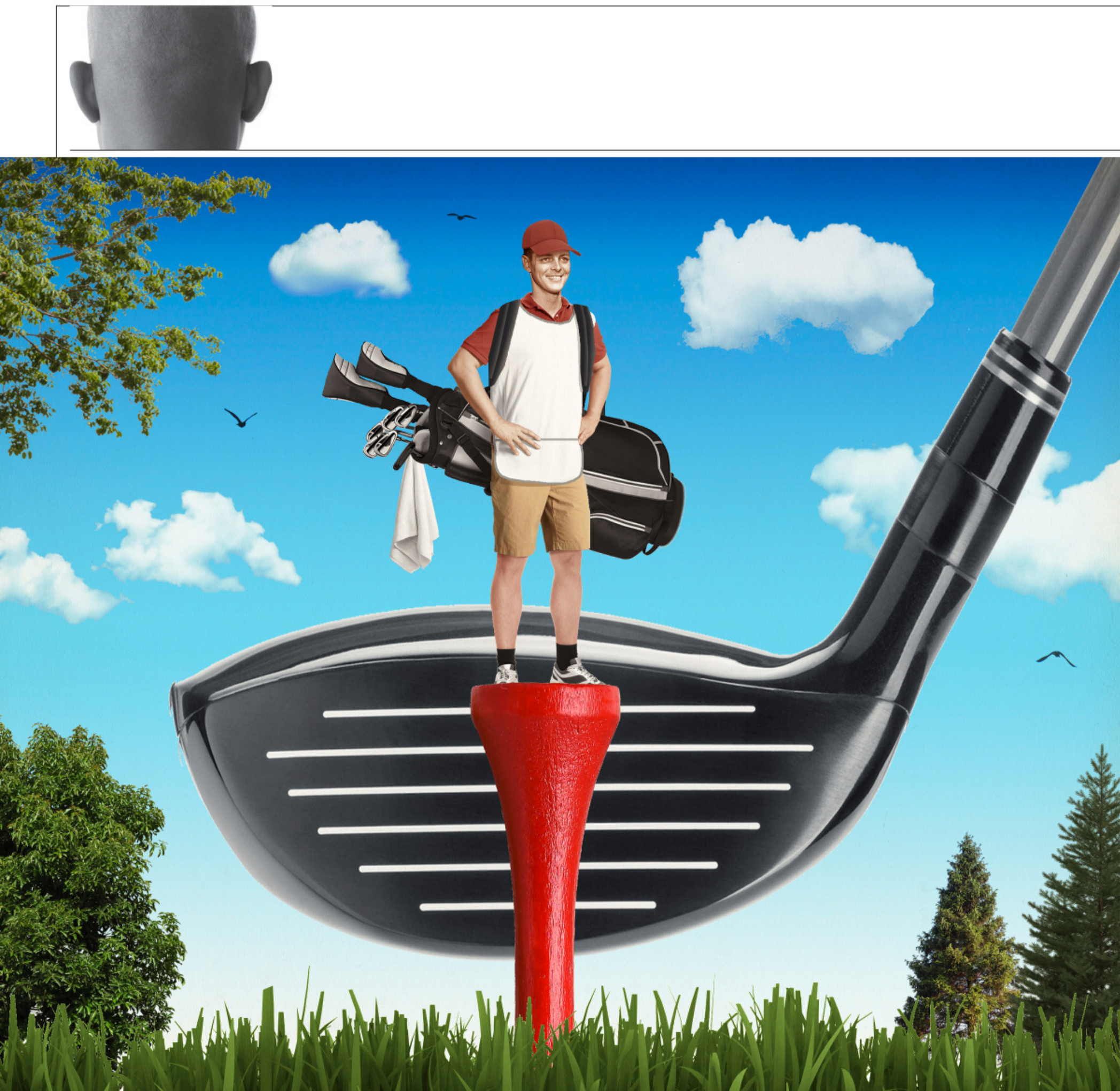
Because my chipping motion is tied to my full swing, it has changed as I've worked with different instructors over the years. At one point, I held the shaft more vertical and used a weaker grip. Then I switched up and my hands were lower at address than they are now. For me, getting comfortable with a new chipping motion has

always been one of the hardest parts of a swing change, but it's vital.

When chipping, my angle of attack is shallower than I'd recommend if you're looking for more consistency. It's probably easier to get good contact with a steeper motion, especially if you don't have as much time to practice as I do. But being shallower is a big reason I can play so many different short-game shots. Coming into the ball on a shallower path allows me to hit short shots with hook spin. Everyone can hit a cut-spin chip with a steeper angle of attack, but not many players feel comfortable shaping it the other way. But having that hook-spin chip as an option means I can let the golf course, not my limitations, dictate what shot I'm going to hit around the greens.

Although I recommend you stick to the chipping style that gives you the most confidence, you still need to evaluate what you want the ball to do during your pre-shot routine. Take a few extra seconds to decide exactly where you want to land the ball, then visualize how it will perform once it's on the green. I've seen amateurs get lazy and not read a chip like a putt and then seem surprised when it doesn't snuggle up next to the pin. Be attentive. Once you've picked a specific landing spot, focus on contact.

—WITH DANIEL RAPAPORT



Undercover Caddie

I've been fired 17 times . . . so far

GRABBING A BAG on a professional tour means you're perpetually on the hot seat. I've been carrying for nearly two decades, so I've been charred good and proper by now. That doesn't make getting consumed by the flames any easier. ► I've been lucky to partner with 18 players on the PGA and developmental tours, four of which were longtime appointments. I've also been fired 17 times—and among my friends, that's on the low end of the spectrum. Find me another profession, outside of working for the Cleveland Browns, with that type of turnover.

"Each week working is a chance to hit the lottery."

The majority of the time, the breakups are amicable, and done in person. I consider myself friends with almost all the players I've worked for, and though there were some strong emotions from both sides when it came time to disband, I get it. This is a business, and they're making a business decision. Plus, you don't want to burn any bridges. I've had two guys toss me aside after a month's work, only for them to circle back within the year, one of which ended up sticking for five seasons.

There have been callous splits. In the early 2000s, I was trying to get my guy to hit an 8-iron on an approach at the 71st hole. He was adamant that 9 was the play. I strongly, but respectfully, said he needed to club up. He went with the 9; his ball came up short of the green, and he couldn't get up and down. That bogey dropped us out of the top 10. He fired me after signing his card, claiming he needed someone "who has faith in me." Hey, I had faith—faith that his 9 was the wrong club.

Another player gave me the boot because he didn't like me socializing with other players. He did that via text after we'd almost won the week before. He's a noted caddie killer, so you tell yourself not to take it to heart. But man, it took all the reserve I had not to fire back with profanities.

Why does it happen so often? The simple answer is, we're collateral damage when a player's game is going bad. We're easier to swap out than dealing with a swing modification. This is especially true when a player is younger and his agents or parents have control—too much, many times—in his decisions. Clearly I'm the reason Little Bobby is missing cuts, not the fact he's got the temper of a 12-year-old.

In other instances, players just need a switch of

scenery. We spend six, seven days a week with our players, often for seven hours a day. That's not counting dinners, off-course functions or just hanging out. Again, I've been on good terms with most of my players, but sometimes you just get sick of each other, particularly when you're not playing well.

When you do get fired, you immediately send out the word you're available, through caddies, players, tournament officials. This is not the time for pride. The worst, and we've all done it, is going to a tournament without a bag, just hoping your services are needed. That's a darkness you don't know unless you've experienced it. You'll take anything—anything—tossed your way. A player might have a reputation for cycling through caddies, but each week working is a chance to hit the lottery. You're not throwing away that ticket.

And each new bag is a temporary gig. At least, you have to view it that way. You pray that you'll find success, even the smallest slivers of it, while navigating every missed putt or poor shot with trepidation.

Of course, there are the rare times when caddies decide to call things off. We're still humans, after all, and can take only so much abuse.

My favorite story involves a buddy who has since moved on from caddieing. He was with a hotshot out of college on the then-Web.com Tour, and the kid blamed every shortcoming on his caddie. In their third tournament together, my buddy had enough, told his player where he could shove his putter, and walked off the course. He was feeling mighty proud. Finally, a win for the caddies.

That is, until he realized his car keys were still in the bag. Talk about the ultimate walk of shame.

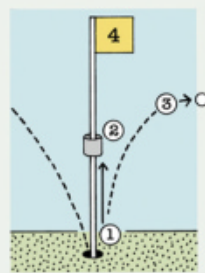
—WITH JOEL BEALL

ASK GOLF DIGEST

Q My tee shot goes, on the fly, straight into the cup. The impact breaks the collar of the cup and causes it to dislodge from the green and shoot about halfway up the flag shaft. The ball flies out of the cup and carries about 10 yards off the green. Was this an ace?

JIM BERTOLI, WINDSOR, CALIF.

A A story you can tell for a lifetime? Absolutely. An ace? Sadly, no. The Rules of Golf define a "holed" shot as being "at rest in the hole." Your ball was anything but at rest.



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NEWCOMB



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Swamp Thing

The original canvas for TPC Sawgrass

IT WOULD BE CLEVER to say that to build TPC Sawgrass, Pete Dye had to drain the swamp, but it wouldn't be quite accurate. The 415 acres south of Ponte Vedra Beach that became the PGA Tour's new headquarters was a man-made bog, created when a coastal highway was built in the early 1920s, blocking the natural flow of water to the Atlantic a few hundred yards to the east. So the water settled and putrefied vegetation, creating a thick layer of muck.

When Dye associate David Postelthwait, the construction superintendent (*pictured, left*), and the tour's Vernon Kelly, the chief engineer (*right*), first walked the site in 1978, they carried machetes to chop away undergrowth and kill snakes. Postelthwait once got lost on the site; Kelly once stepped into a deep gator pit, empty at the time.

Drain it they did, by carving a moat on the perimeter to collect water, then pumping the water under the highway and out to sea. As they dug, Postelthwait noticed the soil profile. Beneath the layer of muck was a seam of clay, called marrow, perfect to seal the bottom of the lake that Dye intended to separate the ninth and 18th holes. Beneath the marrow was a layer—sometimes eight feet thick—of pure white “sugar sand,” ideal for growing golf turf. So, as Dye wrote in *Golf Digest* in March 1984, they “flip-flopped the dirt” by digging holes, excavating the sand, dumping the marrow and muck back into the holes and covering them with sand. The entire course was built that way.

The Stadium Course opened in October 1980 and hosted its first Players Championship in 1982. —RON WHITTEN

PHOTO BY JOHN NEWCOMB, FORMER ART DIRECTOR FOR GOLF DIGEST

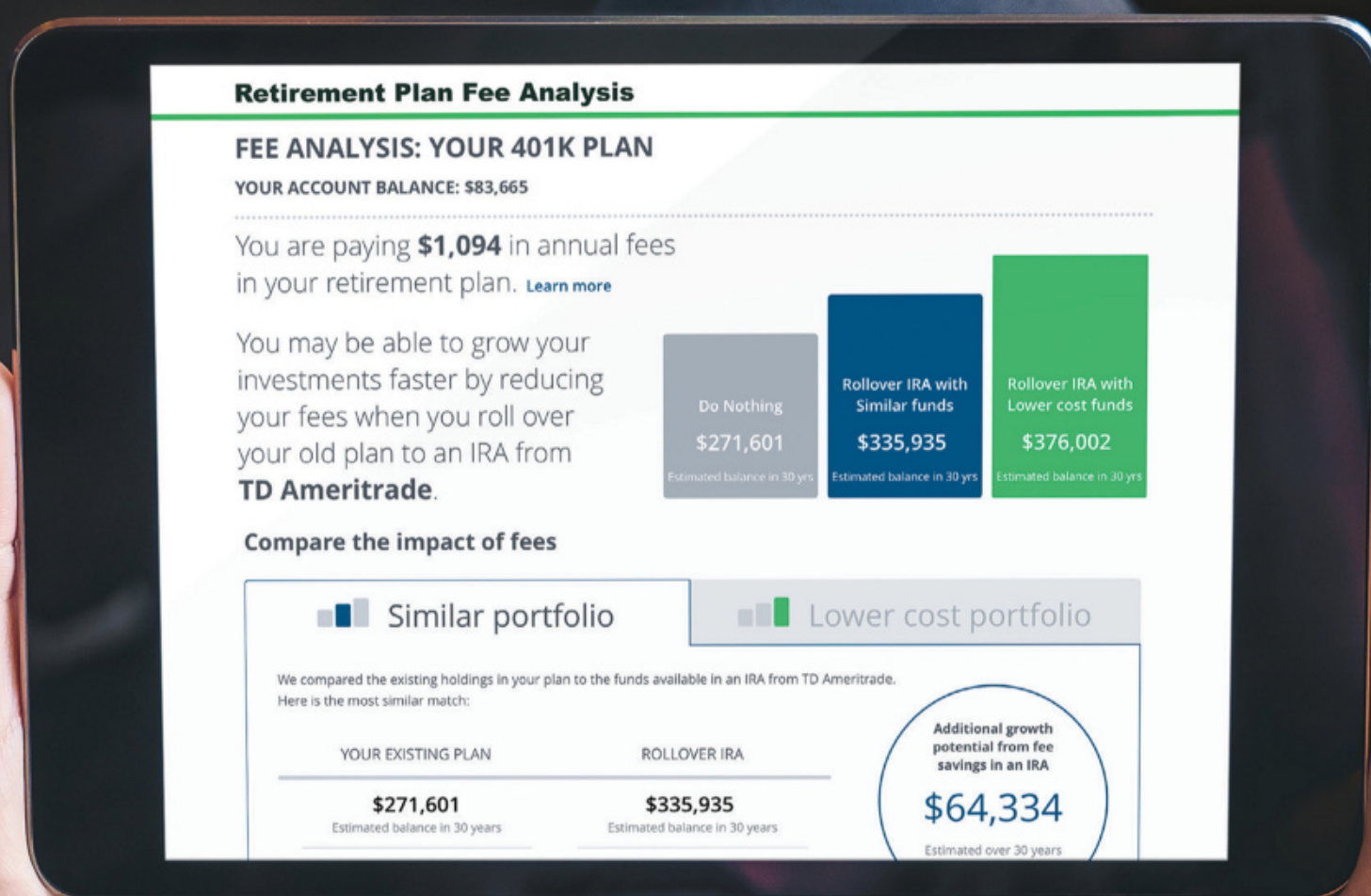
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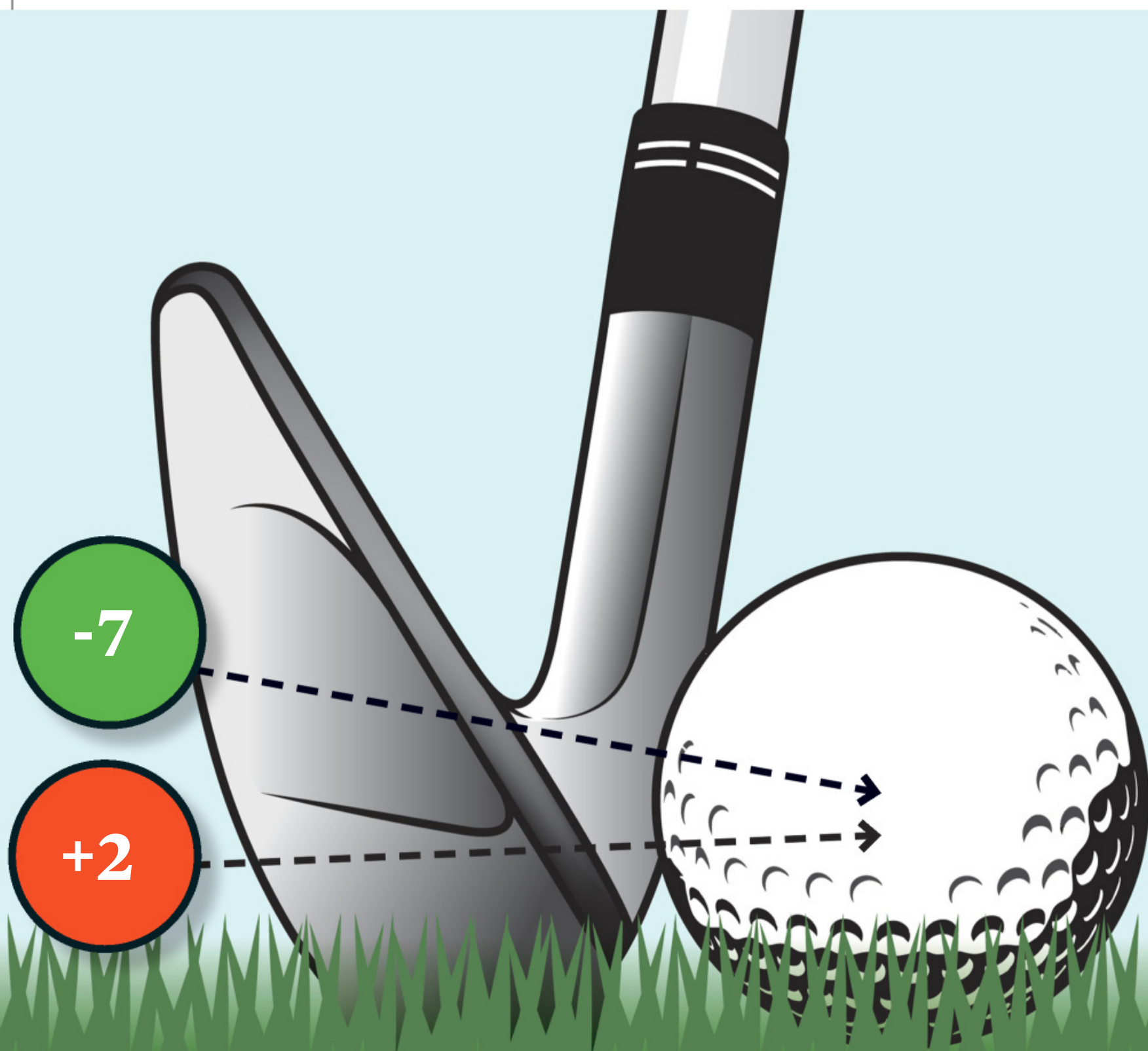
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The Facts of Attack

Testing shows how to get the most from your irons

BY RON KASPRISKE

IF YOU'RE NOW pulling a 6-iron out of the bag where you used to reach for an 8, your lack of power likely has something to do with your angle of attack, says Gene Parente, president of Golf Club Laboratories in San Diego.

"If you want your irons to perform better, you probably need to hit down on the ball more," he says.

It's a conclusion reached after Parente did some testing, calibrating his golf-swing robot to hit iron shots off the ground from three angles of attack at two different swing speeds (80 and 92 miles per hour). Parente found that hitting down on the ball at 7 degrees, which is typical of a tour pro's attack angle, would give the average golfer 10 to 23 more carry yards with a 7-iron and 16 to 26 more total yards. The other two angles tested were -1 and +2, common amateur approaches into the golf ball with an iron.

"If you're swinging a 7-iron 80 miles per

hour, that roughly translates to a 92-mph driver swing speed," Parente says. "And if you hit a ball at that speed with a 7-degree downward angle of attack, you're going to carry it 10 yards farther than if you catch it clean with a 2-degree upswing."

And that's 10 yards with a lower trajectory and less spin, meaning better accuracy because the ball is less susceptible to weather (*see the chart for more details*).

For years golf instructor Bobby Clampett has been telling students to strike down on the ball with their irons, and continue swinging downward until the club reaches its lowest point about four inches in front of where the ball was at impact. That's what tour pros do, and it's the reason they can hit 7-irons 200-plus yards. "A 7-iron for them is like a 4-iron for an amateur," he says.

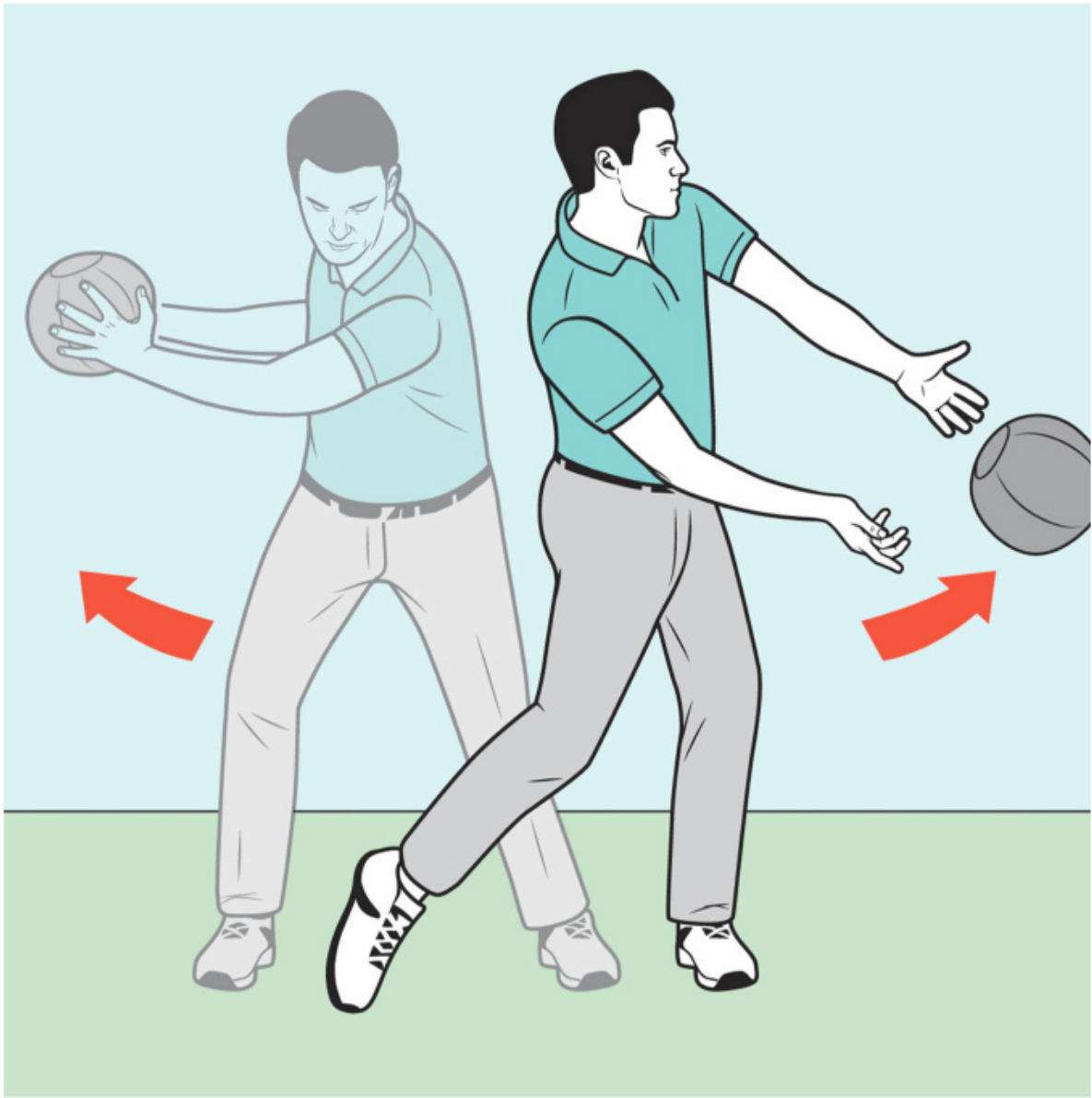
On the next page, Clampett will give you advice and a couple of drills to turn your +2 or -1 into a -7.

You don't have to swing harder to pick up 26 yards.

AVOID SHORTCUTS

► If you want a more downward angle on iron shots, you could move the ball back in your stance, narrow your stance, or swing with more weight on your lead foot. But Clampett says those things won't help create the type of compressed iron shot the robot was making. Instead, he says work on a more athletic move with your lower

body that allows the club to lag behind the arms and the body's rotation toward the target. A great way to train this move is to grab a medicine ball, simulate a backswing and through-swing, and toss it forcefully toward a target. "The heavier the ball, the more you have to rely on your legs and core muscles to throw it," he says.



CREATE COMPRESSION

► Having a flat lead wrist as the club meets the ball with the golf shaft leaning forward is key to getting a quality angle of attack and a swing bottom in front of the ball, Clampett says. To feel what you need to do to compress irons off the turf the way tour pros do, put a medicine ball on the ground and set your club directly behind it. Without using your arms or hands, make the ball move toward your target with the club. This teaches you how to use body rotation and leverage from the ground to power your swing.

SWING PATH MATTERS

► Gene Parente set the robot to hit shots that were no more than a couple of yards off line, but the swing path changed depending on the angle of attack. For the +2 and -1 degree attack angles, the club was moving out to in by as much as 5 degrees, but the -7-degree swings had the club moving in to out in relation to the target by as much as 3 degrees. Interesting considering the widely held notion that an in-to-out path creates a shallower angle of attack. Clampett says you can still hit down on the ball significantly if you swing in to out, so long as the path is propelled by body rotation and not simply chopping down on the ball with an arm-dominated swing.

80 MPH

ANGLE OF ATTACK	CARRY YARDS	TOTAL YARDS	LAUNCH ANGLE	BALL SPIN
+2	143.8	150.5	26.3 °	6,615 RPM
-1	150.7	159	22.9 °	5,695 RPM
-7	154.3	166	15.3 °	4,747 RPM

92 MPH

+2	148.8	154.1	27.1 °	8,079 RPM
-1	154.3	160.4	24.8 °	7,421 RPM
-7	172.1	180.4	15.5 °	6,532 RPM

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KRIS VENTURA

PGA TOUR

AGE 25

LIVES OSLO, NORWAY

PALM BEACH GARDENS, FLA.

"I asked the doctors to postpone the surgery. They just laughed."

Kris Ventura

Playing Q school after an appendectomy

I PLAYED FOR THE EUROPEAN side in the Junior Ryder Cup in 2010. We lost to a team that included Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas. After, we all went to Celtic Manor to watch the real Ryder Cup. I remember being in awe of the crowds, the thousands of people chanting. That was the day I said to myself, *This is what I want to do. I'm going to do everything I can to play against these guys.*

MY DAD IS MEXICAN AND MY MOM IS NORWEGIAN.

They met when my mom studied in Mexico as a college exchange student. I was born in Puebla, which is a big city about two hours south of Mexico City. When I was 2 or 3 years old, the story goes, golf came on the television, and I picked up a wooden kitchen spoon and started swinging. My parents weren't golfers, but they bought me a set of plastic clubs for Christmas that year.

I PLAYED WITH MY GRANDPA A BIT, BUT I NEVER GOT ANY PROPER INSTRUCTION.

None of my friends played. But our family lived near a course, and our extended family shared a weekend house that was near a course. Both were residential-community courses where it was easy for a kid to play alone. I entered local tournaments and got pretty good fast.

WHEN I WAS 6, I TRAVELED TO VIRGINIA FOR THE U.S. KIDS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP.

My mom cried when I made the putt to win my age group. All these people told me I had the potential to be great, and I think it was the first time my parents understood what I was capable of. But the cost to really do it right, to travel to all the most elite junior tournaments, was getting too expensive.

WHEN I WAS 12, MY PARENTS DECIDED WE WERE MOVING TO NORWAY.

Mostly to be closer to my mom's family, but also, in part, for my golf. I told them they could go without me, that I'd stay in Mexico with my cousins. I'd developed more of a life there than my younger brothers. Of course, they weren't having it. I was going to Norway.

MY PARENTS ENROLLED ME IN A SPORTS HIGH SCHOOL IN OSLO.

Learning a new language while overcoming my shyness was tough, but I loved hanging out with athletes. Everyone was so focused. I had classmates going to the Olympics. I saw the discipline it takes to make it. Even though you're young and not that mature, you can still control decisions—like what you eat and how much you sleep—that improve your performance.

THE NORWEGIAN TEAM COVERED THE EXPENSE OF TRAVEL AND COACHES.

Of course, golf in Norway has its drawbacks. For six months, we hit indoors. But we'd go to South Africa or Spain each winter to get on grass. Overall, moving to Norway was great for my game and our finances.

I DIDN'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT OKLAHOMA STATE WHEN I COMMITTED.

It proved to be a continuation of the top-athlete mentality of my high school.

Everything we did was to get better at golf, and everyone wanted to play on the PGA Tour. We won the national championship in my fourth year. After I graduated, my plan was to make the Korn Ferry Tour.

I PLAYED WELL IN THE PRE-QUALIFYING EVENTS.

But 10 days before the final, four-round qualifying tournament, I woke up in the night with a terrible pain in my side: appendicitis. I asked the doctors to postpone the surgery two weeks. They just laughed. As I lay recovering, all I could think about was this tournament that was supposed to launch my career. If I withdrew, my chances of getting status were nonexistent.

I DIDN'T TOUCH A CLUB UNTIL THE DAY OF THE PRACTICE ROUND.

With the incision, I couldn't make a full swing. My body was stiff, and I hit my driver about 250 yards and crooked. Every swing and every time I bent to read a putt was excruciating. The challenge was as much mental, thinking through the pain, trying to find a swing that could score. I'm proud that I finished, but two under beat only a couple guys in the field. I'd never felt more exhausted.

I STRUGGLED MENTALLY TRYING TO MONDAY-QUALIFY ON KORN FERRY.

Then I caught a break and received a sponsor's exemption into the BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by Synnex Corporation. Something clicked. I shot 16 under in the three-round event, finishing T-3. I earned enough points to guarantee starts and set my schedule. Finally a little relaxed, I won twice in four weeks. I finished the regular season fourth on the points list and got my PGA Tour card. My family came for the ceremony. It was the first time I'd seen them in seven months. My youngest brother had grown half a foot, and his voice was completely different. Time can pass quickly on tour.

AT FIRST, ALL I THOUGHT ABOUT WAS KEEPING MY CARD.

But looking at how much money you make each week can drive you crazy. I'm now focusing on what I can control: eating well, sleeping well, practicing well. If I believe in what I'm doing, I can live with the outcome. That's the approach I took when I had no status, and I need to regain that. I don't want to look back and think, *I could've done this; I should've done that.*

LIFE CAN GET LONELY ON TOUR.

Except for a few times when my girlfriend came out, I've traveled by myself. Some weeks I've eaten dinner every night with Viktor Hovland, who was my high school and college teammate. His company reminds me how much I miss the team environment, where you're practicing with people who really care about you and want you to do well.

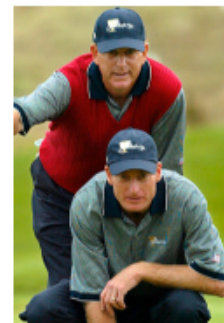
I LIKE WORKING HARD.

Having the opportunity to show you have what it takes and pulling it off—that's as good as it gets.

—WITH KEELY LEVINS



“A good image is back-handing the ball,
like a tennis stroke.”



FUNCTION OVER FORM

In the 2003 Presidents Cup in South Africa, two of the sweetest swingers at that time, Adam Scott and Stuart Appleby, were matched against two of the most unconventional, Jim Furyk and Jay Haas. As they warmed up, murmurs from the crowd suggested the “pretty” swings had it made. At one point, Jay said to Jim, “I bet those people don’t give us much of a chance.” Jim laughed, and the Americans went on to win, 6 and 5, one of the most lop-sided victories in the history of the event. Don’t get me wrong, Adam and Stuart are tremendous talents. (I taught Adam for years.) But the only real barometer of a golf swing is the shots it produces.

Centerface Contact

Two ways to fix fats and thins

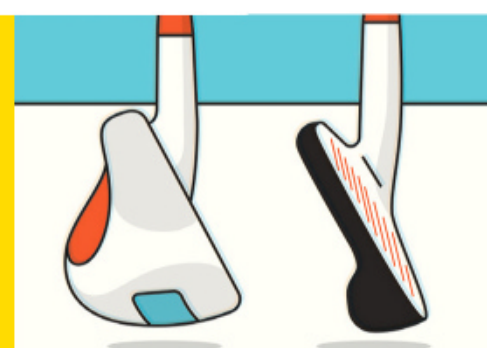
A LOT OF GOLFERS never get over the instinct to lift the ball off the ground. They swing off their back foot or flip their hands through impact, both of which make the club bottom out too soon. As a result, they hit the ground first (fat shot) or catch the ball on the upswing (thin shot).

If that sounds familiar, let me give you two simple keys. First, make your initial move from the top a little bump onto your front foot. Feel like you’re shifting toward the target, so your chest is over the ball. Second, get to impact with the back of your top hand facing the target (*left*), not pointing upward. A good image is that you’re back-handing the ball, like a tennis stroke. If you get those two moves right, you’ll swing into impact with your weight forward and your wrists firm—two things every good ball-striker does. —WITH PETER MORRICE

BUTCH HARMON is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

THE WIDE CHOICE

If you’re playing irons with thin heads and soles, you’re missing out. Clubs with wider bottoms, especially hybrids, are a lot more forgiving on off-center hits. The wider soles also help shots get in the air, and with more mass behind the ball, your strikes will feel really solid. Also, consider graphite shafts that give you a little kick at the bottom of the swing for a softer feel and higher trajectory.



1 WILSON STAFF MODEL

► The hollow head features a seven-gram weight in the sole to lower the center of gravity. The thin face insert is made of a high-strength carbon steel.

\$230/18°, 21°, 24°

2 TITLEIST U510

► This low-profile utility is aimed at average golfers. The key is an L-shape, thin, steel-alloy face and 95 grams of tungsten for a higher launch.

\$250/16°, 18°, 20°, 22°

3 PING G410 CROSSOVER

► A lighter, maraging-steel face insert and a 30-gram tungsten chip in the toe provide forgiveness in a more traditional—but hollow—shape.

\$190/17°, 20°, 23°

4 TOUR EDGE EXOTICS EXS 220 TI-UTILITY

► Thin beta titanium wraps around the sole in an L shape to add flex and save weight, allowing for a compact look.

\$200/17°, 19°, 22°, 25°

5 TAYLORMADE P790 UDI

► The forged-steel face wraps around the sole, which uses a slot for extra flex. A tungsten bar low in the foam-filled hollow body maximizes launch.

\$230/17°

6 SRIXON Z U85

► Designed to fit in seamlessly with the company's iron lineup, this hollow-body entry features a high-strength steel face joined to a forged steel body.

\$200/18°, 20°, 23°, 26°, 29°

7 NEW GROUND LONG IRON

► The knuckled sole design is meant to move the head more easily through the turf on fat shots, and the longer hosel encourages a draw bias.

\$150/16°, 19°, 22°

Utility irons aren't just for elite players anymore.



The King of Sting

Ditch the long irons and try a new utility iron

BY MIKE STACHURA

THERE MIGHT not be a shot that says “player” more than a low, boring 2-iron laced off the tee with driver-like rollout. Who among us hasn’t dreamed of ripping one of Tiger Woods’ low-slung “stingers” on command? Well, modern technology might be bringing this shot to more players.

The latest utility irons have thinner and hotter faces

attached to hollow bodies that are weighted low for launching the ball higher. These clubs can even make a case for replacing the hybrids in your bag—at least for golfers with above-average swing speeds. For sure, there’s no reason for anyone except the most elite players to carry a traditional 2-, 3- or 4-iron. If you have one, and it’s not being used to stir the logs in the fireplace or

to deter intruders as your last line of in-home security, it’s useless. For many average golfers, hybrids have taken their place. But utility irons are now a viable option.

These modern driving irons depart from the long irons of yore thanks to new high-strength steel and beta-titanium faces that flex like drivers, not only increasing ball speed, but reducing spin and improving launch. ►

“A great way to practice a stinger is hitting shots off a downhill lie.”

TIME TO RETIRE THE 4-IRON

A 4-HYBRID BEATS A 4-IRON

HEIGHT.....+13.2 YARDS
CARRY.....+11.2 YARDS
TOTAL DISTANCE.....+5.6 YARDS

A 4-UTILITY BEATS A 4-IRON

HEIGHT.....+7.2 YARDS
CARRY.....+7.0 YARDS
TOTAL DISTANCE.....+2.8 YARDS

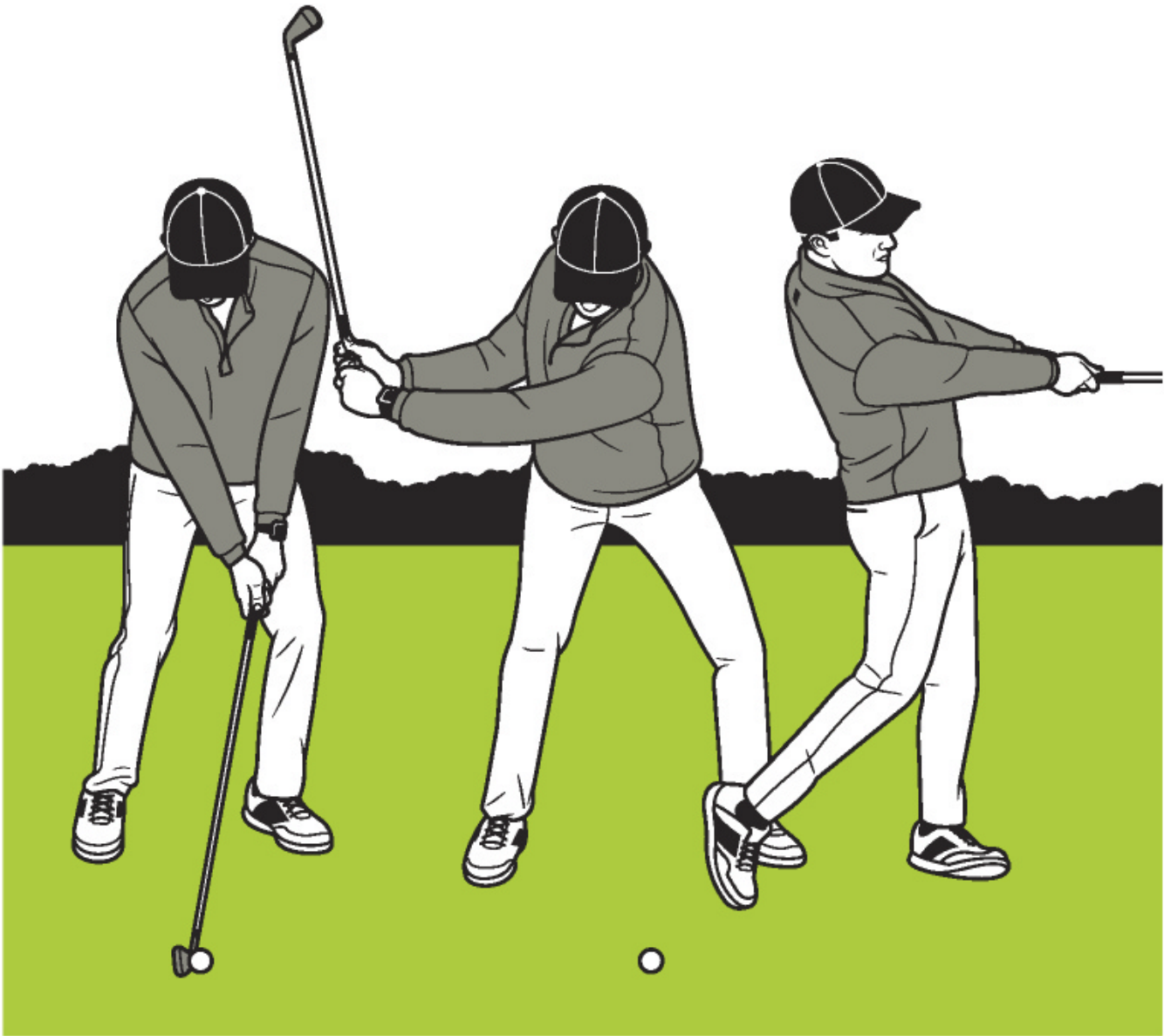
“You’re getting the launch that hasn’t been possible before,” says Marni Ines, Titleist’s director of product development for irons. These faces also are lighter, freeing up mass to reposition to the perimeter for forgiveness. “It’s really a unique product.”

In testing with Club Champion, the national clubfitting chain, hybrids and utility irons flew higher and carried farther than a standard 4-iron (see chart, above). Plus, the utility iron launched an average of 2 degrees higher than the iron.

“The 4-utility seems to be the straightest no matter how you look at it,” says Nick Sherburne, co-founder of Club Champion. “The hybrid launched the highest.”

However, for the highest-handicappers in the test (15 and above), utility irons actually carried shorter than the standard 4-iron. Utility irons therefore seem best for players with faster swing speeds who make centerface contact. Also, because of the natural draw bias of hybrids, utility irons might work better if you’re fighting a hook—a tendency of better players. But if your miss is a fat shot, the hybrid’s wide sole could help.

In the end, you have to consider whether you prefer a potentially straighter tee shot with a utility iron or the forgiveness and higher launch of a hybrid—and whether you have the swing speed to hit that “stinger” (right). **G**



SWING LOW TO KEEP IT LOW

THE BEAUTY OF THE STINGER is that it’s reliable, says Golf Digest Teaching Professional Josh Zander. “It’s not going to move left or right all that much,” he says. The keys? Play the ball in the middle of your stance, no farther forward, and set up slightly open to your target (aligned left for right-handers). “The open stance counteracts the ball po-

sition because your swing path is more to the right,” Zander says. Then abbreviate your swing on both sides of the ball. “Visualize swinging under a tree limb or a low ceiling,” he says. “Finally, hit down on the ball with the shaft leaning toward the target through impact. A great way to practice a stinger is hitting shots off a downhill lie.” —RON KASPRISKE

SHOULD YOU STING IT?

► A robot test of the stinger shot with an 18-degree utility iron at four swing speeds reveals this isn’t the shot for you unless you can swing it 100 miles per hour. The slowest swings tested lost about 15 yards at the steeper, stinger-like attack angle of minus 8 degrees versus the conventional, shallower attack angle of minus 2 degrees.

TESTING BY GENE PARENTE OF GOLF LABORATORIES IN SAN DIEGO.

SWING SPEED MPH		CARRY DISTANCE YARDS	TOTAL DISTANCE YARDS
80	STINGER	121.8	167.9
80	NORMAL SWING	165.8	183.3
90	STINGER	157.5	195.7
90	NORMAL SWING	193	208.9
100	STINGER	193.6	220.8
100	NORMAL SWING	215.3	230.2
110	STINGER	226.5	248.5
110	NORMAL SWING	234.1	245.7

INFINITY FACE

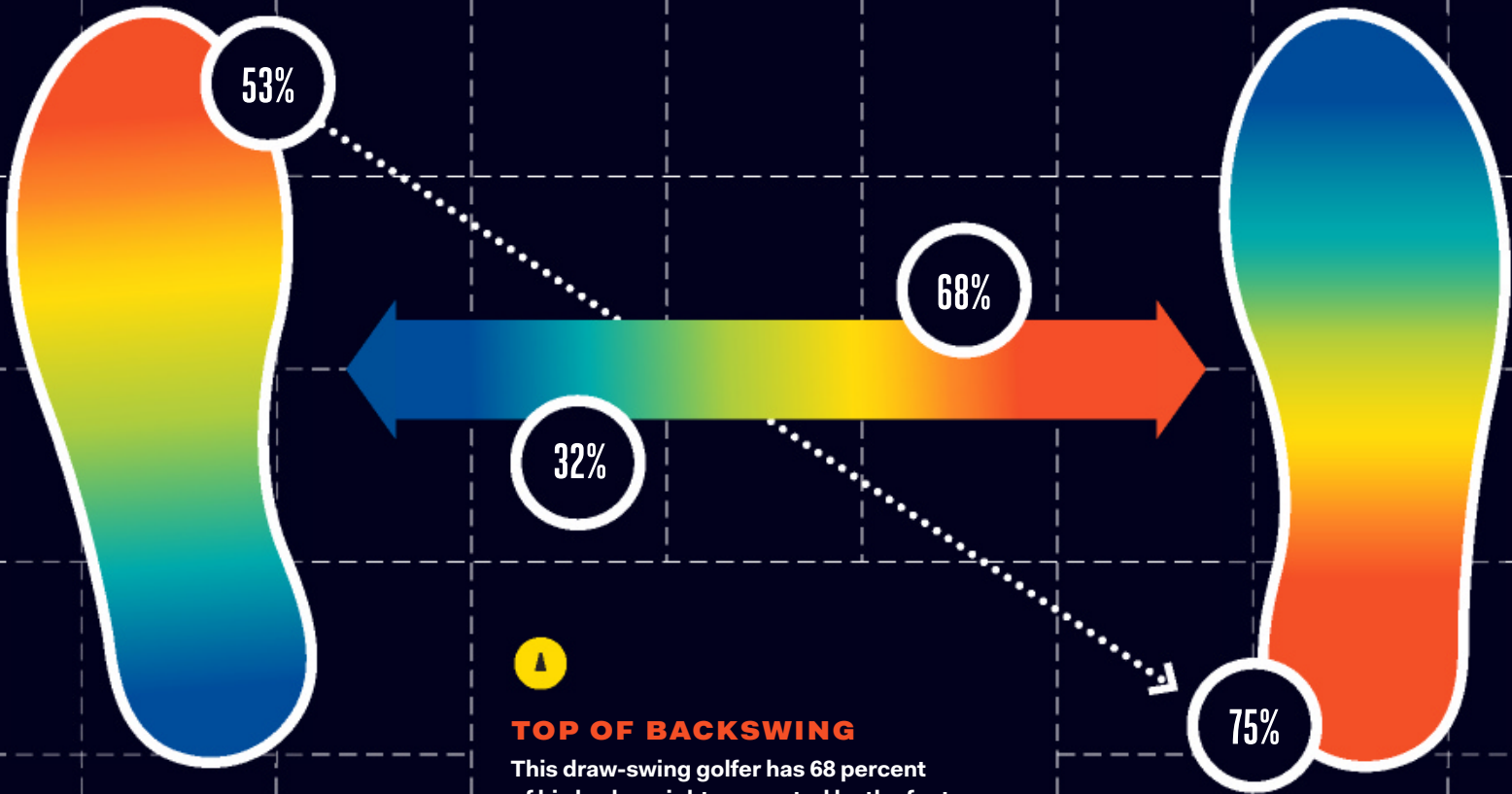
WHAT
FASTER
FEELS
LIKE



SPEEDZONE

COBRA'S FIRST EVER CNC MILLED INFINITY FACE DELIVERS PRECISION PERFORMANCE FOR
FASTER, LONGER AND STRAIGHTER DRIVES. THAT'S SPEED WITH NO LIMITS.





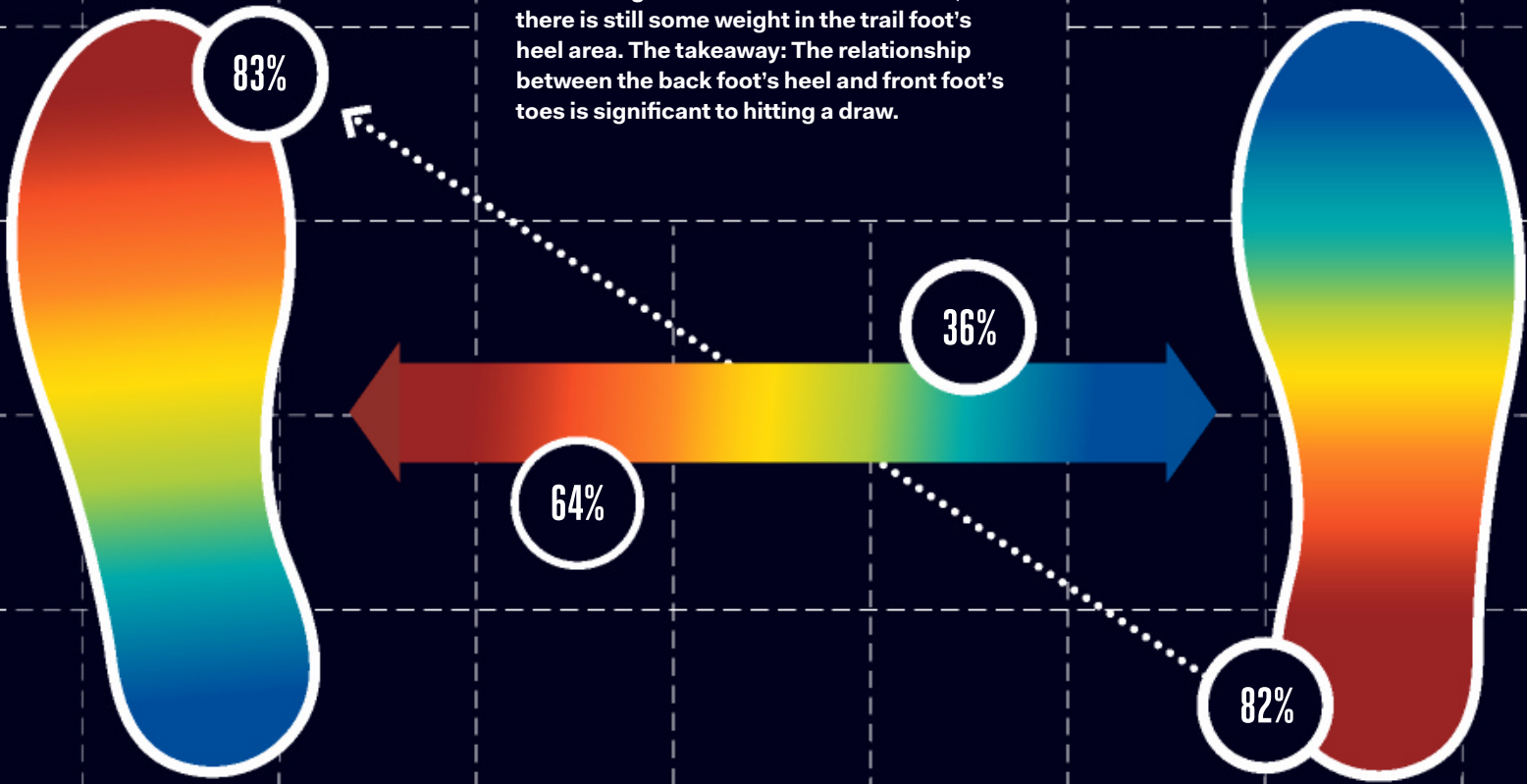
TOP OF BACKSWING

This draw-swing golfer has 68 percent of his body weight supported by the foot farthest from the target. And of that 68 percent, three-quarters is toward the heel.

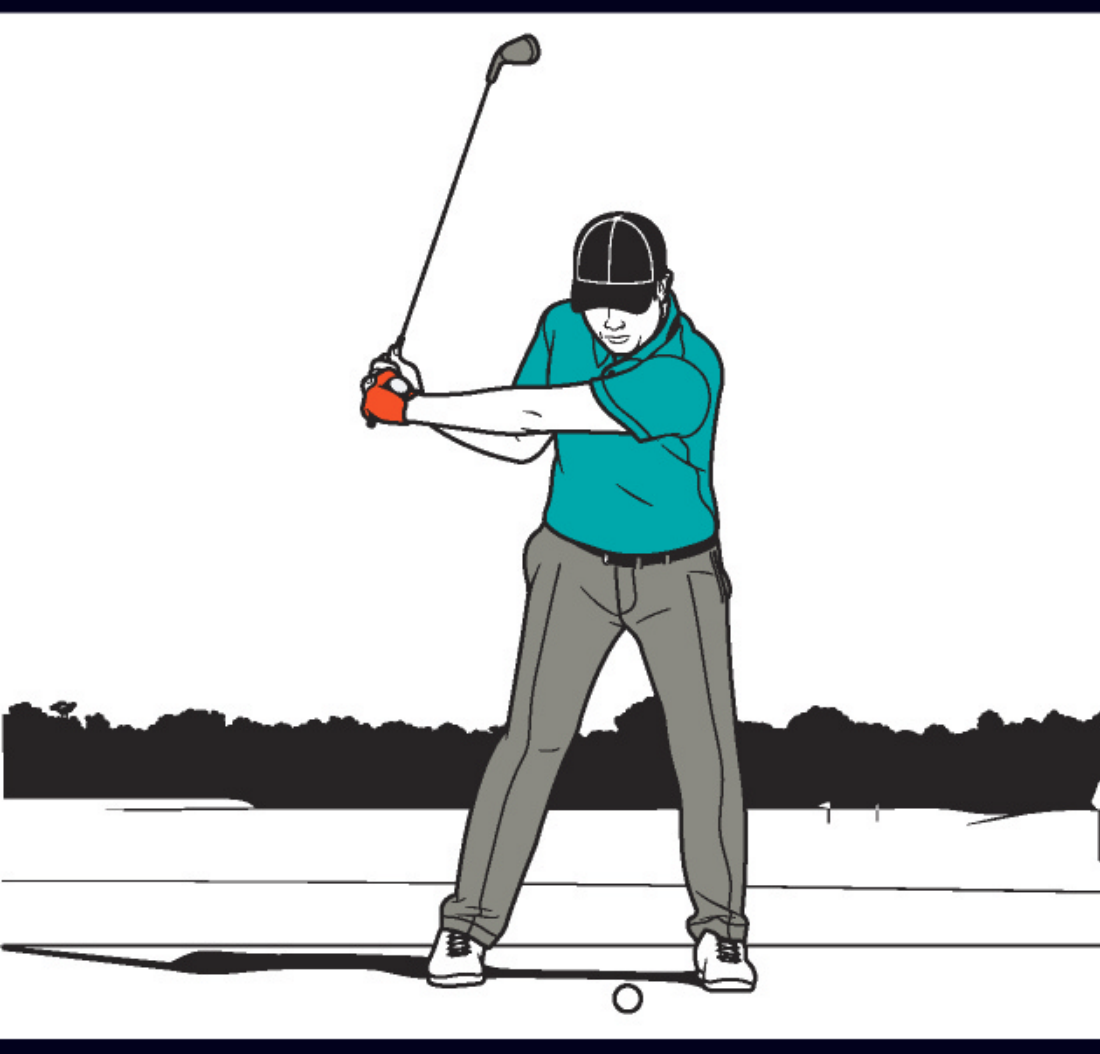


STARTING DOWN

The player shifts 64 percent of his total weight into the foot closest to the target, with most of it moving toward the toes. Meanwhile, there is still some weight in the trail foot's heel area. The takeaway: The relationship between the back foot's heel and front foot's toes is significant to hitting a draw.



“The big mistake? Starting down with your weight in the heel of your front foot.”



Hit a Draw With Your Feet

Good weight shift is vital to this shot

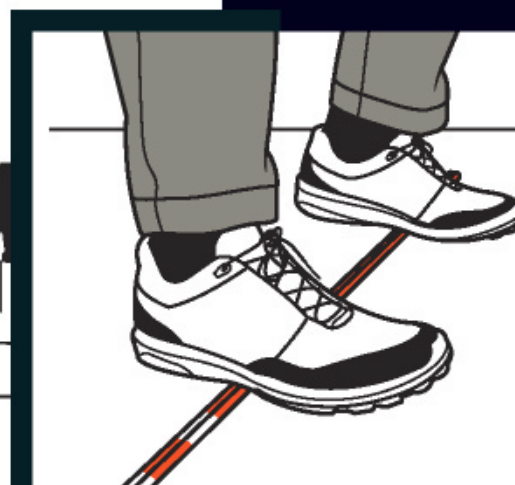
ONE OF THE MOST coveted shots in golf is a draw (the shot curves slightly left for right-handers). You can learn to hit this shot if you focus on your feet.

As you reach the top of the swing, you want to have roughly two-thirds of your body weight supported by your foot farthest from the target. And of that two-thirds, you should feel most of it in the heel. At the same time, the remaining weight should be felt a little more in the toes of your front foot than the heel. Remember: front-foot toes, back-foot heel.

Now here comes the interesting part: In research (*left*) taken from biomechanist J.J. Rivet, draw players maintain this toes-heel relationship at the start the downswing. Like all good players, two-thirds of their total body weight shifts into the foot closest to the target, but you can see that the brunt of it is toward the toes. And the back-foot heel is still supporting a fair amount of weight, too.

This might seem odd if you've been told to get off the heel of your back foot in the downswing and pivot around your front foot's heel. But that should happen later in the through-swing. Starting down, the toes-heel relationship is crucial for an in-to-out swing path. So long as the club is closed to that path at impact, the ball will draw. —WITH RON KASPRISKE

LEADBETTER is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.



THE DRAW DRILL

If you stand on an alignment rod when you practice (*left*), you'll get instant feedback on what part of your foot is supporting most of your weight. Rehearse swings on the rod where you feel the toes-heel relationship.



HOW MANY
DISTANCE IRONS
CAN SAY THEY HAVE THEIR OWN
SOUND ENGINEER?

Meet the all-new SIM. The best-feeling distance irons we've ever made.

With an improved SPEED BRIDGE™ and sound engineer-created ECHO® Damping System for better sound and feel, we went further than we thought possible to bring you a distance iron that feels better than anyone thought possible.



IRISH GOLF LINKS



THE ACTUAL COST OF AN IRISH GOLF TRIP

\$450

\$750

\$65

\$10

\$60

\$275

\$100

Undis- closed

POSITION Shooting guard
CLAIM TO FAME Once guarded Kirk Hinrich, promptly quit.



The perfect match-play player



- **5% PRAGMATISM**
- **10% KILLER INSTINCT**
- **20% TRASH TALK**
- **30% SOUL-CRUSHING LENGTH**
- **35% DISTRACTINGLY BEAUTIFUL WAG**



When the players you hit into turn out to be pacifists.

AN ESSENTIAL PAIRING OF IRISH WHISKEY AND IRISH GOLF COURSES



KNAPPOGUE CASTLE CHÂTEAU PICHON BARON CASK FINISH

GOLF-COURSE PAIRING
▶ LAHINCH

TASTING NOTES
▶ Strawberry, vanilla and a waft of Old Tom Morris' pipe smoke.



KILBEGGAN SINGLE-POT STILL

GOLF-COURSE PAIRING
▶ WATERVILLE

TASTING NOTES
▶ Creamy mint and easygoing citrus mingled with approachable dunes and soft Atlantic breezes.



TEELING SINGLE-POT STILL

GOLF-COURSE PAIRING
▶ PORTMARNOCK

TASTING NOTES
▶ Dublin in a glass, from Temple Bar to Portmarnock Beach and everything between.



THE LUCKIEST THINGS IN GOLF

- ▶ WHEN YOU PUMP IT A MILE RIGHT AND A TREE KNOCKS IT BACK INTO THE FAIRWAY
- ▶ WHEN THE RANDOM SINGLE GOES OFF WITH THE GROUP IN FRONT OF YOU
- ▶ WHEN YOU FIND A PRO V1 WHILE LOOKING FOR YOUR KIRKLAND
- ▶ WHEN IT WOULD HAVE GONE 12 FEET BY BUT HIT THE PIN YOU WERE TOO LAZY TO PULL
- ▶ WHEN THE PLAYERS YOU HIT INTO TURN OUT TO BE PACIFISTS

ANATOMY OF TPC SAWGRASS' 17TH HOLE



CLEVELAND CBX2



SO MANY WAYS TO SAY IT,
ONLY ONE WEDGE TO FIX IT



PUT FORGIVENESS IN YOUR SHORT GAME

The short game is full of flubs, duffs and chilly-dips. So we made this: The Cleveland CBX 2. It's got off-the-charts forgiveness thanks to a Hollow-Cavity. Which means, you're pretty much guaranteed to hit the sweet spot. But with a Dynamic Sole and Rotex face, you'll still have the versatility to hit any shot you dream up. It's the cavity back wedge for cavity back golfers, helping you avoid your worst shots, whatever you call them.



AGE 25
LIVES Coral Springs, Fla.

STORY 11-time winner on the LPGA Tour, including one major, the 2014 ANA Inspiration.

TRAVEL PARTNER 2017 was a really hard year. It put me in a way I never thought I'd be in life. I was volunteering at puppy stores when I met Leo, my Havapoo. I needed a change, something, and he's been a lifesaver. I travel with him, and he's there to greet me when I get back to my room. He's amazing. Heading into this season, I feel optimistic—and independent.

—WITH KEELY LEVINS

CLUB	YARDS*
DRIVER	255
3-WOOD	240
3-UTILITY	215
4-IRON	190
6-IRON	175
7-IRON	165
8-IRON	155
9-IRON	145
PW	135
47°	125
50°	115
55°	105
60°	85

* CARRY DISTANCE

What's in My Bag

Lexi Thompson



DRIVER

SPECS Cobra King F9 Speedback (9° set to 7.5°), Fujikura Ventus Blue 60x, 45 inches.

▶ My loft is low, but I swing from the inside and hit up, so I launch it high. I always test drivers in the wind. I need to see that driving flight on good shots and mis-hits. Looks matter, too. If I don't like the shape, I'll rule it out. I'm switching to the Speedzone soon.



FAIRWAY WOOD/UTILITY IRON

SPECS Fairway: King LTD, 13.5°, (Lexi Blue), Graphite Design GP 6S shaft. Utility iron: Srixon Z U85, 3-iron, 20°

▶ I hit the 3-wood off the tee a fair amount. I can launch it lower than my driver so the wind doesn't affect it as much. I have a bit more control over it, too, so I can rely on it in situations where I need to hit a fairway.



IRONS

SPECS Cobra S2 Forged (4-, 6-iron through pitching wedge), Project X 5.0 shafts.

▶ Cobra doesn't make these anymore, but I fell in love with them from the start, and I've been playing this same model for nine years. I've even kept extra sets at my house. This is my last set, so I'm testing the new King Tour. I'll get them in this season, but it isn't easy to change when you love something.



WEDGES

SPECS Cobra King, V Grind, 48° (bent to 47°), 52° (bent to 50°), 56° (bent to 55°), 60°; Dynamic Gold S200 shafts.

▶ I kept getting the 125-yard shot but didn't have a club for it. I don't hit many long iron shots, so I took out my 5-iron, made my 4-iron slightly weaker to lessen the gap, and put the 47-degree wedge in. It's been great to have a full-swing club for that distance.



PUTTER

SPECS Evnroll ER2, 34 inches, custom "reverse torque" Evnroll shaft, WinnPro X 1.18 grip.

▶ There are so many putters out there, and I've tried a lot. Sometimes it's a mallet, sometimes, like now, it's a blade. I've been using this one for a year. It's all about confidence. The thick grooves on the face give it a quicker, steadier roll for me. I love how it comes off the face.



LUCKY BUGS

▶ I'm superstitious. I wear ladybug earrings and keep these charms in my bag. If I'm chasing after something, it's probably a ladybug. I pick them up, make a wish and blow them away.



DOTTIE'S DOT

▶ My ball is the Bridgestone Tour B X. Dottie Pepper told me to use a dot at the 2013 Solheim Cup and focus on it once I had my read and speed. It keeps my eyes still.



TIPS FROM TIGER

▶ I noticed my hands were shaking during rounds, so I called Tiger and he asked what I eat on-course. He said to add these peanut-butter-and-banana sandwiches on wheat bread. I eat half of one every three holes to keep my energy constant.

"I've been playing this same model
[of Cobra irons] for nine years."



“The game has been a source of great joy and pain for me.”

A Dream Unfulfilled

Golf is hard enough without navigating its culture as a gay man

BY JOHN BROOKS

GROWING UP, as I began to make sense of my sexuality, I had dreams of becoming the first “out” male professional golfer. But that didn’t happen. I never felt fully at ease within the golf community, which is strange to say because I really love the game. It’s the foundation of my relationship with my dad and has truly shaped my life. ► I grew up in a house where athletics were encouraged. My dad was the director of parks and recreation in Frankfort, Ky., for 38 years. I didn’t like most sports. I was pretty tall, so everyone assumed I’d be good at basketball, but I was terrible. Tennis was kind of OK. But I had a real affinity for golf from the beginning.

I started playing when I was 5 or 6. My dad, Steve, and his father, RT, enjoyed playing, and they would take me to Juniper Hill, a municipal course. Part of why I loved golf was because I was an extremely shy kid, and an individual sport like golf doesn’t conflict with that. I’m sure part of my shyness had to do with being gay. When you’re that young, it’s not something you’re aware of, but I was aware that I was different from the other boys.

The only athletic thing my dad forced me to do was play in the junior city tournament when I was 10. I didn’t want to, but I ended up winning my age group by a lot. Golf became my identity. I made the high school team when I was in sixth grade. I worked at Juniper Hill in the summers. My dad’s office was at the course, so I’d ride with him, or I’d walk the mile to the course from our house. I’d clean the bathrooms, take the carts out, then play golf all day. My grandfather was

retired, so we played together a lot. On special days, I’d go to lunch with him. Otherwise, I subsisted on hot dogs and Snickers. I was one of those golf-course kids, and I loved it.

Golf saved me in a lot of ways. I found this thing that I was good at, that people respected, and that other people found difficult. When I was in my early teens, I was playing with a lot of adults, which I liked. Kids can be cruel, but adults generally aren’t mean to children.

About that time, kids began teasing me for being a “fag.” I was too young to understand what the word meant, or even who or what I was, but other boys used the fact I was different to hurt me. I cried a lot at school. I became depressed and thought about suicide often. I wanted to be anyone else who wasn’t different. The golf course became a place I could escape to.

Occasionally someone would tease me at the golf course, but skill is such a great equalizer. As I moved through my early teenage years, I became known as a really good golfer. I won a lot of junior

tournaments, including our city junior event three or four times, once by 17 strokes. I became better known for being a good golfer than this little gay kid.

The teasing continued in high school until I finally confronted my primary bully, who was always calling me gay or fag. One day I said: “Yes, I am. Why? Are you interested?” And that did it. He never bothered me again.

After high school, I went to the College of Charleston in South Carolina to play golf. This is difficult to talk about because I don’t want to appear bitter. I’m not, but I had a miserable experience, and I played miserably. I felt privileged to have had the opportunity, but the environment wasn’t one in which I felt valued or safe. I had a couple allies on the team, both of whom I’m still friends with, but I wasn’t out at that time. I was there to get an education and play golf, and

I didn’t see why my sexuality mattered. But my teammates, and certainly my coach, picked up on it and treated me very differently.

Playing any sport at a high level is incredibly difficult, but if you’re dealing with something that no one else is having to deal with, you’re already over par in a way. I’m so glad for young people growing up today, because attitudes have changed, but it makes me wonder how things could’ve been different for me had the environment in college been welcoming and affirmative.

I came out to my parents right before my 19th birthday. I was home for spring break and told them we needed to talk. They were surprised but also relieved because they thought I wanted to quit golf. They had sacrificed a lot so I could have experiences and opportunities to play. There was an adjustment period, but my parents are kind and loving and have always supported me.

However, I did quit playing after my sophomore year, and for two years I didn’t play golf at all. After graduating college, I moved to Orlando to get into the golf business and start playing again. I got a job at a private club. I was 22 and entering a period of my life when I didn’t want to hide who I was anymore, but I still found it intimidating to be myself in a country-club environment.

When I was 23, I moved back in with my parents in Kentucky and recommitted to my game. During the next three years, I played the best golf of my life. I participated in two U.S. Mid-Amateurs and one U.S. Amateur Public Links. But the highlight of my golfing life was playing in the St. Andrews Links Trophy, an international amateur event. It was incredible. Here I am at St. Andrews, the home of golf, with my dad on the bag,





and the starter announces my name and home course of Juniper Hill on the first tee. I loved that moment. It showed how much I'd accomplished.

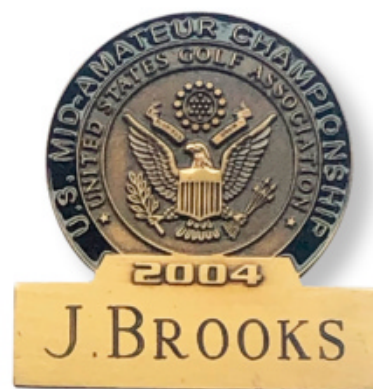
It was around this time I met my partner, Erik, so my life was coming together in a lot of ways. I was finally out, and my golf was really good. I got to a level where I had complete control over my game. In 2005, Erik's job took us to London, where we lived for four years. I joined a club, but I didn't tell the people there I was gay. I was afraid they wouldn't let me join. Golf there wasn't completely welcoming; I played a course with a friend who was a member of the Ladies European Tour, and she couldn't go into the clubhouse because she's a woman. She had to pay for her round through the snack-bar window. There's a lot about the game that's wonderful, but there are also things that are maddening.

After London, Erik and I moved to Chicago, and I joined a gay sports league that included golf. I had never encountered anything like that. I was 33, and it was the first time I had knowingly met a gay man on a golf course or even talked about it. That's one thing about golf: If you walk, you spend a lot

► **Clockwise from top left: Brooks, at age 15, with his father in 1992; player badges from his USGA amateur events; showing off his action at age 14.**

of time talking to the people you're playing with. When I was young, this petrified me because I was afraid I would be found out, and people wouldn't want to play with me—or worse. Being a gay golfer still isn't a normal part of our golf culture. On the PGA Tour, when it's over, someone's wife or girlfriend typically runs out onto the 18th green. At the Ryder Cup, they have a parade of wives and girlfriends. This is all perfectly fine, but gay athletes want that normalcy, too.

Erik and I moved to Louisville in 2013, and I joined a nice club where I had a few friends. I was there three years and got to know the members. I was treated well, but a number of them belonged to churches that, at least until recently, practiced and encouraged conversion therapy. After a round, I often would exhale when I got back to my car. This was nothing new—I'd been doing this all my life—but I grew wary of having to feel this way in my golf life when I didn't have to in my social circle. It's hard



to explain, but I think it's important: Some people have prejudiced views about race or sexual orientation but then are friends with someone who is part of one of those groups, and think, *Oh, that person is OK; I know him.* But every



person within that community is an individual, too.

I'm 42 now and not playing much golf. I've been making art to some degree my whole life and have been focusing on running my gallery, painting and selling my work. My career is finally in a good place, but golf is never far from my mind. I went to the U.S. Open in 2018 at Shinnecock Hills. I attended the 2012 Ryder Cup at Medinah. Last fall, I drove up to French Lick in Indiana to watch the Senior LPGA Championship. I can still cite stats that I memorized about the great LPGA players of the 1980s. As an architecture buff and a huge Seth Raynor fan, one of the things I really miss is playing great layouts. Some favorites of mine include Pinehurst No. 2, Royal St. George's, Southampton Golf Club, Friar's Head, Valhalla and the Old Course.

The game has been a source of great joy and pain for me. Often, when it became known that I was gay, I felt tolerated. But I suspect this was because of my skills and politeness, but who wants to just feel tolerated? A lot of LGBTQ kids today don't seem to think about being anything other than themselves. This is progress and can only lead to them reaching their potential. Perhaps it won't be long before we see an openly gay golfer playing regularly on the PGA Tour. As for me, there have been times when I thought I could fill the void left by golf with other things, but I've come to accept that's not possible. Golf has a place in my life, and I know I'm not done with it. —WITH KEELY LEVINS

This story is part of a Golf Digest.com series called "Golf, Interrupted," which presents first-person accounts of perseverance and courage in the game. Have a story you'd like to share? Send an email to GolfDigest_GolfInterrupted@discovery.com.



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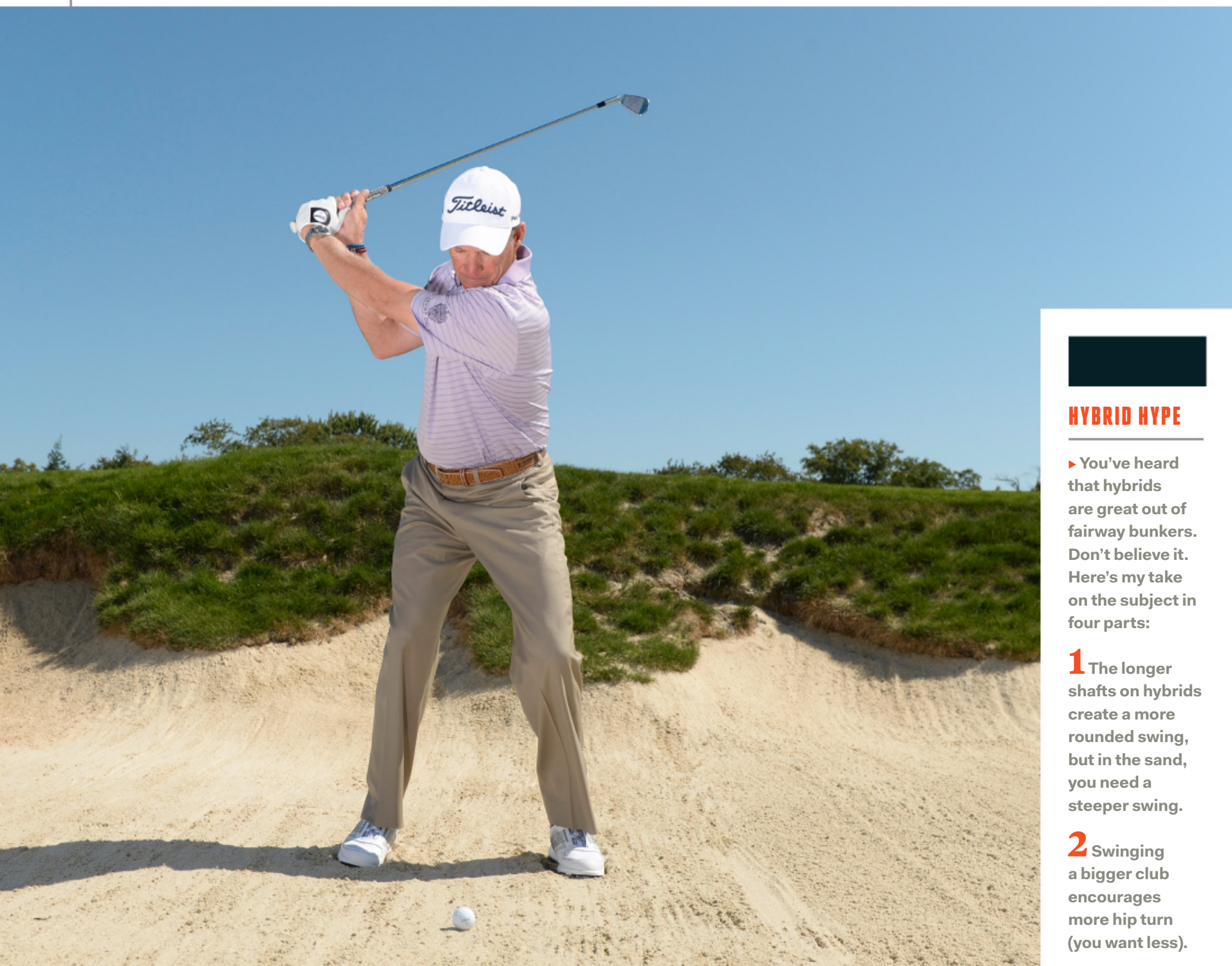
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19_227643



“Nothing will throw off your swing quicker than an aggressive leg drive.”



HYBRID HYPE

► You've heard that hybrids are great out of fairway bunkers. Don't believe it. Here's my take on the subject in four parts:

1 The longer shafts on hybrids create a more rounded swing, but in the sand, you need a steeper swing.

2 Swinging a bigger club encourages more hip turn (you want less).

3 Hybrids are designed to hit the ball long distances; you just need to get back in play.

4 I know some of you will hit them anyway. If you do, make sure you open the clubface, as we talked about, and aim a little left to compensate. (Now forget I told you that!)

Command in the Sand

How to stay steady, and hit it flush

THE ONE REQUIREMENT from fairway bunkers is, hit the ball first. Catching even a little sand before the ball results in a shot that goes nowhere. So let's tweak your technique with the goal of making clean contact.

First, a few setup adjustments. Grip down an inch to promote a steeper swing into the ball, and open the face to counteract the ball being slightly above your feet, which happens when you stand in the sand. Also, angle in your back foot so your weight favors your front side.

Next, swing the club back with an early (and full) wrist set, but restrict your hip rotation. A big hip turn can cause your feet to slide out of position, and that makes it tough to get your weight forward at impact. So restrict those hips, and be patient during the backswing—nerves might make you speed up.

Finally, focus on swinging your arms through while keeping your lower body quiet. Nothing will throw off your shot quicker than an aggressive leg drive coming down. Swing your arms smoothly past your body. That's your best chance of making ball-first contact.

MICHAEL BREED is Golf Digest's Chief Digital Instructor.



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THE

Art & Science

OF CUSTOM CLUB FITTING

Promotional Feature

BY LEONARD FINKEL AND CASSANDRA BAUSCH

With the introduction of new technology to measure and analyze golf swings, custom club fitting has exploded. Still, a *GOLF* magazine study found that 90% of U.S. golfers may still be playing with improperly fit clubs. That's where custom club fitter Club Champion comes in.

When quality is on the line, every detail matters and Club Champion fittings epitomize that. Everything from shaft flex to swingweight is measured, tweaked and optimized for each club. Each element of a shot — smash factor, ball speed, swing speed, etc. — is assessed and manipulated, matching metrics with a solution from 35,000+ hittable head and shaft combinations. Unlike other fitters, Club Champion has the entire world of golf equipment at their fingertips.

Because every swing is different, each fitting is tailored to that customer. Club Champion employs a coupling system that allows any head to connect to any shaft providing unlimited resources to find the right fit. The company's approach is brand-agnostic and unbiased; no specific vendor is promoted. The only goal is to find the best combination of components to lower scores.

A *Golf Digest* study found that eight of nine Club Champion custom-fit golfers lowered their score by as much as six strokes per round and added an average 21 yards off the tee. Better distance, greater accuracy, fewer shots... a Club Champion fitting is the secret sauce for anyone looking to play their best golf.

Ross Lemon (Augusta, GA) is now two clubs longer with his irons. He acknowledges that custom equipment is an investment but waves away any doubts about the value saying, "I'm going to play close to 100 rounds this year, maybe more than that, and I want to play with the best equipment that I can play with."

With more than 70 locations nationwide, Club Champion delivers Tour-quality fittings and unrivaled results to golfers

coast to coast. The #1 fitter in the country, fitting and building optimized equipment is all they do. They are the only fitter to calibrate their stores' loft, lie and swingweight machines to match those in their build shop. This guarantees the clubs you test in your fitting are exactly what you'll get. They even have a Perfect Fit Guarantee.

"Details such as loft, lie, shaft flex, kick point and swingweight can be the difference between a 250 yard drive down the middle and a 225 yard tee shot in the rough," says renowned instructor David Leadbetter. "Club Champion can help any golfer play better by providing clubs that fit their game."



Club Champion hires seasoned fitters and golf professionals who are trained at Club Champion University in the art and science of club fitting. They receive bi-weekly continuing education and product training that keeps them ahead of the game and maintains their ability to confidently fit any golfer using any brand of clubs.

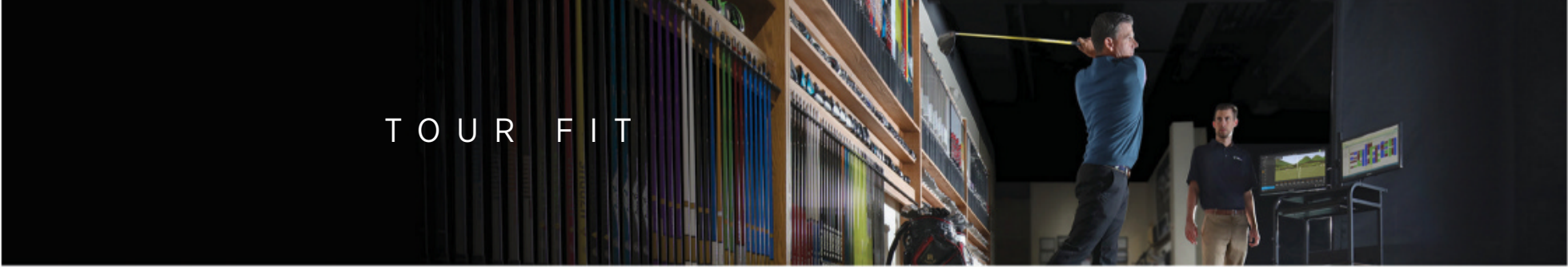
A custom club fitting at Club Champion is for golfers of every skill level, but this premium service is geared toward golfers seeking optimized performance. "Club Champion truly is one of the most innovative club fitters in the business. They provide a consumer experience that is undeniably helpful for all golfers to play better," said David Abeles, CEO of TaylorMade Golf.

Ranked by *Golf Digest* among the 100 Best Club Fitters every year since the inception of the list, the fitting experience coupled with an unrivaled club building process makes Club Champion the fitter of choice. For more information, visit clubchampiongolf.com or call (888) 340-7820.

"Details such as loft, lie, shaft flex, kick point and swingweight can be the difference between a 250 yard drive down the middle and a 225 yard tee shot in the rough."

DAVID LEADBETTER, RENOWNED GOLF INSTRUCTOR

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Jim Nantz

Cherishing milestones, and hoping to find a missing tape

ON JAN. 21, Jack Nicklaus had a birthday and attached his name to a number that has always been foreign to him: 80. It's hard to comprehend that the ageless summer of "Jack is Back" at Baltusrol and Oak Hill occurred half his lifetime ago. Jack would be the first to tell you that the pace of play in life definitely speeds up on the second nine.

But what a turn back to the clubhouse this has been for Jack and his beloved wife, Barbara, who also posted an 80, on Feb. 28. Together they have teamed up for what this July will be 60 years of a blissful partnership. As if it's not enough to be the greatest player in the history of golf, along came the second act, the Nicklaus Children's Hospitals. There are 17 of them now, and one could argue they represent a far greater accomplishment than his 18 professional major championships. God bless Jack and Barbara.

As if the Nicklaus' birthdays weren't enough to celebrate, another Jack—Jack Burke Jr.—took down 97 candles on Jan. 29. Jackie has long been a revered figure in the game, and his career deserves deeper appreciation. He won 16 PGA Tour events—including two major championships—played on five Ryder Cup teams and co-founded, with Jimmy Demaret, Champions Golf Club, one of the greatest clubs in America. It's strangely in keeping with Jackie being widely overlooked that his greatest conquest—the 1956 Masters—was the casualty of one of the more unfortunate mistakes in the history of sports television.

The 1956 Masters was the first ever televised. In those days, CBS presented a broadcast that was cutting edge for its time but primitive by today's standard. It aired on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but the total broadcast time for the three days was 2½ hours. Only the 15th through 18th holes were covered, and CBS had a mere seven cameras. Cables and wires were strewn everywhere, and only later would they be



All the old Masters shows are accounted for—except for the first one.

buried underground. The broadcast team was comprised of two men, the legendary Chris Schenkel and veteran Bud Palmer.

Some 10 million viewers tuned in that year, and clearly the Masters on TV had come to stay. With that, one would think every aspect would be recorded for posterity. But that's where it gets interesting. In the early days of television, the only way to make a permanent record of a live broadcast was to separately film a monitor that displayed the broadcast. This "picture of a picture" was known as a Kinescope. The film used to make the Kinescope would later be transferred to videotape. Through this process, we're able to enjoy many old TV presentations.

And therein lies the tragedy of the 1956 Masters. For years, CBS Sports stashed its historic footage in a Fort Lee, N.J., warehouse. In 1987, an enterprising young tape librarian named Chris Svendsen (now one of CBS' star directors) accepted the role of Chief Archivist. He spent countless hours taking inventory of every show, many stored in ancient film canisters that held memories of the greatest moments in American sport. Chris discovered that all the old Masters shows were accounted for—except for the first one. The original Kinescope film was missing and probably never transferred to videotape. After years of fruitless search, it's presumed that it's gone for good.

For golf lovers it's a tragedy, but in truth all the networks were guilty of eradicating important moments in sports television. Super Bowl I, for example, was broadcast by

CBS and NBC on Jan. 15, 1967. Both networks erased their copies of the broadcast, and it was thought they were gone forever. Solace came four years ago when a North Carolina man named Troy Haupt miraculously came forward with a tape of the game. It turned out that Haupt's late father had film-documented the Green Bay Packers versus Kansas City Chiefs game in its entirety, save for a few third-quarter plays when he needed to change tapes on his recording device, known as a Quadruplex. He stashed the recordings in the family attic. It remains the only known copy of the original broadcast.

Could such a surprise be forthcoming on Jackie Burke's green-jacket performance? Could golf's version of Troy Haupt one day come forward with the 1956 Masters, retrieved from some attic in the hinterlands? Is there a copy deep in an archive somewhere, unlabeled but waiting for a curious individual to place it in a compatible machine, hit "play" and see the grainy but unmistakable images of Augusta National?

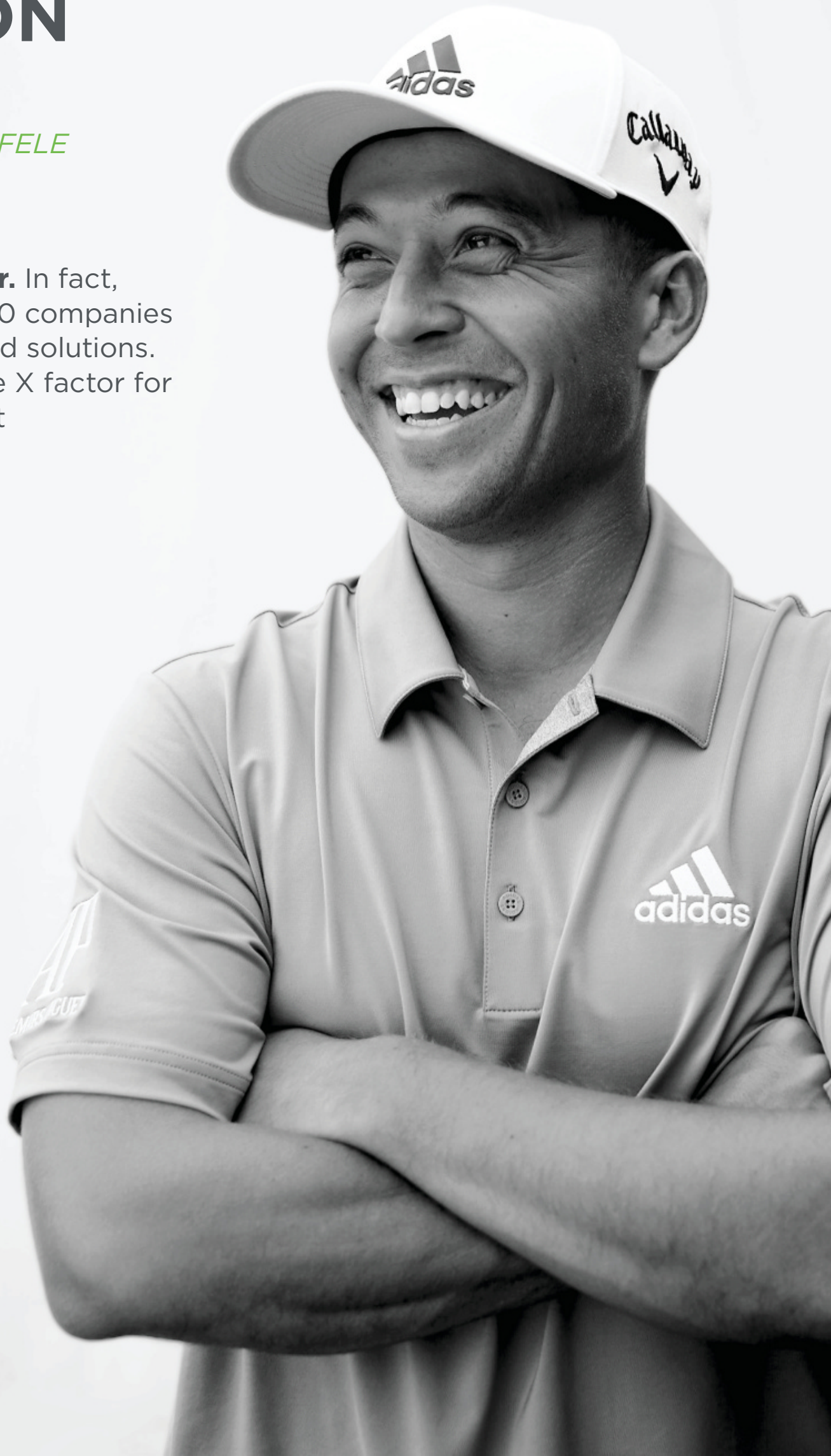
If the tape exists, it surely will show Jackie holing a 15-footer for birdie on the 71st hole and then securing the win with a magnificent par save from the right greenside bunker at the last. It will reveal not only an ecstatic Mr. Burke, but a man with slumped shoulders—Ken Venturi, my late running mate at CBS and a brilliant player, who as an amateur held the 54-hole lead but then shot an 80 to relinquish the tournament to Jackie.

Triumph and tragedy, in living black and white, for the world of golf to share. We can only hope. **G**

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XANDER SCHAUFFELE

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► KEEP YOUR **COMPOSURE**

DEER



IN THE **CRITICAL MOMENTS**

ZEN

I F PRACTICE AND PREPARATION were all it took to prevent nerves on the course, tour players would never get rattled. We hit a ton of practice shots and spend hours and hours preparing, and we have teachers and trainers and mental-game coaches sharing all kinds of sophisticated improvement techniques.

But even with all that, I can tell you that nervousness and excitement are still there. Those feelings are a big reason I love to compete—to test myself on the very highest level.

How do you do well on those tests—whether they’re Sundays at major championships or a weekend match that’s really important? You don’t have to be a superhero and pull off shots you’ve never hit before. Your goal should be to put yourself in position to play as close to your regular game as possible. That’s what I did in the final round of the 2018 Open Championship at Carnoustie, when I was in the final pairing with Jordan Spieth. I made some nervous mistakes early in that round, but I got more and more comfortable, made some birdies and was tied for the lead with Francesco Molinari late. I ended up making a bogey on 17 and tying for second (Molinari won). That might seem like a failure, but for me, it was an awesome learning experience, and proof that I had it in me to play my regular game in a very tense moment.



Still, it’s been a process. I learned from a young age that my tendency was to really choke the grip during a big moment. I’d tense up in my hands, which would then tighten my forearms, and I’d try to rip one as hard as I could. But when your arms are tense, your swing doesn’t perform the same as normal. It’s like when you’re playing in bad weather, and your hands are a little wet or your grips are a touch slippery. You’ll squeeze the handle too hard, and the clubhead won’t release. You’ll block it right of the fairway on one drive and then try to twist the club shut more and wind up hitting a big hook left of the fairway on the next one. Now

you’re on the next tee in a panic because you aren’t sure which direction the next drive is heading. You start to swing defensively, trying to steer the ball instead of winding up and letting it go.

That’s why grip pressure is something I check before every shot now—full swings and short game. I pay specific attention to how the club feels in my hands, and I’m always trying to match it to what I would feel if I were hitting a practice shot on a Tuesday. Just the ritual of feeling the grip in my fingers and making loose swings is relaxing. It reminds me to keep my jaw loose instead of tight and clenched, and my shoulders and neck fluid and flexible.

► **UNDER PRESSURE** Schauffele fell just short of winning the 2018 Open Championship, but the experience taught him how to handle nerves much better.

Being more in touch and aware of what your body is doing is a different strategy than what you hear from some players or performance coaches, who describe “going blank” as the goal under pressure. I want to be aware, because awareness means you can be more in control instead of just getting carried along. For example, I actively monitor my pulse when I play, because that’s usually the first indication that you’re feeling more pressure. As tension starts to build, it translates

into a faster heart rate. Be mindful of that. A smartwatch or fitness tracker can monitor it, or you can take your pulse by counting the beats for 15 seconds and multiplying by four. Mine is usually around 100 beats per minute when I'm playing, but it can get up into the 140s as things get amped up.

Knowing when your heart starts to race means you can take steps to deal with it. I do that with a breathing technique that slows things down. Focusing on how you breathe also gives you a process to occupy your mind, making it harder to dwell on things that would make you more nervous. Anybody can breathe better, and it's something you can work on right now. Inhale through your nose for a full four seconds, and feel the air go down to your solar plexus. Exhale through your mouth, making sure you keep your jaw relaxed. The time element is key, because if you start to breathe too quickly, you'll hyperventilate—which just ramps up your pulse.

Whenever I walk onto the tee, get to my ball or start the process of hitting a putt, I'm using that breathing technique to keep my heart rate under control. Just



'ANYBODY CAN BREATHE BETTER, AND IT'S SOMETHING YOU CAN WORK ON RIGHT NOW.'

like my pre-shot routine, that routine stays the same no matter if it's the second hole on Thursday or my approach with a one-shot lead on the 17th hole on Sunday. That's important, because if you change from what you normally do in

bigger moments, you're just reinforcing the nervousness you might feel. All shots aren't the same, obviously, but the closer you can get to treating them the same, the closer you'll get to letting your shot-making, not your stress level, determine the outcome.

A few months after the 2018 Open Championship, I got into position again to win at the WGC-HSBC Champions in China. The 18th hole called for a fade—the opposite of my preferred shot shape, especially with the driver—but this tee shot didn't bother me. Why? I had made a point to play it from that tee on Tuesday and Wednesday during practice rounds. I wanted to make sure I was comfortable with it so I could trust it when it counted. On the last hole of regulation, I hit a great tee shot, cutting it off the edge of a dangerous bunker to set up a birdie that got me into a playoff with Tony Finau. Then I had to immediately go back and hit that tee shot again in the playoff, so I went through my routine and played a little video in my mind of the fade I had just hit. Even with pressure mounting, I pulled it off again and made another birdie for the win. Test passed.

—WITH MATTHEW RUDY



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GREAT GOLF INSTRUCTION
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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GOLF INSTRUCTOR SIWOO LEE OF SOUTH KOREA



ALL THOSE national flags you see next to the names on the leader

boards at PGA and LPGA Tour events should be validation that golf is a global game. But just to prove the point, we conducted a worldwide search to identify the best instructors outside the U.S. What we found were 75 teachers from 33 countries in virtually every region of the Earth. (To our knowledge, there’s no top-flight instruction happening in the polar ice caps, but apologies if we’re wrong.) These are *Golf Digest’s Best International Teachers*.

Great coaching is being delivered in dozens of languages from Dutch to Mandarin, but the processes seem universally similar: Simplify the complexities of the game, so that even the most rank beginners experience successes and enjoyment out on the golf course.

“It used to be that to get good golf instruction, you had to live in one of a few obvious places where golf is king, places such as the U.S. or the U.K. or Japan,” says renowned British instructor Denis Pugh, who teaches Francesco Molinari on the PGA Tour. “But as I’ve traveled around the world, I’m finding that golf’s popularity has made it much easier to get quality teaching no matter where you live. The growth is obvious—and exciting.”

—RON KASPRISKE

SANTIAGO GARAT	ARGENTINA
STEVE BANN	AUSTRALIA
ANNE-MARIE KNIGHT	AUSTRALIA
DALE LYNCH	AUSTRALIA
DENIS MCDADE	AUSTRALIA
IAN TRIGGS	AUSTRALIA
STUART MORGAN	AUSTRIA
MITCHELL SPEARMAN	BAHAMAS
JEROME THEUNIS	BELGIUM
HENRY BRUNTON	CANADA
KATHY GOOK	CANADA
ROB HOULDING	CANADA
DEREK INGRAM	CANADA
SHAUHEEN NAKHJAVANI	CANADA
MATT WILSON	CANADA
EDUARDO MIQUEL	CHILE
CONNIE CHEN	CHINA
DAVID NORQUAY	CHINA
KEVIN SMELTZ	CHINA
JORGE MESA	COLOMBIA
JIRI NEMECEK	CZECH REPUBLIC
KAREL SKOPOVY JUN	CZECH REPUBLIC
DAVID DICKMEISS	DENMARK
ANDREAS KALI	DENMARK
JAMIE MCCONNELL	DUBAI
ENRICO VILLO	ESTONIA
MIKAEL PILTZ	FINLAND
ALAIN ALBERTI	FRANCE
STEPHANE BARRAS	FRANCE
PAUL DYER	GERMANY
IAN HOLLOWAY	GERMANY
JESSE GREWAL	INDIA
RANDY MAWUNTU	INDONESIA
NEIL MANCHIP	IRELAND
BRENDAN MCDAID	IRELAND
SHANE O'GRADY	IRELAND
SERGIO BERTAINA	ITALY
ROBERTO ZAPPA	ITALY
TODD BAKER	JAPAN
TORU INOUE	JAPAN
YOSHIE KOYAMA	JAPAN
HORACIO MORALES	MEXICO
ALEJANDRO MUNOZ	MEXICO
TOM STICKNEY	MEXICO
PHIL ALLEN	NETHERLANDS
SUSAN FARRON	NEW ZEALAND
GUY WILSON	NEW ZEALAND
ROB CHENEY	PORTUGAL
JUSTIN HAN	SINGAPORE
PETER BERMAN	SOUTH AFRICA
JOHN DICKSON	SOUTH AFRICA
JAMIE GOUGH	SOUTH AFRICA
DEREK JAMES	SOUTH AFRICA
HYUNJEE CHUN	SOUTH KOREA
DUCH HO KOH	SOUTH KOREA
SIWOO LEE	SOUTH KOREA
ROBIN SYMES	SOUTH KOREA
JASON FLOYD	SPAIN
JOSE VICENTE PEREZ	SPAIN
JESUS RODRIGUEZ	SPAIN
CHRISTIAN HARDIN	SWEDEN
HENRIK LUNDQVIST	SWEDEN
HENRI REIS	SWEDEN
MARIO CALIGARI	SWITZERLAND
NOPPAKHUN WONGLAW	THAILAND
MICHAEL BANNON	UNITED KINGDOM
STUART CLAYTON	UNITED KINGDOM
PETER COWEN	UNITED KINGDOM
PHIL KENYON	UNITED KINGDOM
HUGH MARR	UNITED KINGDOM
CHRIS MURTAGH	UNITED KINGDOM
ANDREW NICHOLSON	UNITED KINGDOM
DENIS PUGH	UNITED KINGDOM
JAMES RIDYARD	UNITED KINGDOM
MIKE WALKER	UNITED KINGDOM

GET STARTED LIKE A PRO

► TWO EASY WAYS TO MAKE YOUR SWING REPEATABLE

BY HORACIO MORALES • MEXICO

IT STANDS TO REASON that if you can get your swing off to a good start, you'll greatly improve your chance of hitting a quality shot. And I want to give you two easy ways to do it. Let's start with your setup. Instead of addressing the ball with your feet



'THE CLUB SHOULD STILL BE OUT IN FRONT OF YOUR CHEST AT THIS POINT IN THE SWING, NOT BEHIND YOU.'

perpendicular to the target line, flare them a little. Why? It improves your body's ability to rotate back and through during the swing and helps prevent a common problem that is a big reason amateurs struggle to make good contact with the ball—swaying. You don't have to be exact, but I recommend opening the trail foot by 20 to 25 degrees and the lead foot a little more than that (*above*). You'll find you can turn much better on both sides of the ball without swaying out of position. It's great for consistency.

My other tip involves the first few feet of your backswing. Another common mistake is fanning the clubface open in the takeaway. It happens when the club is being controlled by the arms and not the shoulders. Your torso should get the swing started. When the takeaway is shoulder-driven, the clubface stays square to your path, which puts you in much better position to hit an accurate shot. You can verify that the clubface is square by looking back at it when the shaft is roughly parallel to the ground in the backswing (*left*). At that point, the clubface should be pointing down toward the ball. Like I said, if you can set up to the ball and take the club back a little better, you're on your way to consistently good golf shots.

HORACIO MORALES is director of instruction at Chapultepec Golf Club near Mexico City. He teaches Gaby Lopez on the LPGA Tour.

REV UP YOUR SWING SPEED

► A TOWEL CAN TEACH YOU TO POWER THROUGH IMPACT

BY PAUL DYER • GERMANY

SOMETIMES the simplest things can be used to make your golf swing better. That's certainly true of a standard bath towel, which has a lot of uses as a teaching tool. One of my favorites is using it to train good sequencing in the swing. Many



'TO MAKE THE TOWEL SNAP, YOU NEED TO STRAIGHTEN YOUR LEFT LEG AND STOP ROTATING YOUR HIPS.'

amateurs struggle with the concept of completing the backswing and then starting down with gradual acceleration that puts the fastest part of the swing where it should be—through the impact zone. Instead, they rush through the backswing and the start of the downswing and get out of sync. Let me show you how a towel can correct that.

Roll up a bath towel and grab it at one end with your hands slightly apart, or you can use your golf grip if you like. Next, mimic a backswing as if you were holding a club, and wind up until the towel drapes across your back (*left*). When you feel the towel splay, that's your cue to start the downswing.

The goal is to get the towel to make a snapping sound around the point where your club would make contact with the ball. To do that, you have to press down hard into the ground with your front foot. As your body unwinds in the direction the towel is moving, you'll notice that to make the towel snap, your left leg has to straighten and your hips have to stop rotating. That lets your arms and the towel release toward the target (*above*). It's a quick and powerful move. Repeat this drill several times, and you'll get a good feel for the sequence of body, arms and then club when you swing.

PAUL DYER is a master certified instructor for the Leadbetter Golf Academy in Velbert, Germany. He has been teaching for more than 25 years.

DOM FUREORE • PHOTOGRAPHS OF SIWOO LEE COURTESY OF GOLF DIGEST KOREA



**'THE KEY TO GREAT GREENSIDE
BUNKER SHOTS IS TO
STAY IN YOUR ADDRESS POSTURE
AS YOU SWING.'**



THUMP THE SAND

► **A DRILL TO MAKE
BUNKER PLAY EASIER**

BY SIWOO LEE • SOUTH KOREA

THE BEST THING about hitting shots in greenside bunkers is that you don't have to be perfect with your contact to get a good result. If you slide the clubhead through the sand under the ball, your wedge can touch down anywhere from a few inches behind the ball to right behind it, and your shot is going to carry onto the green as long as you complete the swing. Knowing this should make you less anxious when you find your ball in a bunker.

If you're nervous, your body and arms tend to stiffen, and you straighten up hoping to scoop the ball out with some exaggerated body action. The likely result is a mis-hit, too fat or thin. To improve your contact, think about lowering your center of gravity as you swing down. A drill I like to use to help prevent standing up on bunker shots is to hold your wedge with your trail hand while putting your lead hand on your chest (*left*). Now make a swing letting the club glide through the sand while the back of your lead hand faces downward through impact. Your body should remain steady as your arm swings the club. If you maintain this down-facing position with your lead hand, your center of gravity won't change from address to impact, and you'll thump the sand behind the ball. Don't forget to finish the swing!

SIWOO LEE is the lead instructor at Big Fish Golf Academy in Seoul, South Korea. He teaches Jin Young Ko, who is No. 1 on the Rolex Women's World Golf Ranking.





WHAT PGA T%OUR PROS REALLY TH?NK

Our Survey Asks
Fun **Quest?ons**,
Tough **Quest?ons**
& Silly **Quest?ons**
*by Dave Shedloski
& John Huggan*



WILL TIGER WOODS WIN a major this year? Will he still be competitive at Augusta National when he's 60? Will Rory McIlroy eventually win the Masters to complete the career Grand Slam? Who's the funniest player on tour? How often have you seen a player break a rule and try to get away with it? We posed these and other questions to 46 PGA Tour players, and their answers (and comments) might surprise you. *Note:* Some players didn't answer all the questions. Might have been the ones about marijuana and performance-enhancing drugs.



YOU GET TO CHOOSE ONE TOUR PRO TO BE ON YOUR SIDE IN A BAR FIGHT. WHO ARE YOU PICKING?		%
Ernie Els		27.5
Jason Kokrak		10
Scott Stallings		7.5
Ricky Barnes		5
Tony Finau		5
Brooks Koepka		5
Grayson Murray		5
Shawn Stefani		5
Gary Woodland		5
Andres Gonzales		2.5
Charley Hoffman		2.5
Dustin Johnson		2.5
Jamie Lovemark		2.5
Robert MacIntyre		2.5
Phil Mickelson		2.5
Rory Sabbatini		2.5
Vijay Singh		2.5
Henrik Stenson		2.5
Gary Woodland		2.5

COMMENTS "I'd probably pick myself because I've *been* in a bar fight." ... "I can definitely think of a few caddies I'd want on my side."

WHO IS THE FUNNIEST GUY ON TOUR?		
Tim Herron		17
Jason Bohn		11
Kevin Kisner		11
Pat Perez		11
Henrik Stenson		11
Chesson Hadley		6
Phil Mickelson		6
Boo Weekley		6
Lanto Griffin		3
Colt Knost		3
Russell Knox		3
Eddie Pepperell		3
Carl Pettersson		3
Harold Varner III		3
Johnson Wagner		3

COMMENT "I can't say myself; I still have some dignity."

WILL RORY MCILROY EVER WIN THE MASTERS TO COMPLETE THE CAREER GRAND SLAM?		
Yes		89
No		11

COMMENTS "It's not inevitable. Ask Ernie Els and Greg Norman." ... "Yes—one million percent." ... "He'll win it when people stop asking if he'll win it."

WILL TIGER WIN A MAJOR IN 2020?		
No		60
Yes		40

COMMENTS "I want to say yes, but I think the odds are against him." ... "I told my wife [before 2019] that he'd never win again. How good am I at predicting these things?"



I GET NO
RESPECT

KISS
MY
PUTT

I Like Big
PUTTS
And I Cannot Lie!

I'D TAP
THAT

I THOUGHT
ABOUT LOSING
WEIGHT
BUT
I DON'T LIKE
TO LOSE



👉 WILL TIGER WOODS BE COMPETITIVE IN THE MASTERS UNTIL HE'S 60?		%
Yes		46
No		26
Don't know		28

COMMENTS "Some guys, like Jack [Nicklaus] and Freddie [Couples], proved it can be done. If Tiger's healthy, yes."

WHICH MAJOR DOES TIGER HAVE THE BEST CHANCE OF WINNING THIS YEAR?	
Masters	88
PGA at Harding Park	12
Open at Royal St. George's	0
U.S. Open at Winged Foot	0

COMMENT "You would have to think he still has a chance in every major."

TIGER HAS AN EIGHT-FOOTER TO WIN THIS YEAR'S MASTERS. DO YOU TAKE:	
Make	100
Miss	0

IF YOU HAD A TEE TIME TOMORROW AT THE COURSE WHERE YOU LEARNED TO PLAY, WHAT'S YOUR BEST ESTIMATE OF WHAT YOU WOULD SHOOT?	
60-64	77
65-69	20
59 or better	3
70 or worse	0

COMMENTS "I wouldn't break 60 unless I putted really well. But I can say that about anywhere I play." . . . "I wouldn't be trying too hard."

EDDIE PEPPERELL WAS DQ'D LAST YEAR AFTER HE RAN OUT OF GOLF BALLS ON THE COURSE. HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR BAG AT THE START OF A ROUND, AND HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CLOSE TO RUNNING OUT?	
Six to nine	60
10 or more	40

COMMENTS "Mac O'Grady used to have 18 balls and number them 1 through 18 to have one on every hole." . . . "I was close to running out once. I gave too many away and then hit two in the water at the last. I finished with one." . . . "A lot of bad things might happen. I ain't running out of golf balls." . . . "I have three sleeves. If that's not enough, I probably don't belong out there."

BEST PLAYER OF ALL TIME?	
Tiger Woods	70%
Jack Nicklaus	30%
Other	0%

COMMENTS "Until this last year, I thought it was Jack." . . . "Jack might have more records and has the major record, but Tiger played the best golf." . . . "Why does it have to be either or? Why can't we just say they're the two best?"

WHICH SEASON WOULD YOU RATHER HAVE?		%
One win, but it's a major		95
Three wins, but no major		5

COMMENT "Come on, we all want the major."

CHRISTINA KIM TURNED IN LPGA CADDIES FOR SHARING CLUB SELECTION. DOES THAT HAPPEN ON THE PGA TOUR?	
Never	30
Often	4
Rarely	4
Sometimes	4
Don't know	57

COMMENTS "Everyone knows you can't do that." . . . "Happens all the time but really makes no difference."

HAVE YOU WITNESSED SOMEONE BREAK A RULE AND TRY TO GET AWAY WITH IT?	
Yes	52
No	24
Not sure	24

COMMENTS "Too often, sadly." . . . "It happens most often when they drop closer to the hole than they should after hitting into a hazard."

WHAT'S THE LONGEST TIME YOU'VE GONE WITHOUT SWINGING A CLUB SINCE YOU'VE TURNED PRO, NOT COUNTING INJURIES?		%
Several weeks		36
A week		24
Several days		21
A month or more		19

WHICH MAJOR WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO WIN?	
Masters	77
Open Championship	16
U.S. Open	7
PGA Championship	0

WHAT IS THE BEST MAJOR-CHAMPIONSHIP VENUE?	
Augusta National	74
Old Course at St. Andrews	13
Pebble Beach	8
Muirfield	5

WHO HAS THE BEST-LOOKING WIFE/GIRLFRIEND ON THE PGA TOUR?	
Richelle Baddeley (Aaron)	22
Kristy McLachlin (Parker)	17
Dowd Simpson (Webb)	17
Allison Stokke Fowler (Rickie)	13
Melissa Jones (Matt)	9
Gabby Woodland (Gary)	9
Ashlie Reed (Nate Lashley)	4
Ashley Perez (Pat)	4
Annie Spieth (Jordan)	4



	%
HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO YOU TO WIN AN OLYMPIC GOLD MEDAL?	
Like winning a nonmajor	50
Not as important as winning a nonmajor	42
Like winning a major	8

COMMENTS “Eventually that’s the fifth major.” . . . “Not quite a major, but better than any other event.”

SHOULD THE PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP BE CONSIDERED A MAJOR?	
No	78
Yes	22

COMMENT “Only if all past Players champions are credited with a major.”

FAVORITE HOLE AT THE PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP?	
Par-5 16th	30
Par-3 17th	25
Par-4 18th	20
Par-5 second	5
Par-4 fourth	5
Par-5 ninth	5
Par-5 11th	5
Par-4 12th	5

LEAST FAVORITE HOLE AT THE PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP?	
Par-3 17th	30
Par-4 12th	22
Par-4 18th	22
Par-5 ninth	9
Par-4 sixth	4
Par-4 seventh	4
Par-3 eighth	4
Par-4 10th	4

COMMENTS “Seventeen is the best and the worst hole.” . . . “Eight is one of the worst par 3s I’ve ever seen.”

DO YOU MISS JOHNNY MILLER?	
No	67
Yes	33

COMMENT “Is yes and no a good answer?”

DO YOU MISS GARY MCCORD AND PETER KOSTIS?	
Yes	51
No	49

WOULD YOU MISS BRANDEL CHAMBLEE IF HE WERE OFF TV TOMORROW?	
No	61
Yes	39

COMMENT “Two years ago, I’d have said yes. But he’s gotten way better and backs up his opinions with good stats.”

DO YOU LIKE THE IDEA OF FANS BEING ABLE TO HEAR WHAT YOU AND YOUR CADDIE ARE DISCUSSING AS YOU PREPARE TO PLAY A SHOT?	
Yes	8
No	92

COMMENTS “I’d be OK with it—no one can understand my caddie’s accent.” . . . “I’m afraid they’d hate me because of all the swear words.”

NAME A COURSE THAT HAS NEVER BEEN THE SITE OF A U.S. OPEN BUT WOULD BE A GOOD TEST.	
Pine Valley	18
Spyglass Hill	8
Cypress Point	5
Muirfield Village	5
Point O’ Woods	5
Quail Hollow	5
Sand Hills	5
Harding Park	2
L.A.C.C. North (2023 site)	2
Pinehurst No. 4	2
Quaker Ridge	2
Seminole	2
TPC Sawgrass	2
Trump Bedminster	2
Yale	2
Don’t know	33

WHAT CURRENT PLAYER WOULD MAKE THE BEST FUTURE COMMISSIONER?	
Stewart Cink	12
Charley Hoffman	12
Davis Love III	12
Phil Mickelson	12
Paul Casey	6
Jim Furyk	6
Peter Malnati	6
Mark Wilson	6
Don’t know	28

HOW OFTEN ARE YOU RECOGNIZED OFF THE COURSE?	
Often	37
Occasionally	34
Rarely	17
Never	11

COMMENTS “It kind of depends where you are. At home is more often than on the road.”

WHICH SHOT WOULD MAKE YOU MORE NERVOUS?	
Ryder Cup opening shot	93
Six-foot putt for bogey to win a nonmajor	7

COMMENT “Heck, any length putt to win would make me nervous.”

DOES CBD HELP A GOLFER?	
Yes	25
No	19
Don’t know	56

IS MARIJUANA PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING IN GOLF?	
No	8
Yes	4
Don’t know	88

HOW PREVALENT ARE PERFORMING ENHANCING SUBSTANCES ON TOUR?	
A little	7
Don’t know	93

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF AMATEURS YOU SEE IN PRO-AMS ARE PLAYING CLEARLY INFERIOR EQUIPMENT?	
Most	24
Some	8
Not many	8
Don’t notice	60

HOW OFTEN DO YOU WATCH PGA TOUR EVENTS ON TELEVISION ON WEEKS WHEN YOU’RE NOT PLAYING?	
Not too often	42
Fairly regularly	33
Never	14
Almost all the time	11

COMMENTS “I’ll watch every minute I can.” . . . “The kids have it on, so more than I would like.”

WHO WILL WIN THE RYDER CUP THIS YEAR AT WHISTLING STRAITS?	
U.S.A.	60
Europe	37
Tie	3

YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE WHERE TO PLAY YOUR LAST ROUND. WHICH DO YOU PICK?	
Augusta National	62
Old Course/St. Andrews	14
Cypress Point	10
Pebble Beach	10
Loch Lomond	4

HOW OFTEN DOES A PRO-AM PARTNER TELL YOU A GOLF JOKE YOU’VE NEVER HEARD BEFORE?	
Rarely	60
Never	40

WHAT’S MORE EMBARRASSING?	
Hitting a shank	67
Four-putting	33

COMMENTS “A shank is way worse. Now you don’t know where the next shot is going to go.” . . . “Shank by far. Sometimes a four-putt might be four good putts.” . . . “I’ve done both.”

JIM NANTZ
by vineyard vines



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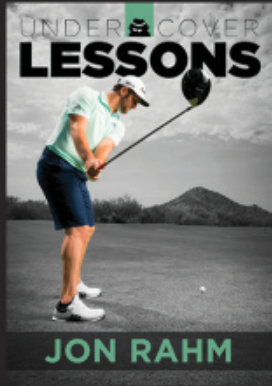
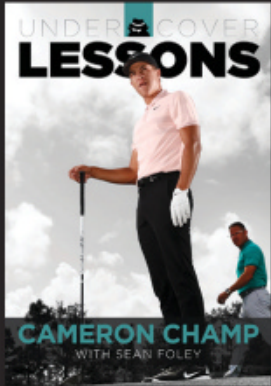
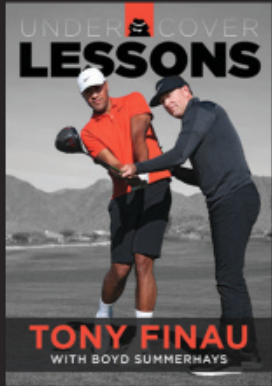
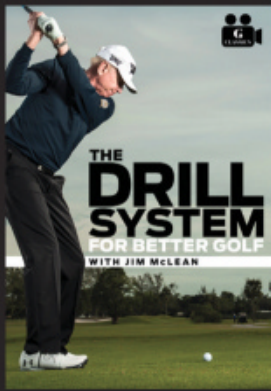
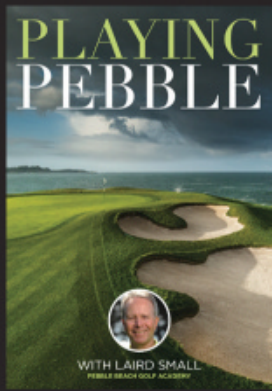
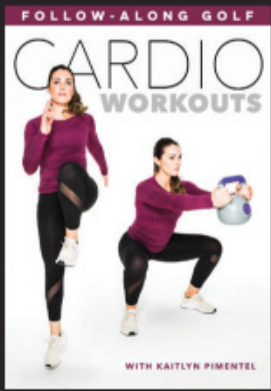


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Pebble Beach is such a special place, one of the most renowned golf courses on the planet and, conveniently, Jim's backyard. So, it made perfect sense to open the first Jim Nantz by vineyard vines store just off the putting green at the iconic Lodge at Pebble Beach.

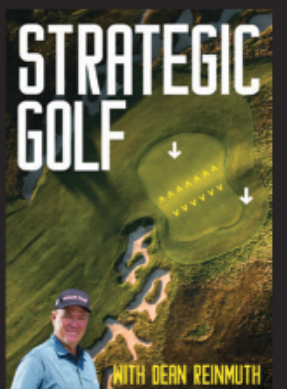
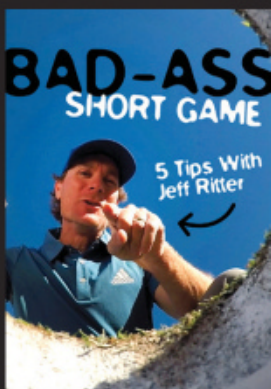
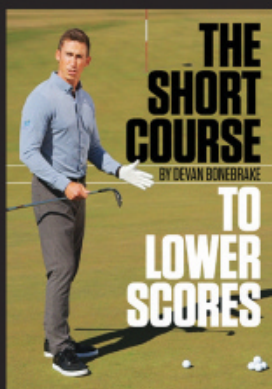
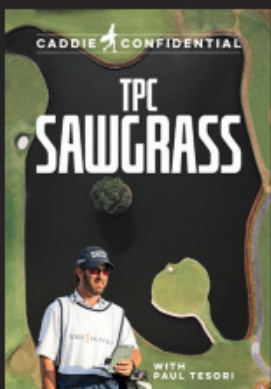
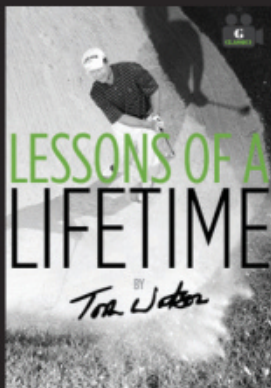
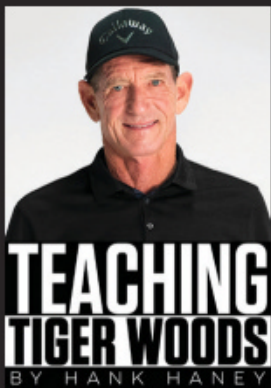
Not only is Jim proud to call Pebble Beach his home, but the golf course, its history as well as the community, are the source of inspiration for many of the collection's comfortable, sophisticated pieces.

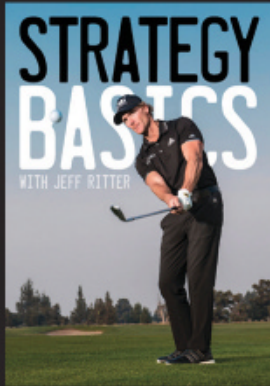
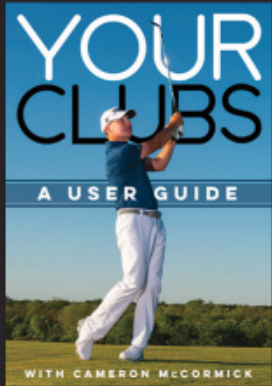
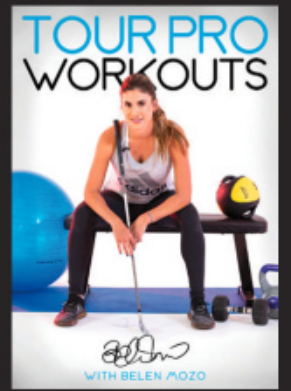
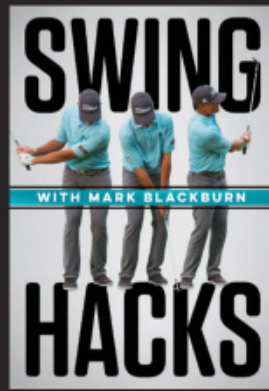
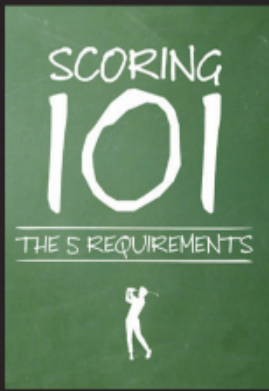




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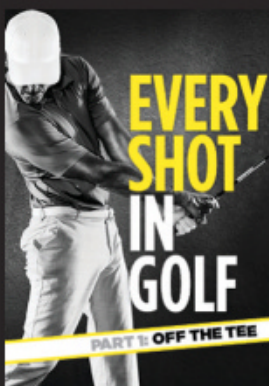
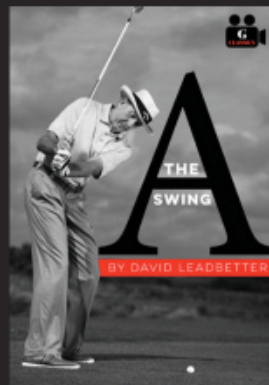
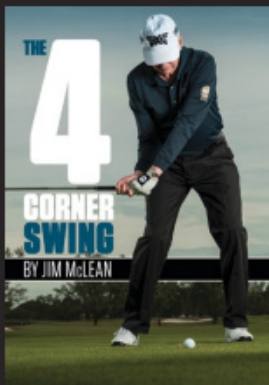
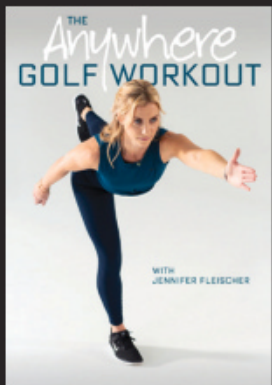
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WHAT WOULD





2020 / PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP

YOU SHOOT...

NO. 7 The 451-yard par 4 is a potential double bogey (or worse).

...AT SAWGRASS UNDER



CHAM



2020 / PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP



PIONSHIP CONDITIONS?

NO. 14 At this 481-yard par 4, be prepared to pull some headcovers.

OUR EXPERT IS HERE TO TELL YOU,

YOU MIGHT have had the opportunity at some point to play a golf course that is the site of a PGA Tour event, and maybe you played reasonably well. But what if you played that same golf course when it was prepared for tournament week? And what if that course was already renowned as one of the most difficult tests the game can offer?

We take you to Ponte Vedra Beach and the Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass, annual site of the Players Championship, to be played March 12-15.

Go in knowing that the creation of the late Pete Dye is a headache for even the best players in the world. The tournament field typically averages about a half stroke to three-quarters of a stroke over par 72 for a round. Now put amateurs of varying handicaps on the same tees—7,189 to 7,245 yards—in tournament conditions with fast and firm greens and deep rough.

There's history here. Golf Digest has proved in various exhibitions that amateurs have a tough time on difficult courses in tournament conditions.

At the 2007 U.S. Open, Tiger Woods said that a 10-handicap couldn't break 100 that week at Oakmont. That prompted three Golf Digest U.S. Open Challenges, the first played the Friday before the 2008 Open at Torrey Pines South. Tony Romo, a 2.2 at the time, shot 84, Justin Timberlake (6.0) shot 98, and contest winner John Atkinson, an 8.1-handicap selected from 56,000 contestants, shot 114. The next year, the Challenge again preceded the U.S. Open at Bethpage Black, and the round took six hours and 21 minutes. This time the four low-single-digit handicappers were Ben Roethlisberger, who shot 81, Michael Jordan (86) and Justin Timberlake (88). The 10-handicap contest winner, Larry Giebelhausen, shot 101. (Tiger had bet Jordan that Michael wouldn't break 92, and after the round, MJ proclaimed, "I don't take checks.") Before the 2010 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach, contest winner Peggy Ference shot 118, following Mark Wahlberg (97), Wayne Gretzky (100) and Drew Brees (102).

The December before that competition at Pebble, Golf Digest's David Owen, a 6-handicapper at the time, played the course from the tips and shot 50-50-100. In 2018, Owen, then a 7.9-handicap ("and

rising") left Connecticut in the winter and played Sawgrass from the shortest tees and from the tips, shooting an 82 at 5,019 yards and a 111 from 7,245 yards.

More perspective: Before the 2009 Masters, Golf Digest asked me to form a team to assess Augusta National Golf Club's Course Rating after it had been lengthened more than 500 yards during multiple transformations over the past two decades. Augusta National doesn't have an official USGA rating. The reason? Despite the fact that almost every member has a USGA Handicap Index from another club, Augusta National maintains its system for members only.

I estimated Augusta National's Course Rating that week at a formidable 78.1. I estimated the Slope at 137—high, but not off the charts. From the championship tees, most Bogey Golfers can't reach Augusta's long par 4s in regulation, but the fairways are relatively wide and the players can hit relatively short third shots into greens, minimizing many of the difficulty factors (water, bunkers, green targets, etc.). I estimated that a player with a Course Handicap of 0 could expect to shoot an 81, a 9 might shoot 91, an 18 would shoot 103 and a 36 approximately 125.

THE DANGERS OF SAWGRASS

IN 1985, Golf Digest sponsored a contest to identify America's Worst Avid Golfer, with the final to be played at Sawgrass. Angelo Spagnolo, then 31, made a 66 at the 17th—including a three-putt—on his way to "winning" with a 257 for 18 holes. After a flurry of line drives at 17 splashed and seven more bounced over the green into the water, Spagnolo reluctantly agreed when his caddie suggested putting onto the green from the adjoining walkway.

So what would you do at Sawgrass? Let's run some numbers.

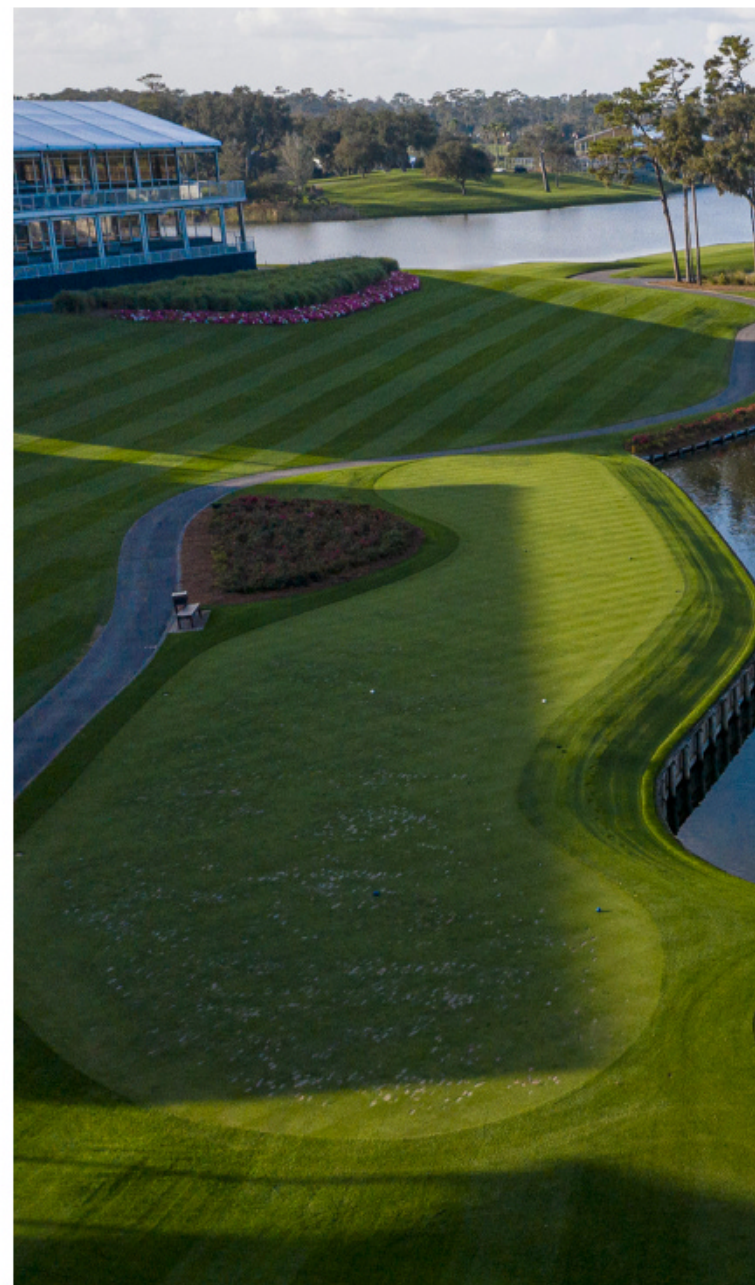
Course Rating is a measure of a course's difficulty level for a scratch golfer—someone who has a 0.0 Handicap Index.

Slope Rating measures the relative difficulty of a course for Bogey Golfers and other players of "varying abilities" when compared with the Course Rating. Though there are no limits for a Course Rating—the par-73, 8,325-yard Pines Course at The International in Bolton, Mass., has a Course Rating of 80.0—Slope Ratings basically range from 55 to 155. Standard playing difficulty is 113.

At the Stadium Course at Sawgrass, the Course Rating issued by the Florida State Golf Association is 76.4 and the Slope Rat-

ing is 155. These are ratings for normal playing conditions—so the actual uncapped Slope Rating during the Players would be higher. On a non-tournament week, the average scores for scratch golfers would be in the area of 2.6 strokes over the 76.4 Rating, but under tournament-week conditions I estimate the average score as close to 81 by a scratch player. A golfer with an 18-handicap typically would shoot 116, but would be in the 122-124 range under tournament conditions (*see accompanying chart*).

Rough and slicker greens during tournament week mean almost every hole demands forced carries over water or bunkers—a major challenge for amateurs when compared to pros. Also, some of the greens have a shallow depth, and most of the greens have severe slopes punishing you if you don't stop the ball near the hole, producing more three-putts than normal. Amateurs are challenged to produce the ball flight and spin needed to approach the greens correctly.



BY DEAN KNUTH

Dean Knuth created the USGA Course Rating System and Slope Rating System.



Adding to the challenge of the approaches, many fairways run at angles and then into pine straw, water and sand, causing amateur golfers to struggle with distance control and accuracy. Even a scratch golfer would expect to frequently score an 85.

Producing many double bogeys are four long par 4s—the 471-yard fifth hole, the 451-yard seventh, the 481-yard 14th and the 470-yard 15th—and, of course, the famed 137-yard 17th. A group of 36-handicappers who want to see the back tees that week, besides taking an extra hour or more to finish, would see scores over par almost double their handicaps.

HOW FAR DO YOU REALLY HIT IT?

FINALLY, let's discuss the ability of amateurs to get to the greens in close to regulation from the back tees. A study that I did for Golf Digest a number of years ago produced one of the most telling numbers in how far amateurs are behind pros' 300-plus-yard drives and how dramatically amateur players inflate their driving distances. In that

test, lower-handicappers claimed their average drives went 247 yards, but driving-distance stats taken in a pro-am tournament measured 232—a 15-yard exaggeration. Poorer players claimed a driving average of 227 yards but hit it 198 yards—a 29-yard exaggeration. The worse the players, the more they kid themselves about how good (and long) they are. Nobody, it seems, wants to admit he drives the ball less than 200 yards. Succumbing to self-delusion, it seems most amateurs tend to equate their *best* drive with their *average* drive. In looking at the self-assessed strengths and weaknesses from the amateurs who hit a fairway and then missed a green, "driving" was named a strength as often as it was a weakness.

It all adds up to a long and exhausting day for amateurs and a new appreciation for just how good PGA Tour pros really are—especially Rory McIlroy's winning rounds last year of 67-65-70-70 for a 16-under-par 272 total. That score would be out of reach for almost all amateurs even with handicap strokes. 

AND IT'S NOT PRETTY



NO ONE'S BREAKING 80

• • • We estimated what golfers would shoot at TPC Sawgrass' Stadium Course under Players Championship-week conditions:

HANDICAP INDEX	COURSE HANDICAP	PREDICTED SCORE
0-0.1	4	81
0.2-0.8	5	82
0.9-1.5	6	83
1.6-2.2	7	84
2.3-2.9	8	85
3.0-3.7	9	86
3.8-4.4	10	87
4.5-5.1	11	88
5.2-5.9	12	89
6.0-6.6	13	90
6.7-7.3	14	92
7.4-8.0	15	94
8.1-8.8	16	96
8.9-9.5	17	98
9.6-10.2	18	100
10.3-11.0	19	102
11.1-11.7	20	104
11.8-12.4	21	106
12.5-13.1	22	108
13.2-13.9	23	110
14.0-14.6	24	112
14.7-15.3	25	114
15.4-16.1	26	116
16.2-16.8	27	118
16.9-17.5	28	120
17.6-18.2	29	122
18.3-19.0	30	124
19.1-19.7	31	126
19.8-20.4	32	128
20.5-21.2	33	130
21.3-21.9	34	132
22.0-22.6	35	134
22.7-23.4	36	135
23.5-24.1	37	136
24.2-24.8	38	137
24.9-25.5	39	138
25.6-26.3	40	139
26.4-27.0	41	140
27.1-27.7	42	141
27.8-28.5	43	142
28.6-29.2	44	143
29.3-29.9	45	144
30.0-30.6	46	146
30.7-31.4	47	148
31.5-32.1	48	150
32.2-32.8	49	152
32.9-33.6	50	153
Higher	50+	154+



► **GET IT WHILE IT'S HOT** The seventh hole at Bay Harbor Links, overlooking Little Traverse Bay in Michigan.

Want to make this a summer to remember?
Then start planning a golf getaway to one of our 23 Best Summertime Buddies Destinations

BY PETER FINCH

HERE COMES THE SUN

A

golf trip with
your buddies
anytime is
a beautiful
thing. But a

summertime trip, well, that's
next level. ✨ The days are long
and dependably warm, so you
can play 36 holes—or even
more if you've got the stamina.

✨ The golf season has been
underway awhile, so you've had
a chance to groove your swing
a little. Or even if you haven't,
there's still hope. Summer is
full of optimism. ✨ And let's not
forget, the courses in so many
summertime destinations are
amazing: the startling elevation
changes of tree-lined Northern
Michigan, the rugged glory of
unfrozen Wisconsin, the rolling,
seemingly endless fairways of
Ireland and Scotland. Places
that are unplayable in the winter
become magical in the summer.

✨ So what's stopping you from
heading somewhere great with
your golf buddies? Over the next
few pages we'll walk you through
what it takes—from picking a
destination to planning a trip
to making the most of it once
you're there. ✨ We've included a
ranking of the Best Summertime
Buddies Destinations in the
United States and overseas, as
selected by our Course Ranking
panelists and members of our
Places to Play Facebook group.

✨ What are the key factors
in selecting a buddies-trip
destination? In no particular
order, here they are. ►





► **SHORE THING** The 16th hole at Cabot Cliffs in Nova Scotia, Canada, feels like the edge of the world.

TEMPERATURE°

FOR SUMMER TRIPS, you're essentially picking from a menu with three options: (1) Warm. (2) Hot. (3) WTF. The first two cover most of the classic summertime destinations—your St. Andrews, your Oregon coast, your Nova Scotia.

“Summer in Michigan is perfect for golf,” says Joey Pena, who lives in the Detroit area and has organized a buddies trip in the northern part of his state for the past five summers. “It’s 80 or 90 degrees, the courses are in great shape, and you can tee off before 6 a.m. and play until after 10 at night.”

There are only a couple of downsides. One is these areas are likely to be crowded, precisely because it’s summertime. The other is that this is their peak season, which means you’ll be paying top prices. For example, the rate for a round at Wisconsin’s Erin Hills, site of the 2017 U.S. Open, is \$210 in early May—then leaps to \$320 in July, August and September.



For this reason some buddies-trip planners, looking to keep down costs, gravitate toward destinations where the mercury is highest.

Rob Kelly, organizer of an annual four-day trip called the Bush League Open Championship, led his crew of 12 high school friends to Scottsdale last June. “I did have to fight with the guys on that,” he says. “Everyone was worrying about the heat. I had to enlist a couple of guys to do some lobbying through back channels.”

When they arrived, it was 108 degrees. “We got those sun sleeves for our arms and bucket hats, and we drank a ton of water,” he says. “The courses do a great job. There was cold water everywhere. Even the beverage cart had iced towels for us.”

Because Arizona doesn’t adjust its clocks for daylight saving time, it gets bright early. So the Bush League guys were going off at 7:15 a.m. Only once did they try two rounds in a day. “It was a battle,” Kelly says, “but if you’re prepared and don’t abuse your body the night before, it’s OK.” Most of the time they’d finish with their golf before noon. “We’d get some lunch, some beers and then hang out by the pool at our Airbnb for the rest of the day.”

They played at We-Ko-Pa, Troon North, Grayhawk and the Short Course at Mountain Shadows. The cost for four nights lodging and five rounds of golf: \$450 a man. “At the end, everyone was saying, ‘Oh my God, let’s come back to Scottsdale next year!’” Kelly says with a laugh. (Note: Despite all that, he’s moving

(PREVIOUS PAGES) BAY HARBOR: EVAN SCHILLER • CABOT CLIFFS: BRIAN KREHBIEL



the Bush League Open Championship to Toronto this summer. Which should be a lot more comfortable.)

CO\$T

JUST AS NO two golf swings are identical, no two golfers view buddies-trip spending the same. Typically, you'll have a mix of big spenders and penny pinchers. The trick is striking a balance so that everyone is happy.

Looking for destinations with off-peak pricing isn't the only way to help keep costs in line. Every March, Joey Pena attends an event called the Michigan Golf Show, where equipment makers, clothing companies and golf courses come to pitch themselves to consumers.

He's found it is fertile ground for deal-making. "They'll haggle," says Pena, whose trip is called Hoodwinked. "We go in there and say, 'OK, what can you do for us today?'" Pena once walked up to the owner of a course and told him a competing course was letting his group



play for \$50 a man. "He said, 'I'll do you one better. You can play my course for \$50, and I'll throw in dinner for your group!'"

Interested in trying this for yourself? Do an Internet search for "golf trade shows near me." There are quite a few of them around the country.

Replay rounds are another good cost-saving trick. Many courses will offer a discount if you play the same course twice in a day. Bandon Dunes Resort in Oregon charges \$295 a round in its summer peak season, for example. That drops to \$150 for your second round.

Yes, that's still \$222.50 a round—which is a lot. But then, it is Bandon Dunes—site of four courses in America's 100 Greatest and No. 1 on our ranking of U.S. Summertime Buddies Trip Destinations.

Many resorts also offer "unlimited golf" packages, which promise even bigger savings. Pena's a fan of these deals. "With unlimited golf, we can go out and do a barefoot round, drop another ball if you want to, play some music," he says. At the

Grand Traverse Resort on an unlimited golf package, he and his friends have played as many as 52 holes in a day.

QUALITY OF COURSES

FOR SOME, the buddies trip is purely about the camaraderie. Others get a thrill from checking off top-ranked courses on their bucket lists. The success of your trip depends on knowing what your buddies are most interested in.

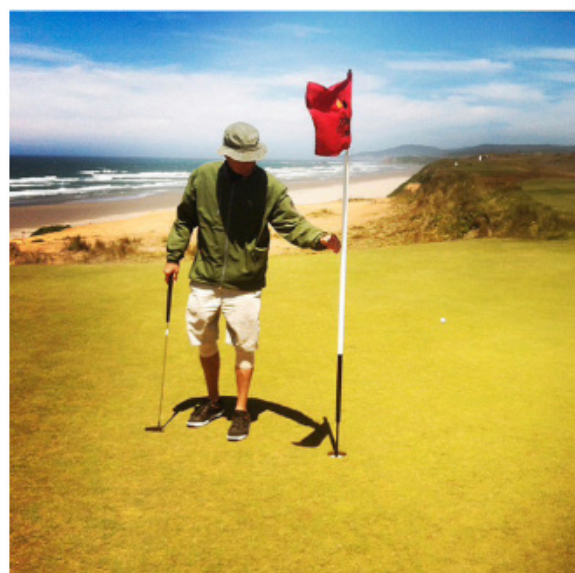
Cory Hall's Caddyshack Conquest, a trip he has run for the past nine years, is mainly about friendship. It started as a small group of buddies from Iowa and has expanded as other guys began bringing along their pals. This summer they're heading to the Denver area with seven golfers.

Everyone who comes on the trip gets to vote on where they'll go the next year. Once that decision is made, Hall finds a house on Airbnb that's within easy driving distance of a few good courses.

"We aren't big on trying to get on the prestigious courses," Hall says. "With the skill level drastically varying, from single-digit handicaps to guys who just play once a year, we try to keep rounds typically under \$60."

In a nod to the better golfers in the group, Hall likes to include one round at a noteworthy course. This year in Denver it'll be Fossil Trace, a tough and visually dramatic layout in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Weekend green fees start at \$100 in the summer.

Carlos Soto Healy, who runs a financial consultancy in Monterrey, Mexico, is





more of a trophy hunter. He has led a summer trip for the past few years, taking his friends to Kohler and Pinehurst, among others. “I’m mainly interested in courses on America’s 100 Greatest or the world rankings,” he says.

This summer they’re going to British Columbia and Alberta, where they’ll play Jasper Park Lodge and Banff Springs. Both are among the top-10 courses in Canada, according to our latest rankings.

“If I ask my friends, everyone wants to go to different places,” Soto Healy says. “So I say, ‘This is where I want to go. Anyone want to come with me?’ ”

The courses in Canada are less expensive than top U.S. courses, and his group is staying at “reasonable” hotels charging the guys about \$80 a man if they want to double up. Seven nights, eight rounds of golf and a rented minivan will cost them about \$2,500 a person.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

AT REMOTE golf destinations like Michigan’s Forest Dunes or Canada’s Cabot Links, often the only sound you’ll hear at night is the gentle chirp of crickets (mixed with the sound of guys snoring). This is part of the appeal for many groups.

But if you’re looking for a more varied mix of after-golf activities, consider bigger cities. As part of the Caddyshack Conquest this summer, Hall is thinking about organizing a trip to a Colorado Rockies game one night or maybe a tour of the Coors Brewery.

Casino golf resorts are another good option. Turning Stone in Verona, N.Y., Salish Cliffs in Washington and Minnesota’s The Wilderness at Fortune Bay are all far from the big-city hustle while offering lots of excitement after golf.

So where will you be heading this summer? Take a look at our 23 Best Summertime Buddies Destinations on page 98—and start planning. ►



“If I ask my friends, everyone wants to go to different places,” says one buddies-trip planner. “So I say, ‘This is where I want to go. Anyone want to come with me?’ ”





TIPS FOR PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Committing to a golf trip can be difficult given the demands of work and home life.

Yet the same digital technology that keeps us tethered to our jobs also makes it easier to communicate with our friends and plan a much-needed group getaway.

Kyle McLinn, who organizes an annual Ryder Cup-style competition with his friends, offers a counterintuitive approach to starting the conversation. “Instead of asking your buddies which dates work best, ask which dates definitely don’t work,” says the oil company landman from Edmond, Okla. “With eight or more guys, it’s near impossible to secure one date that works best for all. You’ll begin identifying a couple dates that will work for the majority of the group by taking this approach, and whoever can make it will make it.”

Group texts or GroupMe chats can get unwieldy, especially with a larger pool of buddies. Apps such as Mobili or Prava keep all trip planning and photo sharing self-contained, a nice feature to avoid the hassle of keeping up with yet another group chat. Shared document services like Google Sheets are useful for capturing

everyone’s schedules and gauging interest in locations.

When it comes to planning the itinerary, first block out the most important moments of the trip so you can plan around those. When I was planning a golf trip to the Waste Management Phoenix Open for my buddy’s bachelor party, I knew attending the tournament, a trip to Topgolf and festivities for that weekend’s Super Bowl were important. Figuring out when and where to play fell into place after slotting those events.

Budget, of course, affects all parts of the trip. Don’t forget the sneaky expenses of traveling—Ubers, rental cars and club transportation like Ship Sticks.

What courses are you going to play? GolfDigest.com and its rankings of America’s 100 Greatest Public Courses and the Best Courses in each state is a great place to start. Also, check out our Places to Play group on our Facebook page. Here you’ll find thousands of other avid golfers with advice on where to play, no matter your budget.

Something else to consider: Nonmember requests to play private clubs are more common than ever. McLinn says his group has had success getting on exclusive clubs this way, reaching out “respectfully” to the head professional and offering to pay all fees. It doesn’t hurt to ask.

—STEPHEN HENNESSEY



The 23 Best Summertime Buddies Destinations

TEXT BY DEREK DUNCAN

UNITED STATES

1 OREGON COAST

Bandon Dunes exerts a stronger gravitational pull than almost any place in golf not named St. Andrews. Bandon Dunes, Pacific Dunes, Bandon Trails and Old Macdonald all rank among Golf Digest’s 100 Greatest Courses in America, and the Sheep Ranch, opening in June, could be the best of them all.

2 CARMEL / MONTEREY PENINSULA, CALIF.

Before Bandon Dunes, the Monterey Peninsula was the king of public American destination golf. Pebble Beach is No. 7 on our list of America’s 100 Greatest. Spyglass Hill, the Links at Spanish Bay, Poppy Hills and even modest Pacific Grove highlight a deep bench that gets better with age.

3 PINEHURST / SOUTHERN PINES, N.C.

The “home of American golf” has experienced a major revitalization with upgrades to No. 2, the addition of the Cradle short course and a total reconstruction of No. 4. Mid Pines & Pine Needles, in Southern Pines, have also been masterfully reworked, and nearby Tobacco Road adds a theatrical element to the mix.

4 KOHLER, WIS.

There’s plenty to explore among four resort courses spread across two sites. Whistling Straits (Straits Course) is the most raucous and typically gets top billing as a PGA Championship and Ryder Cup (2020) venue, but many visitors prefer Blackwolf Run’s quieter, more idyllic River Course.

5 SAND VALLEY / GREEN LAKE, WIS.

Sand Valley, the latest chapter in Mike Keiser’s destination golf opus, features three stunning options cut from sandy pine forests in central Wisconsin—the original Sand Valley course, Mammoth Dunes and the quirky Sandbox. A side-trip to the Links Course at Lawsonia, a playground of 1920s architecture, is a no-brainer.

6 SAN FRANCISCO / HALF MOON BAY

Public golf in San Francisco runs the gamut from modest, beloved city courses like Sharp Park and Lincoln Park to the once modest but now rebranded TPC Harding Park, site of this year’s PGA Championship. Half Moon Bay, 30 miles south, brings a more luxurious approach plus golf holes peering out to the Pacific Ocean.

(PREVIOUS PAGES) CARNE GOLF LINKS; NICK WALL



7 HILTON HEAD ISLAND / SAVANNAH, GA.

Options begin with Sea Pines' classic Low Country courses (Pete Dye's Harbour Town and Heron Point, and the remodeled Atlantic Dunes), or Palmetto Dunes' tour of the architectural past with courses by Robert Trent Jones ('60s), George Fazio ('70s) and Arthur Hills ('80s). May River, meanwhile, is modern and mesmerizing.

8 SEA ISLAND, GA.

Sea Island's Seaside course remains one of the Southeast's grand courses, but residents Mark and Davis Love III have been busy with classical retrofits of the resort's Retreat and Plantation layouts (reopened in 2019). They've also restored Brunswick Country Club (Donald Ross, 1939) and added Sanctuary Golf Club, a Seth Raynor-inspired public option.

FOREST DUNES: EVAN SCHILLER

9 MILWAUKEE

Buddies golf trips passing through Milwaukee are likely headed to Erin Hills, the vast, heaving site of the 2017 U.S. Open just 45 minutes northwest. They also might stop at one of the area's strong public facilities like Brown Deer Park, where Tiger Woods played his first PGA Tour event as a professional, or The Bog, a countryside Arnold Palmer design with 118 bunkers.

10 MAUI

Given Maui's idyllic setting, there are no bad places to play. Yet there's only one must-play venue, the Plantation Course at Kapalua, recently revamped by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw. The Gold and Emerald courses at Wailea deserve consideration as well, as does King Kamehameha rising 750 feet above the island's north shore.

11 SAN DIEGO / CARLSBAD, CALIF.

No golf trip to San Diego is complete without a visit to the city-owned North and South Courses at Torrey Pines, host of the 2021 U.S. Open. But more gold awaits in SoCal's crinkled hills in the form of Omni La Costa Resort, Tom Fazio's Rams Hill, and Barona Creek, reopening this summer after a comprehensive renovation.

12 TRAVERSE CITY, MICH.

Traverse City is central to an abundance of fine resort golf. Arcadia Bluffs (Bluffs and South courses) is an hour southwest. Forest Dunes (Forest Dunes and The Loop, plus a new 10-hole short course) is 90 minutes east. And Boyne Highlands, with four 18-hole courses, is within a two-hour drive north.



13 PHOENIX / SCOTTSDALE

The biggest challenge facing participants on a buddies trip to the Phoenix area is how to narrow the choices, and how to fit it all in. The Valley of the Sun offers endless combinations of multi-round golf days, including We-Ko-Pa, Troon North, Grayhawk, Talking Stick, Wickenburg Ranch, TPC Scottsdale and the remodeled Papago Municipal.

14 NAPA VALLEY, CALIF.

Mornings swinging clubs at Silverado Resort, Chardonnay Golf Club, Eagle Vines or nearby Hiddenbrooke can lead to afternoons swirling wine at dozens of tasting rooms throughout Napa Valley, where the moderate climate and off-course attractions are as much of a reason to come as the golf.

15 TAMPA

A trip here can go several directions: Innisbrook Golf Resort and the famed Copperhead Course are 45 minutes north of the Tampa airport; Tom Fazio's World Woods is another 30 minutes north, and Black Diamond Ranch is just beyond that; an hour southeast are the Red, Blue and Black at Streamsong, all among Golf Digest's top-rated public courses. ►

Pick your destination wisely—e.g., go north, or to the westernmost edge of a time zone—and you could be playing comfortably until 9 or 10 p.m.



► TWICE THE FUN

The 10th at Forest Dunes in Michigan features a forked fairway and green.



INTERNATIONAL

1 ST. ANDREWS, SCOTLAND
A pilgrimage to the Home of Golf could simply consist of playing the seven courses of the St. Andrews Links Trust (the Old Course, the Castle Course, the New, etc.). However, short excursions to nearby authentic links like Crail, Elie and Lundin should be on any itinerary, and Gleneagles and Carnoustie are each about an hour's drive away.

2 REPUBLIC OF IRELAND / NORTHERN IRELAND
Royal Portrush's popularity is soaring after the 2019 Open Championship, bookending a Northern Ireland trip opposite Golf Digest World No. 1 Royal County Down. Ballybunion, Lahinch and Waterville highlight Ireland's southwest coast, and Carne, Enniscrone and Rosapenna await in the wild dunes of the northwest.

3 ABERDEEN / INVERNESS, SCOTLAND
Golf in Northeast Scotland, beginning above Inverness at Brora and Royal Dornoch, is great and wonderfully uncrowded. Castle Stuart, just south, kicks off a stellar road trip of new and old links that stretches through Nairn, south to the incomparable Cruden Bay, then onto Royal Aberdeen and its neighbor Murcar.

4 EAST LOTHIAN, SCOTLAND
North Berwick and Muirfield headline the golf-centric region surrounding Edinburgh, but other venerable links abound, including Dunbar, Kilspindie, Luffness, the three courses at Gullane, and the original nine holes inside the Musselburgh racetrack, among the oldest courses in the world.

5 AYRSHIRE, SCOTLAND
Ayrshire—Scotland's southwest coast—is home to bucket-list courses like Royal Troon, Turnberry and Prestwick, where the first 11 Open Championships were played. It can also be the launching point for more far-flung excursions out to Machrihanish, The Machrie, Shiskine and, for the most adventurous, the Outer Hebrides and Askernish.

6 NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA
It might be odd to suggest an add-on drive two and a half hours beyond the destination, but travelers to Cabot Links (home of Cabot Links and Cabot Cliffs, both in Golf Digest's World top 35, and

a new short course opening this summer) would be remiss not to visit Cape Breton Highlands Links, one of the great scenic walks in golf.

7 NEW ZEALAND
Most of the golf that international groups play is located on the North Island, notably Cape Kidnappers, Kauri Cliffs, Jack Nicklaus' Kinloch Club, Alister MacKenzie's redesign at Titarangi and Paraparaumu Beach. While here, why not take a shot at getting on Tara Iti, the private retreat ranked Golf Digest's second-best international course?

8 AUSTRALIA
Melbourne's Sand Belt courses (Royal Melbourne, Kingston Heath, Metropolitan, Victoria, etc.) deserve their own special trip, but so do places like St. Andrews Beach and the National Golf Club. And other top 100 courses, including Cape Wickham and Barnbougale Dunes, are just a short plane ride away. ►

CAPE KIDNAPPERS: BRIAN KREHBIEL



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Whether it's playing for a tattered green jacket or a mounted plastic cup from your favorite dive bar, a sentimental trophy is more special than any prize money.



★ HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF A BUDDIES TRIP

► A summer buddies golf vacation is not unlike making your own ice-cream sundae. There are plenty of ingredients that can affect how it turns out, but you really can't go wrong. That being said, by adding the following toppings, you can max out the fun.

★ ESTABLISH TRADITIONS

► Whether it's playing for a tattered green jacket or a mounted plastic cup from your favorite dive bar, a sentimental trophy is more special than any prize money. You can also play to avoid winning something like the Bush League Open Championship's Sweater of Shame, which goes to last place and has to be worn all the way home and on the first night out of next year's trip.

"Sometimes that's more fun to follow than the championship," says Bush League commissioner Rob Kelly, whose group of Philly high school friends has a pre-tourney Par-3 Contest and

Champions Dinner just like the Masters. "Some guys might not have a chance to win, but they certainly don't want to win the sweater."

★ TAKE ADVANTAGE OF LATER—AND WARMER—SUNSETS

► Taking a trip in the winter can be a nice escape, but if playing the most golf possible is your goal, the summer is your friend. Pick your destination wisely—e.g., go north, or to the westernmost edge of a time zone—and you could be playing until 9 or 10 p.m.

Or—and hear us out—maybe mix in a nongolf activity like catching a concert at a famed outdoor venue



or attending a baseball game. Kelly says he and his buddies like to take one break from golf. This year they plan to rent a pontoon boat and go sightseeing around Toronto.

★ HAVE MULTIPLE COMPETITIONS

Keep everyone involved for the entire time with other forms of action other than your big tournament. "I can't stress enough how much fun, and stressful, it is to play worst-ball scramble," says Tony Cherone, who organizes multiple trips to the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail and is a big fan of tracking greenies.

As for the main event, scoring apps like 18Birdies make it easy for everyone to keep track of the competition, giving your trip even more of a tournament feel. Giant, electronic leader boards sold separately, of course.

★ STAY UNDER THE SAME ROOF

► If your group is more than four people—congrats, you have a lot of friends!—you'll be splitting up on the course, but you don't have to part ways off the course if you rent a big enough house. "It's the magic of the trip," says Jim Meyer, who organizes the annual Plastic Cup tournament (they play for an actual plastic cup) in Orlando with up to 16 golfers. "Half the guys are playing cards, some are having a cigar, some go up to watch a movie. That's what really makes it."

★ TURN IT INTO A YEARLONG EVENT

► No, we're not advocating that you abandon your family, but there are ways to keep the fun going for the other 360 or so days of the year. In addition to a lively group chat, the Bush League creates a variety of pre-trip prop bets while maintaining an active website and social-media handles that build anticipation for the next year's trip.

Not ready for all that? Start with a group holiday party or a pre-trip barbecue. "The original idea of the trip was just to get everyone together," Kelly says, "but now it keeps us all close and keeps us all talking all year." —ALEX MYERS

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COLT KNOT ON RETIREMENT, THE BEST MOMENT
IN 'TOP GUN,' AND HOW HE GOT HIS NICKNAME (**AND A BEER LABEL**)
WITH DAVE SHEDLOSKI





Photographs by John Loomis



WHEN HE TURNED professional in 2007, Colt Knost had completed a summer of amateur competition with historical ties to Bobby Jones. Knost won the U.S. Amateur, the U.S. Amateur Public Links and was a member of the winning U.S. Walker Cup team. Only Jones in his 1930 Grand Slam year and Jay Sigel in 1983 had won three United States Golf Association events in the same calendar year. ► Knost wasn't able to duplicate that success as a pro, winning twice in 2008 on the Nationwide Tour but nothing more, which, frankly, surprised him. "I've always believed in myself a lot," he says. ► Knost, 34, was attempting to overcome the most difficult juncture of his career before announcing his retirement late in January. A wrist injury required surgery in 2017, and in 2018, a ligament tear in his left thumb ended his season, leaving him to rely on a major medical exemption entering 2020. This all had come after his best season, which included a tie for third place at the 2016 Players Championship. Yet he retained his good-natured demeanor despite the adversity, displaying a personality and profile that have earned him the nickname Big Gravy. ►

HOW LONG HAD YOU BEEN THINKING OF RETIRING? I guess when I had the second hand surgery, I started questioning if I could come back. Finally thought I was figuring things out before I got hurt. The game has changed so much, it's made it much harder for guys like me to compete. I'll miss competing more than anything, but I think it's time for me to move on to my next chapter.

• • •
DID ANYONE TRY TO TALK YOU OUT OF IT? Yeah, my mom, as well as my old coach, Randy Smith. But I just don't feel like trying to grind it out on the Korn Ferry Tour. I think I can do big things in the broadcasting world, and I'm excited for it.

WHAT WAS THE SUPPORT FROM YOUR FELLOW PROS LIKE WHEN YOU MADE THE RETIREMENT ANNOUNCEMENT AT SCOTTSDALE? That was the most emotional part. They were all so nice, and I can't thank them enough for the nice things they all said. I'll miss hanging out with the guys every day. We're so lucky to be able to do what we do for a living. It'll be hard to move on, but I loved every minute I had while I was on tour and wouldn't trade it for anything.

“I DON'T LOOK LIKE EVERYONE ELSE OUT THERE. . . . I KNOW I CAN PLAY THE GAME.”



YOU'VE BEEN DOING SOME TELEVISION AND RADIO. WHAT MIGHT THAT LOOK LIKE GOING FORWARD? CBS called me last year to see if I had some interest. I worked three events. I thought I did pretty well, and I really liked doing it. That's the direction I'm headed. I'm not going away. I've got seven events for CBS coming up [early rounds that appear on Golf Channel], and I like doing the radio show on SiriusXM. I have a blast with that. So I have other things I'm doing that will keep me in the game, and I'm looking forward to seeing what other opportunities there are for me.

BEST BUDS ON TOUR? I'm a very social guy. I like everyone, but I'm probably closest to Gary Woodland. He's my best friend, and I go the farthest back with him since my freshman year in college [at SMU]. A lot of friends.

• • •
HIGHLIGHT AND LOWLIGHT OF YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER? I think the first few years were tough. I didn't take things as seriously as I should have. That's the biggest disappointment. The results speak for themselves. I didn't prepare. I kind of thought it was going to be easy, and I knew better than that. But I had been playing so well.

I had to look at myself in the mirror and tell myself, *You have to go at this a lot harder if you want to keep doing this.*

• • •
FAVORITE TOUR STOP? It has to be the Players, and not just because I played well there. Shooting 63 [tying the course record in 2016 despite a three-putt on the final green] was awesome. The atmosphere and the field are the best in golf. The crowds, the big purse. The golf course is one I felt I could win on. It's such a cool event.

YOUR FAVORITE PLACE IS LAS VEGAS. WHY IS THAT? I've always been a big gambler as far back as I can remember, since I was probably 16 years old. I grew up playing for money on the golf course, but I'd play gin, poker, pretty much anything. I've always been fascinated by gambling. One of my sponsors has been Aria in Vegas. I have friends who play poker for a living, and I love their stories. One of the most fun practice rounds I ever had was in Vegas with Billy Walters. He's in trouble now [convicted in an insider-trading case], but I would just ask him question after question, and he had the greatest sports gambling stories you ever heard, some of his big runs in casinos and big golf matches he was in.

• • •
WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE TO GET A MEAL OR A DRINK IN VEGAS? I'm obviously biased for Aria, but there's a restaurant called Carbone, an Italian place, that is just super. And the best bar I know is in Aria, the Alibi Lounge. That's where I'm hanging out.

• • •
WHAT DID YOU DO WITH YOUR TIME AWAY FROM TOUR AFTER YOUR INJURIES? Honestly, guys think I'm crazy, but even when I'm home, I love playing golf every day. I go up to Whisper Rock and hang out, drink a beer, get a game and go play. That's not work to me. That's fun. Otherwise, I'm a sports freak. Die-hard Dallas Cowboys fan; love going to games. Big hockey fan. It's pretty much all I do.

• • •
THAT EXPLAINS THAT WHEN YOU WERE HURT IN 2017, YOU CROSSED OFF THE KENTUCKY DERBY AND THE INDIANAPOLIS 500 FROM YOUR BUCKET LIST. They both kind of just popped up. I had no idea what I was getting into, but both were just really great experiences. Those are cool events to be able to see in person. Again, I like that kind of buzz in the air, a big atmosphere. ►

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HGTV

SPEAKING OF BIG, HOW DID YOU GET THE NICKNAME BIG GRAVY? One day on Twitter someone made a comment about me, and Steve Elkington came back with a comment and referred to me as Big Gravy. It was funny. I'm cool with it. And I actually have had a beer company out of Hong Kong name a beer after me: Big Gravy Pale Ale. It's being done by Lucky Dawgs Brewing Co. Charles Howell and Hudson Swafford are investors. One of the guys there said they were going to name a beer after me, and they ended up doing it. Pretty cool.

• • •

TIM HERRON ALSO HAS HIS OWN BEER. GUYS LIKE YOU, TIM AND KEVIN STADLER, SAY, DON'T FIT THE PROFILE OF TODAY'S MORE CHISELED ATHLETES PLAYING GOLF, BUT YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO GET THE JOB DONE. I do take pride in that. Like I said, I've always been a sports freak since I can remember, and I always thought I'd do something in sports. I played everything growing up. Then I realized I was never going to be even 6-feet tall [he's 5-9] or some super-fast guy. I found golf when I was 13 years old and just fell in love with the game. I was 11 when Tiger won the [1997] Masters. That was the first golf I remember watching. And it inspired me. Back then there were guys built in all different ways. It's changed a lot now. You look at Gary or Tiger or Dustin Johnson—I know that's why people know who I am, because I don't look like everyone else out there.

• • •

SO BEING DIFFERENT ISN'T A BIG DEAL. Well, unfortunately, it brings out a lot of hate in people. They say mean things on Twitter, and you hear some comments. There are always going to be idiots who want to tear you down. I just go about my business and try to do the best I can and be myself.

• • •

WHAT WERE THE KEYS TO YOUR ABILITY WITHOUT THE WOODLAND BUILD? I'm blessed with great hands, so I've always been a good putter, and I've hit the ball pretty straight most of my career. My confidence in myself is pretty high. I'm never scared of the moment the times I was in contention. I showed I could handle pressure. Love the big atmosphere, love those nerves. Phil [Mickelson] was talking about it when he won in Mexico, that he loves feeling the nerves. Yeah, you have to deal with them, but that's the fun part, dealing with them and seeing what you've got.

THAT AMATEUR SUMMER OF 2007 SORT OF SET YOU ON YOUR WAY. YOU PLAYED THE WALKER CUP AT ROYAL COUNTY DOWN, WHICH YOU'VE CALLED YOUR FAVORITE GOLF COURSE. YOU TEAMED WITH DUSTIN JOHNSON AND HAD A WIN AND A TIE AGAINST DANNY WILLETT IN SINGLES ON A U.S. TEAM THAT INCLUDED RICKIE FOWLER, WEBB SIMPSON AND BILLY HORSCHEL. WHAT STICKS OUT IN YOUR MIND FROM THAT WEEK? I'll never forget the first tee shot: Dustin hit it before they announced his full name, and he just killed it. We were playing Rory McIlroy and this kid Jonathan Caldwell, and DJ outdrove Rory by about 78 yards. Then I played Willett twice in singles. He was probably the best putter I'd ever seen. He could roll it. But I played tough. The Walker Cup is by far my favorite moment in golf so far.

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THAT YEAR YOU WON THE U.S. AMATEUR AND THE NOW-DEFUNCT U.S. PUBLINKS. It started when I Monday-qualified for the Byron Nelson. It was my first-ever PGA Tour event, and I played well on Friday and got into contention. I played bad on the weekend, but for my first tour event . . . in my hometown, to shoot 64 in the second round in front of a lot of friends and family, that gave me a lot of confidence going into the summer. I won the Publinks, and I had never played in it before. My goal was always to make the Walker Cup team, and winning the Publinks at the start of the summer just freed me up from there. Then I went to the Olympic Club for the U.S. Amateur, and Trip Kuehne was telling me all summer I would love it there and that I was going to win. Having someone tell you that gives you a lot of confidence, and knowing how great I already was playing, it was a great situation.

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YOU'VE HAD A ROUGH GO OF IT HEALTH-WISE. Yeah, after two pretty good years on tour, this was frustrating. Anything can happen on any given week out there. Max Homa is one of my best buddies. We play a lot of golf together. I always thought Max had the talent to go out and do it and win out there. Just goes to show you that you can go a few years playing terrible and it all changes in one week.

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LET'S WRAP UP. WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE RECORDING ARTIST? Easy: Garth Brooks. I rebelled against country music growing up. I didn't like it. I feel like when your parents like a certain kind of music, you can't like it, too. Now I just love it. It's probably all I listen to. I guess now my parents are OK on that.

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BEST MOMENT FROM YOUR FAVORITE MOVIE, "TOP GUN"? Iceman: "You can be my wingman anytime." Maverick: "Bull----. You can be mine." 

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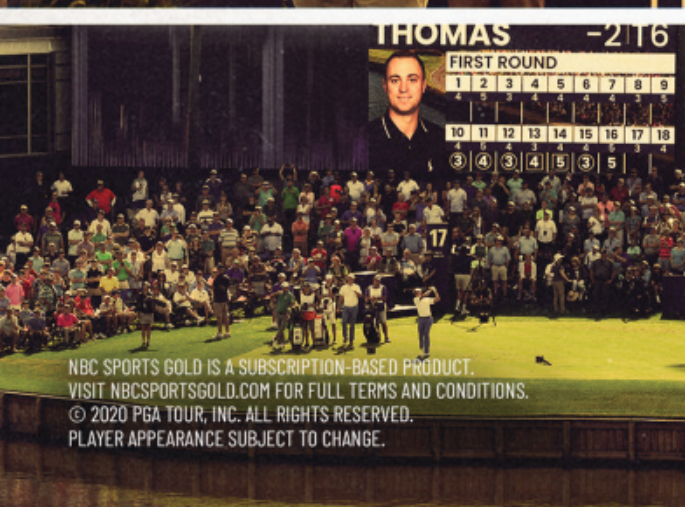
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Take a moment to savor a genius' guide to golf, life and rubbing the earth.

Everything I Know, I Learned From Pete

BY JERRY TARDE / *Editor-in-Chief*

PETE AND ALICE DYE are gone now, less than a year apart, both in their 90s. They were my golfing parents, but I wasn't an only child. They treated so many of us like their kids—praising us when we did good, disappointed in us when we failed, but always rooting for us. “Golf Digest still the best,” Alice wrote in a note that arrived home the weekend she died. Earlier, she wrote: “Pete doing just OK. He still hits balls, plays 18 some days and still kissing the girls. Just wanted to say hello. We miss you.” We all miss them now.

Over 40 years of friendship, Pete taught me everything I know about golf and a bit about living. Here's the abbreviated version:

MARRY A STRONG WOMAN. Alice and Pete had an equal partnership, and it worked for their 68 years together. I once commissioned a portrait of architecture's First Family, including sons Perry and P.B. If you looked closely, Alice was holding a machine gun.

AIM AT THE HAZARDS. On most courses, you steer away from bunkers, trees and water. On Dye courses, you do the opposite. Hit tee shots close to the danger, because that's where Pete's approach angles open up best. Isn't life that way?

IF SOMEBODY GIVES YOU A PUTT, PICK IT UP. One time Pete and I were partners playing the seventh at Pine Valley when our opponents conceded me a long two-footer for a net birdie. “No,” I demurred, “I think I should putt this one out.” “I'll kill ya,” Pete shouted, charging across the green. “Pick it up, you SOB.”

EAT A GOOD BREAKFAST EVERY MORNING. Pete's favorite was poached eggs sprinkled with Grape Nuts, a side of chicken, plain yogurt and a Diet Coke.

WEAR THE SAME UNIFORM DAILY. Oscar de la Renta, his neighbor at Casa de Campo in the Dominican Republic, sent Pete 100 pairs of khakis at a time. Pete wore khakis, a short-sleeve white or blue shirt, and work boots every day of his life. When dressing up, he put on a blue blazer.

DON'T BUY A CAR, RENT IT. This is one I didn't follow, but Pete always drove rental cars. He beat up and muddied them so badly during course construction, some rental agencies kept his car on the back



THE BUILDER Pete Dye at Kiawah Island's Ocean Course in South Carolina, circa 1991.

lot and delivered it to him at the airport in the condition he left it.

BE JOYFUL IN COMPETING. “Pete loved to play golf with you,” Alice wrote me toward the end. Despite competing in U.S. Opens and Amateurs, Pete derived joy out of beating a broken-down scribe, as he called me. Our last match was at Gulfstream in Delray Beach, Fla. We got to the 17th hole tied. I had a kick-in par left before Pete theatrically pitched in for a birdie 2 and cackled with delight all the way up the 18th hole to win 1 up.

GENIUS IS IN THE CRAFT, NOT IN THE ARM-WAVING. “Pete doesn't talk about *designing* courses,” said Tom Doak, another of his children. “He talks about *building* them.” It was typical of Pete to spend 150 days on-site. I once got up at 5:30 with Pete to check on the newly redesigned fifth green at the TPC Sawgrass before the turf was laid. He'd spent seven hours the day before riding around and around on a Sand Pro, a miniature tractor designed to rake bunkers. Every pass moved one-16th of an inch of topsoil. Still unsatisfied, he rode the Sand Pro for another hour, and then began the tedious process of checking the contours with a surveyor's transit. He called it “rubbing the earth.”

CREATE GREATNESS, AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT BUDGETS. Pete's most famous patron was Herb Kohler,

who invoked the words of Edward Bennett Williams after hiring George Allen to coach the Washington Redskins: “I gave him an unlimited expense budget, and he exceeded it.” Pete's version: “Every time I broke a budget, Herb would have another heart attack.”

THE BEST HOLES HAVE HALF PARS.

The great equalizers are the 2½, 3½, 4½. He wanted golfers to expect to make a birdie. Then he constructs the area around the green so challenging, an errant shot is unrecoverable. Good players don't mind making a bogey with a 2-iron approach, but it drives them crazy with a half-wedge. “Now I've got those dudes thinking,” he said. “It weighs on their minds the hole before and the hole after.”

TIP LIKE YOU'RE RICH. Especially ice-cream servers who don't expect anything. It makes them happy, and the ice cream tastes better.

GO WITH YOUR INSTINCTS. When Pete was working on Crooked Stick, he couldn't decide whether to put a bunker or a lake right of the par-4 16th green and asked the board of governors for its opinion. The board voted to put in a bunker. Pete put in a lake. The club president asked him why he disregarded the board's decision. Pete replied: “Because the board has never been right about anything!”

UNDULATION OVER SPEED. Pete told me the ideal green speed was no more than 9 on the Stimpmeter, and the challenge should be in the contouring of the greens. He even liked convex greens that repelled shots. He questioned the tour-pro principle that good shots should always be rewarded and bad shots punished. “Only the very best player can survive a bad result after a good shot and compose himself to play the next one,” he said.

WORK LIKE YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT MONEY. When Jack Nicklaus' design fee was \$1 million, Pete's was \$100,000, except when he did it for free. He loved the simple life. He and Alice ate dinner at home every night on side-by-side TV stands while watching “Jeopardy!” He accurately described his thatched-roof compound in the Dominican Republic as “seven orange-juice stands.”

DON'T PUT ANYTHING ON PAPER. Pete never did blueprints or even sketches. He walked the land and improvised. Commissioner Deane Beman once demanded a drawing of the TPC Sawgrass “in case you die before it's done.” Pete turned over a place mat and scratched out the back nine that eventually was framed in the clubhouse. His genius will outlive us all. **G**



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