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Golf Digest

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Lee-Anne Pace (*right*) completed a historic hat-trick of SA Women's Open victories when she won the title at San Lameer by seven strokes. And 15-year-old Woo Ju Sun (*left*) had a top-10 finish to win the Jackie Mercer Trophy as leading amateur.

MONEY ISSUE

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03/17

Behind the Scenes

You can't play too much golf

By Stuart McLean, Editor

Much as I love golf, I am often happy to be off the course and taking a break. So it's difficult for me to comprehend that an American played 878 rounds in 2016, walking and carrying his golf bag. For many, that's a lifetime of golf packed into one year.

Barry Gibbons, a retired 57-year-old, set out to break the world record for most rounds walked in a calendar year, and that mark (611 rounds) went last September. He then shattered the record for most rounds in a cart (812). To provide perspective, if you played once a week without fail every year, it would take nearly 17 years to get to 878 rounds. "People are either envious," said Barry, "or think I'm nuts."

Barry never let up, averaging 43 holes a day in all weather, mostly at his two home clubs in Texas and Connecticut. He only played 21 different courses, so green fees were minimal. His biggest expense was golf shoes – he went through more than a dozen pairs, but then he did walk 10 300 kilometres. That's Cape Town to St Andrews in Scotland. He discarded three golf bags. Starting the year as an 8-handicap, all that golf (67 840 strokes, average score 77.3) improved his game, because he was a 1-handicap at one stage.

Curiously, Barry's wife Joy was his biggest supporter. She helped him with his schedule, and created a website, breakthegolfrecord.com, that followed his accomplishment. Good lateral thinking by Barry. The more golf you play, the more sympathetic your wife will be. "A good friend of ours died at age 57 in 2015, before he had a chance to retire and enjoy life," says Joy. "That was a perspective builder." Maybe it was Joy who persuaded Barry to become the world's fittest golfer.

How do South Africans fare when it comes to playing a lot of golf? We have our own champions who tee up often without any thought of records or websites. Henk "Clutch" Maree, club captain at Bronkhorstspuit GC in Gauteng North, played 347 rounds in 2016, of which

308 were at his home course.

No club captain in history has done as many course inspections. This wasn't a one-off year for him either. He was also the SA golfer with the most rounds in 2015, when he played 331.

"I have a job where I have four days on and four days off, so there is plenty of time for golf," said Henk, a 5-handicap. All that practice paid off on December 31, when he shot a 72 to end the year on a triumphant note. "It's not as if I can play every day, so quite often I get in 36 holes; once there were 54 holes in a day." Just wait until he retires. Henk admitted that most of his rounds were played using a golf cart, although he walks for scratch league and tournaments. Just to show that 2017 is going to be no different, he played 24 rounds in January.

Two Randpark members, who must be buddies, were next in terms of rounds, with 318 and 297 respectively. In the Cape, a Durbanville member did 295, and a Westlake member 282. Women golfers weren't as crazy. Their enduro leader was a young Southern Cape woman with 208 rounds.

I obtained these statistics from Handicaps Network Africa, and the most revealing information was that as many as 87 percent of affiliated golfers play less than 50 rounds a year. That is poor commitment to the game by 117 685 golfers. Barry Gibbons was doing that every three weeks.

If you measure a core golfer as someone who plays 100 rounds a year, then they represent only three percent of the affiliated golfing population. HNA says that 3 825 golfers played more than 100 rounds in 2016. There were 516 who broke the 150-round mark, and 71 recorded more than 200 rounds.

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Golf Digest

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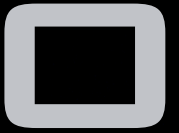
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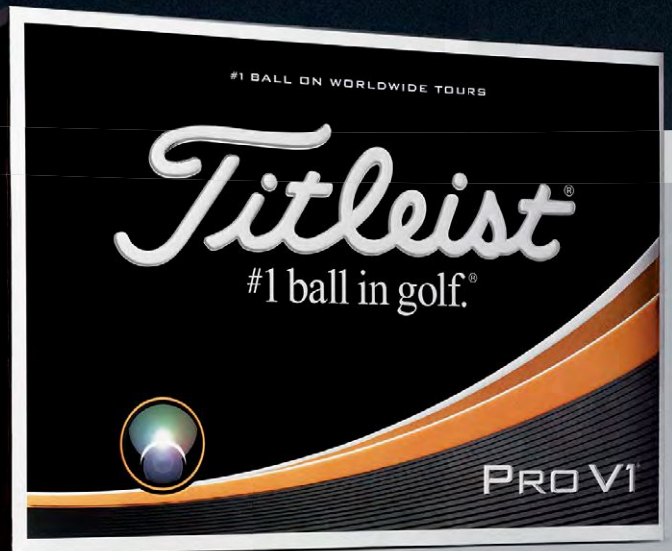
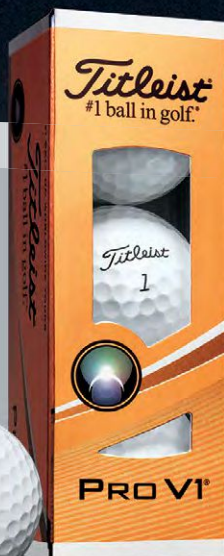
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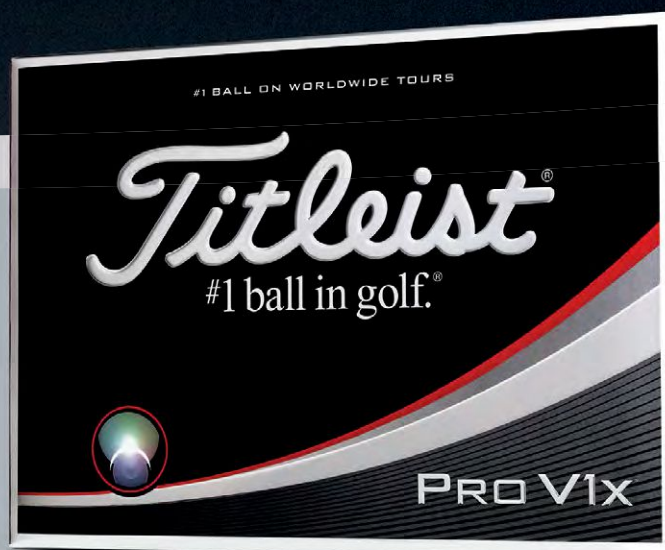
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Play

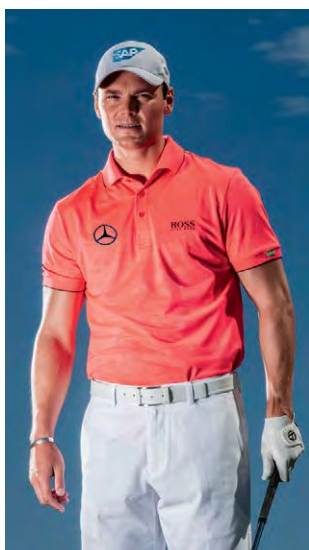
You've Got This

How to beat the tough holes

BY MARTIN KAYMER

MOST PLAYERS GET TO the No 1-handicap hole and think about just trying to survive without destroying the round. Being cautious is understandable. We feel it, too, especially in the majors, where course setups can be brutal. But you'll have more success if you treat that 440-metre par 4 the same as all the others, instead of playing it safe. I used the strategies here to win two major championships, and they'll work just as well for you no matter what hole you're playing. It's time to start looking forward to the challenge and stop playing with fear.

— WITH MATTHEW RUDY



SEE YOUR SHOT

▶ Before I step up to any shot – on any hole, hard or easy – I go through the same mental process. I create a picture in my mind of exactly what the shot will do. Seeing the specific starting line, trajectory, landing and finishing point is a lot different than hoping just to hit it out there somewhere safe. When you have a specific image in your mind and commit to it, you tighten your focus. It's also an important part of handling pressure. You're giving your mind something to do other than be nervous.

“Keep your backswing tempo the same. Nice and smooth.”



DON'T OVERSWING

▶ Long, hard holes are usually visually intimidating from the tee. That's done on purpose to make you uncomfortable from the start. In those tense situations, it's very common to swing faster than normal. And when your tempo changes, your sequencing gets thrown off, which produces a bad shot at the worst time. On a hard driving hole, do the same things you would on a hole you love to play. Take the club back at your usual unhurried pace and make the same smooth swing you would when you're playing your best.

HAVE AN APPROACH PLAN

▶ Bad decisions are just as costly as bad swings – and many times they go hand in hand. When you have a hard approach, don't get consumed with all the trouble around the green. Instead, pay attention to key fundamentals such as alignment, aim and picking the right club for the shot. Good planning helps take away the indecision over the ball that often leads to out-of-control swings. A good swing thought to marry with your plan is to maintain the extension you feel in your arms from address to finish. You'll hit it solid and make a hard hole play easy.

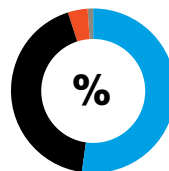


RECORD ROUND

▶ I set the 36-hole scoring record for the US Open (10 under par) in 2014, but the number you see on the ball I use for every tournament round commemorates the 59 I shot in 2006, my first year as a professional. It was in the second round of the Habsburg Classic, on the European Professional Development Tour, when I was 21 years old. It's hard to be disappointed about going 13 under, but I still think about the birdie chance I missed on 17, an easy par 5.

Martin Kaymer won the 2010 PGA Championship and the 2014 US Open, and made the clinching putt for Europe at the 2012 Ryder Cup.





When a distance is perfectly between a 7- and 8-iron, I'm most likely to...

- ▶ Baby the 7: 52%
- ▶ Muscle the 8: 43%
- ▶ Do whatever my caddie or partner says: 4%
- ▶ Do the opposite of what anyone says: 1%

SOURCE: GOLF DIGEST READERS



FORWARD THINKING

Don't hang back and try to lift the ball off the ground. Shift forward and focus on swinging down and through.

How to Hit More Greens

You can start by avoiding these mistakes

There are lots of reasons golfers miss greens – poor contact, over-swinging, too much curve on the ball. But the root problem is usually one of three bad habits:

1. NOT TAKING ENOUGH CLUB

I almost never see an amateur hit over the green on a full-swing approach. When facing a full 8-iron shot, take the 7 and swing smoothly. You'll hit the ball more solidly, and get the distance right.

2. AIMING POORLY

This stems from just not thinking properly. Most golfers are happy to put the ball anywhere on the green, so they aim at the middle. Problem is, that doesn't allow for their natural shot shape. For example, if you're a left-to-right player and you aim

at the middle, your target goes from the whole green to just the right half. Instead, aim at the left edge of the green.

3. TRYING TO HELP THE BALL UP

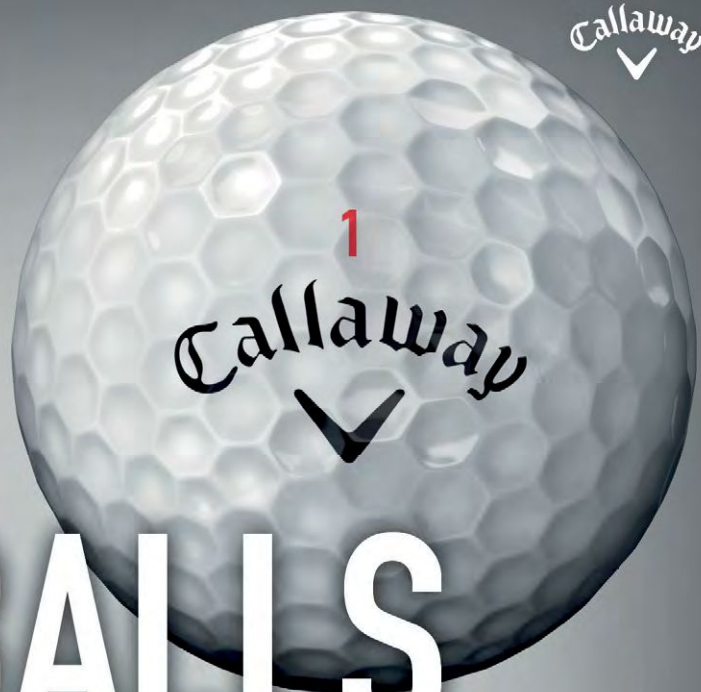
The club's loft will send the shot plenty high if you hit it flush. Here's a great way to stop lifting: When you hit irons on the range, hover the clubhead about 8cm at address so you have to hit down to get to the ball. You'll learn to shift forward and swing down and through.

Butch Harmon is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

BUTCH'S BASICS



Some people think a shorter swing means shorter shots, but often the opposite is true. Short, wide backswings, where the hands stretch away from the body (above), create a bigger arc than long swings where the arms collapse at the top. The key is how much you turn your body. As long as you make a good windup behind the ball, a short swing can be powerful.



THE BALLS THAT CHANGED THE BALL.

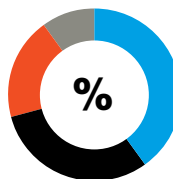


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Worst result you've ever had punching out?

- ▶ Negative distance: 40%
- ▶ Ball got stuck in a tree: 31%
- ▶ Damaged my club: 19%
- ▶ Hit myself: 10%

SOURCE: GOLF DIGEST READERS



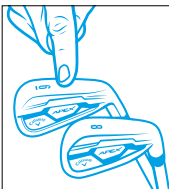
Jailbreak

How to punch your way to freedom

There are times when an off-line shot puts you in a place where all you can do is hit the ball low and advance it to a better position. In these situations, you need the punch shot. It's smart, user-friendly and can eat up a good chunk of distance towards the green. Just remember one thing: To use it reliably, you have to practise this shot. Let me show you how in four steps.

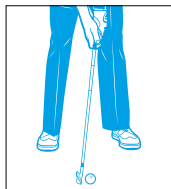
David Leadbetter is a Golf Digest Teaching Professional.

1. USE LESS LOFT



▶ Select a longer iron than normal, like a 6-iron where you might have chosen an 8-iron. But be careful not to choose a club that might hit the ball too low to carry whatever is between you and the fairway.

2. GRIP DOWN



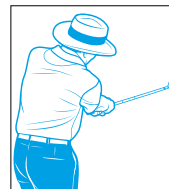
▶ Even with a less-lofted club, you can hit it too high and catch a low-hanging branch. To avoid that, grip down five centimetres and play the ball about middle in your stance. That'll keep the flight down.

3. KEEP IT SHORT



▶ You don't need the extra power that comes from a full backswing. You do need to swing in control and make solid contact. Try not to take the club back any further than the point where your left arm is parallel to the ground.

4. FINISH LOW



▶ The hands should lead the clubhead through impact. Once you strike the ball, the punch swing is almost over. A low finish produces a lower shot – one that just might get you back in position to save par.

Body Blow

Turn through to stick your wedges tight

BY BRIAN MANZELLA

When the pros hit wedge shots, like European Tour player Thomas Pieters is doing here, they're controlling the distance and height very precisely. There's no guessing and hoping it gets close. You can have that kind of control, too, if you start using your body the right way.

Pieters isn't trying to smash the ball as hard as he can, but he's still making a definite body turn through. If you skip this part and use mostly arms, you won't make consistent contact – and you won't have good distance control.

To check your body turn, imagine the ball has a camera on it and that the camera is looking up at you. If you played back the video after the shot, you should see the left side of your chest moving around to the left, up and away from the ball. You should see your belt buckle coming through, followed by your hands and then the clubhead.

The result? Your arms will straighten and line up with your hands and the shaft after impact (*above*). If you try to lead your hands into impact too much, the clubhead will still be trailing the hands at this point. You want the shaft to be pointing at your belt buckle. You can even set up the camera on your phone at the same angle this photo



European Ryder Cup player Thomas Pieters shows how to sync up a wedge swing.

was taken. Check your post-impact position against Pieters' here.

He's a perfect model.

Brian Manzella, a Golf Digest 50 Best Teacher, is based at English Turn Golf & Country Club in New Orleans.

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“Let the hands roll to get the ball to the hole.”



Turn it Over

Master the long greenside bunker shot



ou might get this shot only once or twice a round, but knowing how to get up and down from a bunker on the other side of the green can really help you score. When I won the Masters in 1981, I faced a long greenside bunker shot – about 80 or 90 feet – on the 17th hole on

Sunday. The flag was all the way on the back of the green, and I was in a front bunker resting on the upslope. Fortunately, I caught it just right, hit it pin high about five feet from the cup and saved par to win my second green jacket.

How did I play the shot? I changed my technique from a normal greenside bunker scenario starting with aligning my shoulders more with the slope (left shoulder higher, right shoulder lower) and kicking in my right knee towards the ball at address to keep from swaying. When I swung, I let my hands release, or turn over, through impact. The reason for this different

shoulder alignment is to keep from sticking the club into the bunker at impact, so you can cut a shallow swath of sand out from under the ball as you would do from a level lie. Instead of holding the clubface open and skimming through the sand, I let my hands turn over as the club passes through impact. Rotating them counterclockwise closes the clubface and helps project the ball out with some force. The key here is don't dig too deep into the sand. Make a nice, shallow divot that starts behind the ball's position. The ball will vault out of the bunker and then roll towards the hole.

ELEMENTARY WATSON

▶ To make this shot easier, use a lower-lofted club instead of your sand wedge or lob wedge. Clubs like a gap wedge, pitching wedge or even a 9-iron give you more distance without having to swing harder. Remember that they tend to dig more than skim, so be careful you don't swing too deep.

Tom Watson is a Golf Digest Playing Editor.

"Sometimes a bunker is your friend."

Play Up

Raising your game when the time is right

When I design a hole, my goal is to give golfers of all abilities a way to play it. Often I try to present three distinct options for the tee shot, escalating in difficulty. If I can do that, I figure I have nearly everybody covered.

Paramount is recognising the path down a hole that best suits your game. The perceptive player learns to identify all the choices. That way, when there's a change in weather or circumstances, you're ready to pounce on the opportunity to play more aggressively – or be more conservative, if that's what the situation calls for.

Let's take the par-4 18th at The Loxahatchee Club (illustrated) in Jupiter, Florida. It's a course I designed in 1984, and our team renovated in 2016. The prevailing wind is against. This sets up three basic positions attainable with a solid drive, depending on your power. However, if the wind switches to helping, as it frequently does in the winter months, consider moving up a position. It's your chance to play the hole like a stronger player. –

WITH MAX ADLER



6-15 HANDICAP

Not all middle-handicaps have the same skill set, but generally this is where most should aim. It's the widest section of fairway, plus favouring the right-centre limits exposure to the water. Better for a loose drive to find the sand than get wet. Sure, shifting your target here sets up a longer approach, but there's a nice bailout area right of the green if you're coming in with a hybrid or long iron.

16+ HANDICAP

Look at the scorecard. This happens to be rated as the sixth-toughest hole on the course. If I'm a higher-handicap, that tells me I'm not supposed to make par. Time to figure out how to come away with no worse than 5, maybe see a putt for 4. Aiming well right makes the hole so long it likely resigns you to reaching the green in three shots, but it should keep your ball dry. And don't be scared of the bunkers; they're here to save a slice from scooting out-of-bounds on the right. Even if you find the sand, reaching the green in three is still quite manageable.

0-5 HANDICAP

This is where a lot of low-handicaps are looking. Driving down the left side means flirting with the water. But the hole bends to the left, so this leaves the shortest approach to the green. Also, this fairway runs a touch faster down this side, rewarding moxie even more. If you're confident with your driver and feel like you need a birdie, have at it. Downwind, be cognisant of the fact a big drive can run through the fairway and get wet.

PATIENCE AT PEBBLE



This hole reminds me of the 18th at Pebble Beach, even though that's a par 5. Both are doglegs that wrap around a non-recoverable hazard. I rarely challenged the ocean much with my drive or second shot at Pebble. Usually I went 1-iron, 1-iron, and then wedged on. That strategy worked for me. I won the US Amateur there in 1961 and the US Open in 1972.

5-Minute Clinic

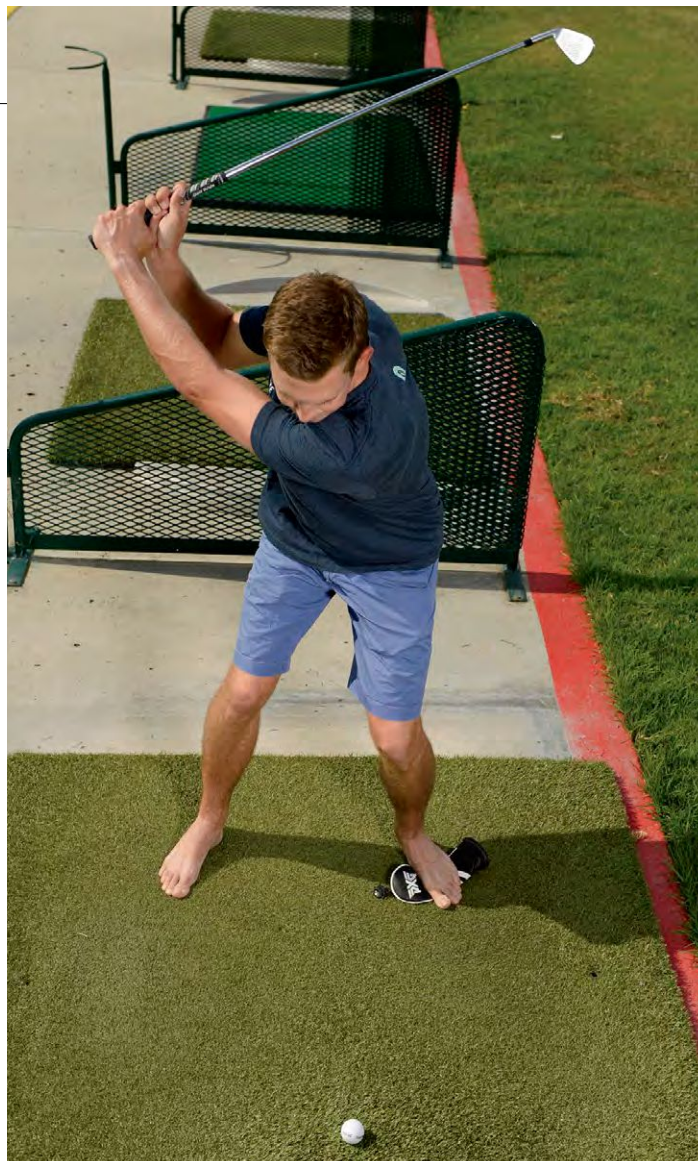
Streamline your practice sessions

BY DEVAN BONEBRAKE

Admit it: You'd rather go play golf than beat balls at the range. That's OK. Most of us would. But practice is the only way you're going to get significantly better. If you have to put in the time, you might as well get something out of it.

Here are some of my favourite range drills you can do with a few simple props – a range bucket, a headcover and a towel. You don't even have to hit a million balls to get some serious benefit. Cycle through these drills during your next session, and you'll be amazed at the difference in your shots when you get back on the course. You'll start looking forward to your trips to the range. — WITH MATTHEW RUDY

Devan Bonebrake, a Golf Digest Best Young Teacher, runs the Southern California Golf Academy at Carlsbad Golf Centre.



1

SWING RHYTHM

Squish the headcover

► Hitting balls barefoot is nothing new. Sam Snead did it in the 1950s. You can do it, too, and get some of that terrific tempo and timing Snead was famous for.

Put a headcover on the ground and cover it with the middle of your front foot. Make your backswing, and when your hands get to chest high, make sure you're squishing the headcover (left). Your hands and arms will respond by following your body into the downswing.

Pushing into the ground at half-way back will help you add speed later in the swing.

2

CLUBHEAD PATH

Miss the buckets

► The path of the swing is a big deal: It influences ball flight in tons of ways. But it's hard to see and feel when you're going full speed. With a couple of buckets as guides, you'll learn where to go.

If you slice, create a swing path by putting a bucket upside down to the inside of the target line, in front of the ball, and a bucket right side up to the outside, just behind the ball (right). Hooking it? Reverse the buckets so the front one is outside, back one inside.



To fix a slice, don't dump the balls on the backswing.



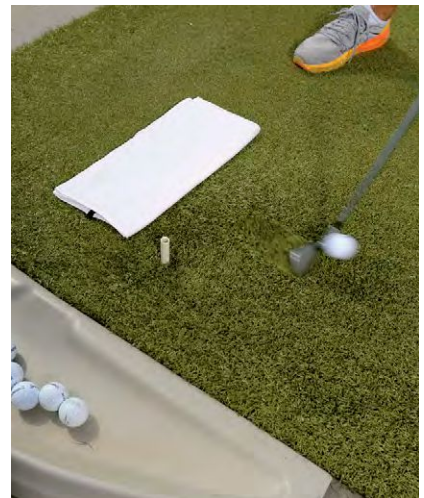
3

THE TRANSITION

Get it right going back

► One of the biggest backswing mistakes I see is when a player rotates the lead arm over the trail arm right away. That makes the club pull to the inside, putting it immediately out of position.

To feel the right movement, pick up a range bucket that's half full of balls and get into your setup. Simulate your backswing, keeping the bucket aligned so the balls stay in (*far left*). Only when you get to the top should you feel the bucket turning so that the balls fall out – right as you start down (*left*). That's the position you want to be in to fire into impact.



4

BACKSWING ARC

Going back, let the headcover fall

► When I walk the range, I often see golfers swinging with a headcover under one arm to stay "connected." That might be a good drill for a tour player who already produces a lot of speed, but it's too restricting for most golfers.

I'd bet you need more width on the backswing – and more speed at impact – so try this drill instead. Put a headcover under your right arm and swing so that the headcover drops behind you when your arms get waist high. This will promote a wider arc and set up the correct downswing sequence.



DON'T WORRY ABOUT PRECISE DISTANCES WHEN HITTING RANGE BALLS. THEY'RE ALL DIFFERENT, SO DISTANCE CAN VARY BY 10-15 METRES.



5

BALL-STRIKING

Clean up impact with a towel

► Good ball-strikers get it done their own way, but one thing they all do is hit the ball before they hit the ground. To get that clean, pure contact, give yourself a reference point on the ground.

Set a small towel down and make some practice swings with your 8-iron where you hit the turf in front of the towel. Once you do this three or four times, place a ball five centimetres in front of the towel and hit a shot (*above*). If you try to lift the ball into the air, you'll catch the towel before you strike the ball, which means you need to make a more descending strike.

CLICKING AWAY
Galleries at the SA Open embrace
Rory McIlroy's presence at Glendower
by capturing every moment with their
cameras and smartphones.



Life

All eyes on Rors

The week a genuine superstar came to town – and ripped it at altitude.

BY BARRY HAVENGA

When Rory McIlroy stepped on to the 10th tee at 07:10 for his first round draw with defending South African Open champion Brandon Stone and George Coetzee, 4 000 fans had already passed through the gates at Glendower Golf Club. The fact that he ultimately lost a sudden-death playoff to Englishman Graeme Storm on Sunday afternoon almost proved inconsequential considering the impact he made on so many South African sports fans on his first visit back to our country since 2009.



McIlroy on the par-3 17th tee at Glendower. The BMW i8 hybrid sports car was won by Jaco van Zyl with an ace in the second round.

Such was the pulling power of the World No 2, and four-time major champion, that a total of 28 000 fans attended the 106th BMW SA Open over the four days. Last year it had been just 8 000.

Only Humewood Golf Club has seen more fans at a Sunshine Tour event in recent decades, when 41 000 descended on the Port Elizabeth links in December 2006 to watch Ernie Els win with what was a record 72-hole score. Els was then as big a

drawcard in PE as McIlroy is today in Gauteng.

McIlroy's presence in any tournament boosts global television ratings and interest, but there was added anticipation at Glendower which brought huge fanfare to what is normally a low-key European Tour event. Social media was abuzz with speculation as to what new equipment the Northern Irishman would be using in his first start of 2017 – following Nike's withdrawal from the club and

ball market — and then came his controversial comments about golf at the Olympics.

In an interview with Dublin's Sunday Independent newspaper (which emerged at Glendower), McIlroy talked about how his agonising dilemma of choosing between representing Ireland or Great Britain had soured the Olympic experience for him, suggesting it's unlikely he'll be at Tokyo for the Games in 2020.

South African fans came to see Rory smash it off the tee – and they weren't disappointed. The 27-year-old ripped driver as much as possible, averaging 290 metres for the week with his new Calaway Epic.

We were also very fortunate that he played all four rounds. We learnt afterwards that he was close to withdrawing from the Open after the second round because of a balky back which had ailed him

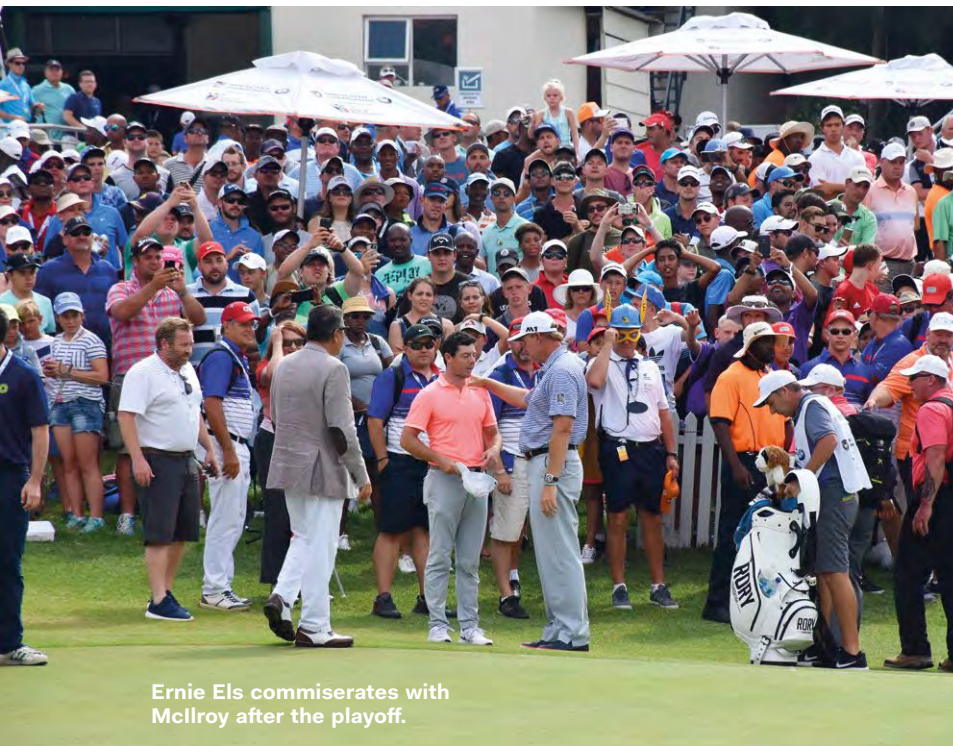
on the Friday afternoon.

Thankfully for the fans, the Sunshine and European tours, and promoters, he played through the weekend, albeit in some discomfort, and gave us a final round to remember. McIlroy was due to play in Abu Dhabi the following week, but on arrival in the United Arab Emirates a scan revealed he had sustained a rib injury which would result in his having to rest up for some considerable time.

South Africa hasn't seen such fanfare for a foreign golfer since Tiger Woods' two visits to South Africa (1998 Nedbank Golf Challenge and 2003 Presidents Cup), and McIlroy delighted locals with his affable demeanour towards many fans who were clearly attending a golf tournament for the first time. That's what marquee players do. McIlroy's reputation and celebrity status attracts new people to golf.

The gallery on the 14th.





Ernie Els commiserates with McIlroy after the playoff.



McIlroy's American fiancée Erica Stoll.

And he was gracious in defeat too. Following Storm's dramatic victory, where it seemed that only his caddie, Thama 'Jeffrey' Nkonyane was pulling for him (see page 30), McIlroy was acutely aware of the career life-line the victory meant for Storm. Last October, the 38-year-old fell €100 short of automatically retaining his European Tour playing privileges, but he subsequently moved up one crucial spot on the money-list when American Patrick Reed failed to play the minimum number of events.

"What a story it is for Graeme. He thought he had lost his card and there he is now standing with a trophy in his hands after the first event of 2017. I'm delighted for him," said McIlroy. "I wish I could have done a little more but it's not a bad way to start the season."

Tournament host Ernie Els brought McIlroy to

South Africa after Els had played in the 2014 Irish Open, extracting a promise that the Irishman would reciprocate. But how does the five-time SA Open champion follow up his coup for the 2018 Open? Els followed the action on the back nine at Glendower on Sunday from a cart and would have been immensely proud of the masses that lined the fairways, reminiscing perhaps of the days in his prime when he drew the same audience.

Could Els lure Jordan Spieth or Rickie Fowler to Johannesburg for a week? Maybe tempt Dustin Johnson or Bubba Watson with the thrill of power hitting at altitude? The prospect of a game-viewing holiday beforehand could perhaps clinch such a deal. Before the Open, McIlroy spent time with his fiancée Erica Stoll at the private Londolozi Game Reserve, bordering the Kruger National Park, and something

similar could serve as an incentive for American visitors.

Let's hope that Els can also convince our big three of Louis Oosthuizen, Charl Schwartzel and Branden Grace to play in their national open again

— none of them have yet won the trophy. All were notably absent this year. Grace opted to play on the PGA Tour in Hawaii, but major champions Oosthuizen and Schwartzel were in the country the week Rory came to town.

No cellphones or cameras allowed?



Are your shoulders flexible enough for the wall slide?

Starter Workout

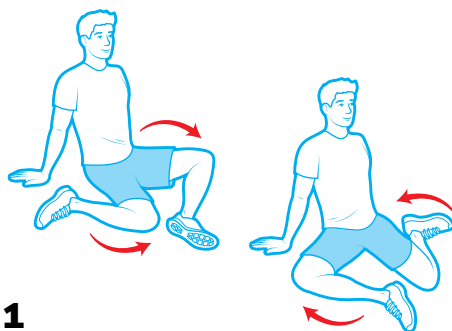
The best moves to prepare for 2017

New Year's resolutions rarely stick, but maybe this one has some staying power: We asked Golf Digest Fitness Advisor Ben Shear to come up with the best golf exercises for an off-season programme.

No problem. He selected a dazzling dozen. First there are three to improve mobility and three to improve stability. You're looking at those here. The other six come next month, once you've had a chance to work on this starter kit. In the April issue, Shear will give you three exercises for strength and three for power. In other words, once you've improved your stability and flexibility, you'll be able to add the fuel for more explosive shots.

— RON KASPRISKE

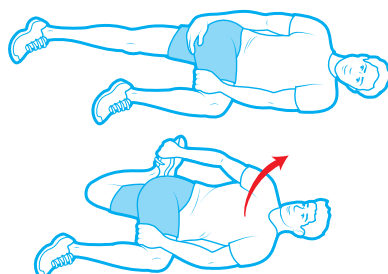
MOBILITY



1

90-90 KNEE DROP

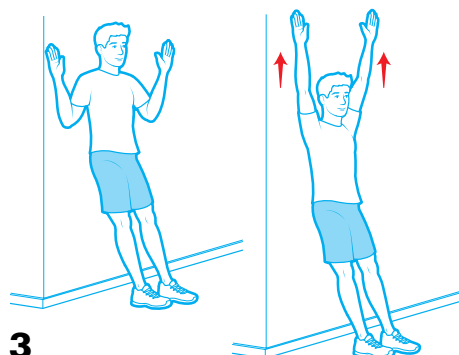
Start with both legs bent to 90 degrees and the knees touching the ground (*left*). Keeping one knee down, rotate the other until it's touching the ground on the opposite side. Then repeat with the other knee (*right*). Keep alternating the knee rotations back and forth. Do six reps in each direction to help improve the mobility necessary to coil and initiate the downswing.



2

BRETZEL

Lie on your side with your top leg bent at 90 degrees, waist high, lower arm holding it down. Rotate the other leg thigh down (*top*). Lift that foot up, grab it with your other arm and pull it towards your butt. Finally, rotate your torso away from the top leg (*bottom*). Hold for a few seconds, then return to start. Do five reps, each direction, to improve trunk, thigh and hip mobility.

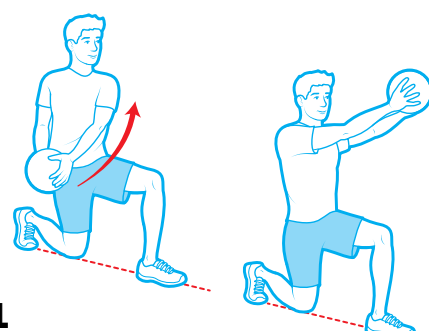


3

SHOULDER WALL SLIDE

Keep your back, shoulders, head and arms against a wall (*left*). With your eyes straight forward and your feet a foot from the wall, slide your arms up as high as you can, maintaining all points of contact with the surface (*right*). Don't arch your back. Do 10 reps. Improves shoulder mobility needed to swing on the proper plane.

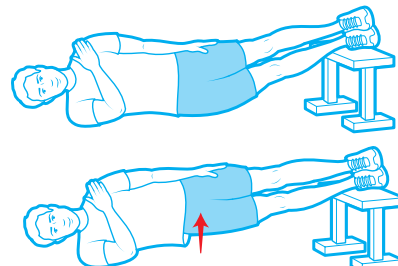
STABILITY



1

MEDICINE-BALL LIFT

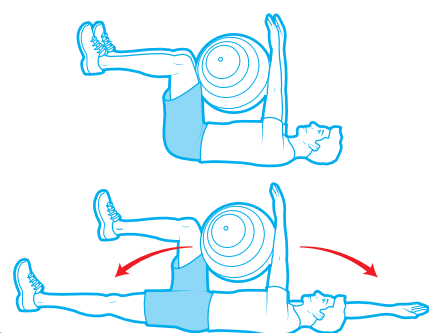
Kneel on one leg with the foot of the other leg directly in line with it. Hold a medicine ball down by the hip of the kneeling leg (*left*). Bring the ball to your chest and lift it across your body above the opposite shoulder (*right*). Do 10 reps. Switch leg positions and repeat in the opposite direction. Improves balance, core strength and cross-body coordination needed for the golf swing.



2

NO-ARM SIDE PLANK

Lie on your side, supported by your shoulder and upper arm with your feet stacked and resting on a bench (*top*). Raise your pelvis as high as you can (*bottom*). Hold for a few seconds and then lower it to the ground. Do 10 reps, and repeat on the opposite side. This strengthens the oblique muscles necessary for proper side-bending and torso rotation in the golf swing.



3

DEAD BUG

Hold a physio ball with your arms and legs (*top*). Lower one arm behind your head while straightening and lowering the opposite leg (*bottom*). The other leg and arm should push into the ball. Keep your back from arching. Return to start. Do 10 reps, alternating arms and legs. Improves core stability to control faster swings.

How much range time would it take to master the game?

Q

While addressing his ball under a tree, a playing partner was dive-bombed by a large red-tailed hawk. Rather than have him risk his hat being clawed off, we allowed him to move the ball away from the tree without penalty. Were we correct?

A

To truly understand the gravity of the situation, we did some research on red-tailed hawks. Did you know they can have wingspans of more than a metre, are also known as a chicken hawk, and frequently cause damage to Foghorn Leghorn? Regardless of what the *Rules of Golf* says, we believe you made the right call. No gap wedge in the world was going to save his hat, or his hide, from those talons. But Decision 1-4/10 confirms you were in the right. You can take relief from a “situation dangerous to the player.” It doesn’t cite hawks specifically, but let’s not split hairs or, in the hawk’s case, hares. Get it? The correct procedure is to drop in a spot not nearer the hole that isn’t dangerous, not in a hazard, and not on a putting green. Or run like hell.

I work at a golf club and see members practising two or three hours, three to four times a week on the range. Is there an amount of time where there is a limited return on all that work?

There has been a lot of research on what types of practice are best, but we don’t know of any studies on how much to practice. Malcolm Gladwell famously wrote in his book *Outliers: The Story of Success* that it takes 10 000 hours of practice to master something. For example, it took us that long to figure out you could take apart a Rubik’s Cube and put it back together with all the colours matching. If you believe Gladwell, your members would have to hit balls for three hours every day for more than nine years to master golf. During that time, they would likely lose their jobs, go through two divorces, need spinal surgery and change their names to Vijay. Is that a limited return? *Hmmmm.*



As my brother-in-law started his swing, a gust of wind blew his ball off the tee, and he had a big whiff. He said he could re-tee without penalty. Was he right?

▶▶

Two things apply, to your question. The first is Rule 11-3 in the *Rules of Golf*. The second is Rule 2-6 in the *Procedures for In-Laws, Volume III*. Let’s get the golf stuff out of the way. If the ball fell off the tee while he was making a stroke, it counts as a stroke. He should have played it as it lies.

What matters here is the definition of a stroke: the forward movement of the club with the intention of hitting the ball. So if the ball fell off the tee in the backswing, it’s not a stroke. If he stopped his swing short of the ball – like Tiger used to do when he heard sounds in the gallery or in his head – it’s also not a stroke. You follow?

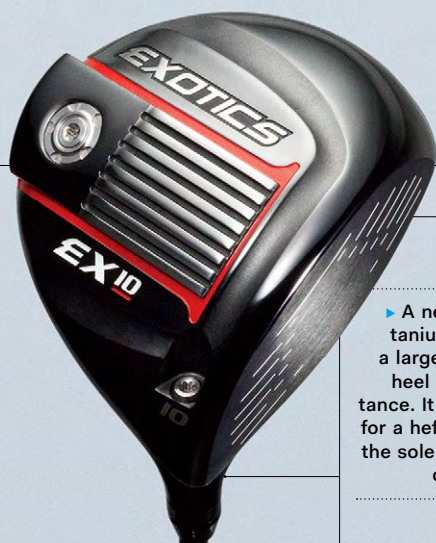
Now, back to the brother-in-law thing. Do you really want to make your family holiday gatherings more awkward than they already are? Don’t be that guy; let him re-tee without penalty.

IN FOUR WORDS

Q: Is it legal to make an indentation behind your ball in the fairway?

A: Yes, but dieting helps.

Submit your burning questions here:
ask@golfdigest.com
or on Twitter
@GolfDigest



**TOUR EDGE
EX-10**

► A new, lightweight titanium alloy allows for a larger face so toe and heel hits lose less distance. It also makes room for a hefty weight deep in the sole for extra stability on off-centre hits.

SPECIAL ORDER



**WILSON
TRITON**

► The club made famous by the "Driver vs. Driver" TV show has two adjustable sole plates that allow you to control the club's weight, launch and spin. Movable weights in the heel and toe let you tweak direction, too.

PRICE R6 999



**CALLAWAY
GBB EPIC**

► Two titanium posts inside the head and just behind the face run from the crown to the sole. They stiffen the body, allowing the face to be thinner and more flexible.

PRICE R8 499

**XXIO
PRIME**

► The Prime is designed for average swings in need of speed. The club is 20-percent lighter than most drivers on the market and has a shaft that weighs 30 grams.

SPECIAL ORDER

Weight Watchers

How new drivers are getting lighter in all the right places

It's not that today's drivers are getting lighter. It's just that designers have got smarter about how they distribute weight. Yes, they're making use of lighter titanium alloys and carbon-composite materials, but it's how they're using them that's making drivers more effective than ever. The greatest innovation in drivers today is the ability to save weight in one area and use it strategically elsewhere. Redistributing



**BRIDGESTONE
TOUR B XD**

► Sole weights can be adjusted to tweak spin, and each head produces a different ball flight: higher and favouring a draw on the XD-5; lower with a fade bias on the XD-7; and neutral on the XD-3.

PRICE R8 999



**HONMA
TW737**

► The four drivers in this line aren't adjustable, but they come in four sizes to match four player types: the 445 (low spin), the 450 (deep face), the 455 (forgiveness) and the 460 (extra carry).

SPECIAL ORDER



**TAYLORMADE
M1 (2017)**

► This update of golf's most adjustable driver adds a lighter titanium alloy and a carbon-composite panel in the sole to lower spin and boost forgiveness.

PRICE R7 999

weight can take many different forms: It can free up space so that the driver can feature more adjustability. It can make the heaviest part of any driver (the face) lighter so the driver can be larger and more flexible. Or it might make it possible for drivers to come equipped with the kind of on-board diagnostics that would make even a Formula One team boss jealous. Here are eight new models that throw their weight around so you can, too.

COBRA KING F7

► The carbon-composite crown saves weight to allow for three weight ports in the sole. But the cool bonus is the sensor in the grip that tracks your driving stats via a smartphone app.

PRICE R6 999

Rising with Confidence

Backed by a fierce work ethic, Jacques Kruyswijk looks for a breakout year in 2017.

By Barry Havenga

JACQUES KRUYSWIJK

AGE 24

BORN Pretoria

ATTACHMENT

Centurion CC

TURNED PRO 2012

CAREER His maiden Sunshine Tour victory came at the Cape Town Open in November 2016. He led by three through 54 holes before closing out defending champion Brandon Stone and Justin Harding to win by two at Royal Cape with rounds of 67-66-68-70. Twice a runner-up in Vodacom Origins of Golf events.

» **ON MAKING GOLF A PROFESSION**
I'm proud to say that I'm one of the hardest workers on tour. I take it very seriously. I'm not out there to make friends and have a good time – I'm there to be the best athlete I can be and win tournaments. I've sacrificed a lot, including relationships, to achieve my goals and will do whatever it takes to keep improving.

» **ON A RURAL UPBRINGING**
I grew up on a farm in Louis Trichardt in the Far North where my family bred horses and cattle. I was 13 when I started

playing golf at the Koro Creek estate in Modimolle (Nylstroom) and quickly progressed to representing Limpopo in their provincial teams. I wasn't able to travel to that many amateur events around the country, but I was grateful when those opportunities came.

» **ON LEARNING FROM A LOSS**
In the Vodacom Origins event at Vaal de Grace in 2015 I opened with rounds of 66 and 63 to lead Jean Hugo by two shots through 36 holes. I shot 67 in the final round to finish on 20-under-par, and still

lost by one. Jean shot 64. At the time the defeat was tough to take, but it ended up being a valuable learning experience. I might not have held my nerve so well coming down the stretch at Royal Cape (in the Cape Town Open) had it not been for memories of that day at Vaal de Grace.

» **ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PATIENCE**
I have always been hard on myself in this game. I got frustrated because I wasn't getting the results I wanted from all the work I was putting in. I started seeing sports

psychologist Maretha Claasen 18 months ago, and she has taught me that golf is a process. It takes time to mature as a professional, and I am mentally tougher because of her guidance.

»» ON TURNING HIS BACK ON AMATEUR GOLF

In early 2011 I was ranked within the top 8 of the SA Golf Association rankings and reached the semifinals of the SA Amateur at Vaal de Grace, but was not selected for the national team. It was actually a blessing, because it made me more determined to prove people wrong. I decided to start playing IGT events to test myself against professionals, and that made me better prepared for when I turned pro.

»» ON BEING BLOWN AWAY BY STORM

In January I played the first two rounds of the SA Open with eventual champion Graeme Storm. At some stage during the second round I said to my caddie that this guy is going to win the tournament. I played decently and signed for a 69, but only realised that Graeme had shot 63 when I signed his card. He hadn't hit the ball better than me, but his phenomenal short game outclassed me. It was an excel-

lent example of how an experienced European Tour pro manages his game – and of where I need to be in the future.

»» ON ANIMALS HOLDING UP PLAY

I've had two amusing experiences where animals have disrupted my round. In a social round at Koro Creek, when I was an amateur, a puff adder came out of the bush and slithered into the back of our golf cart where the clubs were stored. We abandoned the round and a snake-handler had to be called to restore order. At the 2014 Nedbank Affinity Cup at Lost City a monkey nabbed my pro-am partner's phone from the cart. We chased it into thick bush, eventually retrieving the device, but causing a 30-minute delay.

IN THE BAG

- **Driver:** TaylorMade M2, 9.5 degrees
- **Fairway:** Srixon Z F45, 13 degrees
- **Irons (3-5):** Srixon Z 745, (6-PW): Srixon Z 945
- **Wedges:** Cleveland RTX (52, 56, 60)
- **Putter:** Odyssey ProType #5
- **Ball:** Srixon Z-Star

QUICK FIRE

- **Window or aisle?** Aisle.
First person to call in a jam? My dad Paul.
- **Test match at Lord's or Twickenham?** Twickenham.
- **First car?** A green VW Polo Classic.
- **Current car?** Audi A4.
- **Favourite TV shows?** Suits and Vikings.
- **Lowest round?** 61 in social rounds at Koro Creek and Centurion CC.
- **Superstitions:** I only carry 4 tees in my pocket, and always use the same pitch mark repairer and ball marker.
- **Best friends on Tour?** Erik van Rooyen, Christiaan Bezuidenhout and Arthur Horne.
- **Strongest mentally on tour?** Trevor Fisher.
- **Most naturally gifted on tour?** Jean Hugo.
- **Longest hitter you've played with?** Dean Burmester.
- **Who would you like to be stuck in a lift with?** Tiger Woods. He looks tough to approach, but he'd have no choice in that confined space.
- **Which celebrity would you sacrifice to zombies?** Andy Murray.



Jacques Kruyswijk signs a cap for a young fan after winning the Cape Town Open.



Storm's Caddie Joins Local Roll of Honour

Thama Jeffrey Nkonyane found himself a mini-celebrity in Johannesburg when he collected the biggest cheque of his 32-year career as a caddie after helping England's Graeme Storm win the BMW SA Open at Glendower.

He is one of six South African black caddies who have been on the bag of an Open champion since the championship became part of the European Tour in 1997. Four of them have been with foreign players rather than locals. Isaac Zwane was the first, with Vijay Singh at Glendower in 1997. Simon Masilo caddied for Ernie Els in all five of his Open victories (two of those were before the Open became co-sanctioned). Mike Sithole caddied for Mathias Gronberg at Randpark in 2000, while Solomon Soli was on the bag for another Swede, Henrik Stenson, when he won at Serengeti in 2012. Soli has travelled extensively on the European Tour. Tim Clark had Kloof CC caddie Justice "Juice" Dlamini by his side when

winning at Durban CC in 2002.

"This is the biggest payday of my life, and also the proudest day of my career," said the 51-year-old from Soweto, who is a regular caddie at the Wanderers Golf Club. "It was special to win the Open in front of my home crowd, and with Graeme, who I've known for many years. I first caddied for him when he came here in 2001 as a youngster to compete on the Sunshine Tour. Then I picked up his bag again in the 2005 SA Open at Durban Country Club, and we finished in the top five. We always reconnect when he comes to South Africa and he calls on me if he doesn't bring his own bagman. This time his caddie went on honeymoon, so he called and I came."

Nkonyane has carried many bags on the Sunshine Tour and his favourites include Hugh Baiocchi, the late Wayne Westner and American Woody Austin, who briefly played the Sunshine Tour for part of the summer of 1987.

"Graeme had never played with Rory (McIlroy) before, so we knew it was going

to be a stressful day, but I have to say the fans had a lot to do with his win," said Nkonyane. "At almost every hole they cheered just as hard for Graeme as they did for Rory and that really gave us confidence. My job was to keep telling him not to get angry or upset and hurt himself. I am so proudly South African after this. This shows that we are as good as caddies anywhere in the world."

Storm, incidentally, recorded a golfing first when his mother caddied for him at the 2000 Masters (he was invited after winning the 1999 British Amateur).

SA OPEN WINS BY BLACK CADDIES (SINCE 1997)

Isaac Zwane	Glendower 1997
Simon Masilo	Durban CC 1998, 2010; Humewood 2006
Mike Sithole	Randpark 2000
Justice Dlamini	Durban CC 2002
Solomon Soli	Serengeti 2012
Jeffrey Nkonyane	Glendower 2017

New Data shows Club Golfers need more Distance

What constitutes a long drive? If you watched the tour pros at the SA Open, tee shots going 300-plus metres at Glendower were not the exception.

South African Dean Burmester (*right*) was the early No 1 in the 2017 European Tour driving distance stats, averaging 309 yards this season, or 283 metres. He headed the tour's driving distance stats in 2016 with an average of 315.6 yards. On the PGA Tour, J B Holmes was No 1 in 2016, with 314.5 yards.

But for mere mortals – read average golfers – the numbers are far more modest, and goes to show that it would be foolish for golf's governing bodies to try and curb golf-ball technology.

Game Golf, maker of a wearable, real-time shot-tracking system that received Golf Digest's 2016 Editors' Choice award for Best Game Analyser, compiled the average driving distance in the United States for all users from rounds played between April and September 2016.

The overall average? Try 219.55 yards, or 201 metres. Of course, that number varies by age and handicap.

Golfers aged 20 to 29 averaged 238.68

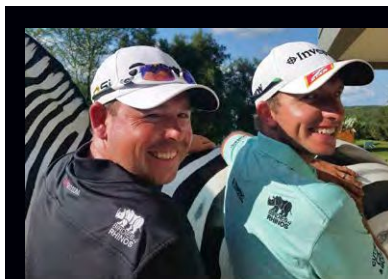


(218m), while those between 30 and 39 (the largest group at 25.76 percent of users) averaged 231.21 yards (212m), while those between 40 and 49 averaged 220.52 yards (202m). Golfers over 60 average 196.4 (180m).

Players with handicaps of 5 or lower averaged 250.93 yards (230m), with golfers between a 5 and 9 hit it 231.04 yards (211m).

Game Golf also provided other club distances: the average 3-wood went 186.89 yards (171m), the 7-iron clocked in at 133.48 yards (122m), with the pitching wedge at 73.97 yards (68m).

And for what it's worth, golfers found the

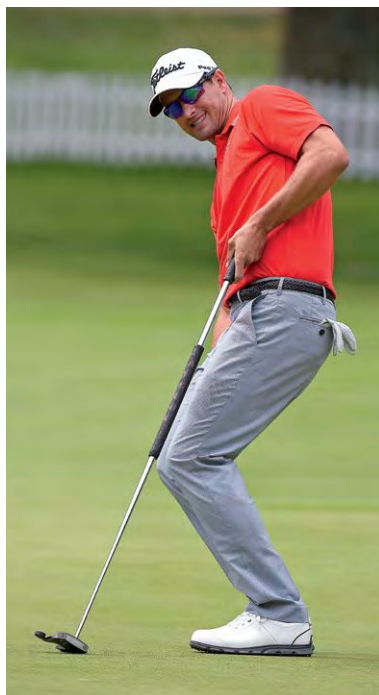


Sunshine Tour golfers Dean Burmester and Justin Walters raised R137 425 for Mark Boucher's Rhino conservation programme during the 2016 season. They each donated R100 for every birdie they made, and between them they had 557 last year in Sunshine Tour and European Tour events. Their sponsors also contributed, and they both intend to continue with Birdies 4 Rhinos in 2017.

fairway off the tee 46.46 percent of the time. What to make of the findings?

While the longest distance number may seem puny – especially when Henrik Stenson is outdriving that figure by 40 yards with his 3-wood – at least it's clear that when golf officials discuss the potential need for curbing escalating driving distances, they're not talking about an issue for recreational amateurs.

Anchor Ban turns out to be no Big Deal



At the height of anchoring, interest in it on tour and among the masses was not as a matter of last resort, but as a more efficient way to putt – something the R&A's Peter Dawson cited as largely the impetus for the rule prohibiting the anchored stroke that went into effect a year ago.

Now, with a full year of non-anchored putting complete, the question might be asked, "Was it really a better way?" The stats seem to indicate any improved performance from anchoring was virtually nonexistent. Those who were good putters before continued to putt well, and those that struggled continued to have trouble finding the hole.

At the last full-field PGA Tour event of 2015 (The Barclays), seven players on tour today anchored: Keegan Bradley, Tim Clark, Brian Harman, David Hearn, Carl Pettersson, Adam Scott and Webb Simpson. Harman and Hearn ranked among the top 50 in strokes gained/putting and remained there (Harman rising from 47th to 15th); Scott (*pictured*), Simpson, Bradley and Clark were all outside the top 125 and remained there. Scott improved modestly,

Bradley got somewhat worse, and Clark didn't play enough events (just two in January 2016) to draw a reasonable conclusion. The one anomaly: Pettersson, who was 31st in 2015 but dropped more than 100 places last season.

And what about Bernhard Langer? The PGA Tour Champions stalwart barely moved his Odyssey White Hot 2-Ball Long putter away from his body (causing some, early in the year, to insist he was still anchoring) and went on to rank second in putting average – an impressive accomplishment given that he led the tour in greens in regulation. (He led the tour in putting average and GIR the year before.)

"I practised a great deal," said Langer. "Spent many weeks, months, lots of hours on the putting green, trying different techniques, but also working with the long putter non-anchored. I came to the conclusion that in the short term, it's definitely the easiest for me to use the long putter non-anchored." Apparently so. Langer won the tour's season-long Charles Schwab Cup for the third consecutive year, and has taken his number of victories on the senior tour to 30, second only to Hale Irwin's 45 wins.



The Robot Named After Tiger

This could be the most influential golfer of the next 25 years.

BY JERRY TARDE



The best description of the robotic swing of Ben Hogan was authored by the late writer Charles Price, who said Hogan hit the ball “like a machine stamping out bottle caps.” So it came as a bit of a surprise that the United States Golf Association’s golf robot was named “Iron Byron” after the more artistic swinger, Byron Nelson.

Nelson became known as “the Mechanical Man” when he won 11 consecutive tournaments and 18 total in 1945. The True Temper shaft company built the first swing robot in 1967, modelled on Nelson’s “perfect swing,” and for decades the USGA used it to test balls for compliance with the rules.

Most of the USGA’s testing is now done indoors, but modern versions of Iron Byron can be cranked up to 130 miles per hour (208 kilometres per hour), matching the fastest swings on the PGA Tour today. The USGA’s robot is stationary, so it’s kind of a one-trick pony, hitting perfect drivers.

Now along comes Gene

Parente, who runs a company called Golf Laboratories Inc. Parente is the inventor of a robot on wheels with an adjustable swing that can hit balls out of bunkers and putts on the green as well as every imaginable tee shot. His partner Gary McCord named it LDRIC after Eldrick (Tiger) Woods, a gibberish acronym for Launch Directional Robot Intelligent Circuitry.

“At his peak, Tiger was able to take emotion out of the moment and hit pure shots,” McCord says. “Our LDRIC is a tribute to that spirit and resolve.”

So it was quite a coincidence when Parente and McCord rolled out LDRIC onto the stadium par-3 16th at TPC Scottsdale in Arizona on the Wednesday of last year’s Waste Management PGA Tour event and made a hole-in-one (on its fifth try). Beer cans rained down on the green from the stadium seats, reminiscent of the 1997 ace made by the original Tiger on the same hole.

Parente has been a longtime

technical advisor to Golf Digest and performs the robotic tests for our annual Hot List evaluation of equipment. His overnight success began when he graduated in 1989 from UCLA with a major in International Relations and a plan to work in the foreign service. His father is Richard Parente, the former Palm Springs golf pro who started the wedge company, Hickory Stick USA, later purchased by Ely Callaway and renamed Callaway Golf.

Richard had another idea for an independent testing company and knew of a swing robot for sale by Titleist. Gene agreed to give his dad’s plan a try as a temporary job before graduate school, and 27 years later his evolving robot, built jointly with Sean Dynes of Dynes Unlimited Products, has become the go-to device in the industry for testing clubs and balls. It can also replicate hooks, slices and other flaws inherent in the human swing, which is the basis for a new venture by Gene and Gary and another partner, Mike Abram,

to use LDRIC as a teaching tool.

You might have seen the European Tour promotion showing Gene’s robot competing in a skills challenge against Rory McIlroy hitting balls into washing machines on a practice range. Or in a match in Japan against Shingo Katayama.

There is more to come as LDRIC combines robotics, information, education and entertainment with golf learning. “You only have to see how kids react to a seven-foot talking robot in junior clinics to appreciate the impact on teaching science and promoting the game,” Parente says.

At the end of the day, LDRIC’s performances are eerily similar to that of another golfer goofing his way through a clinic and amazing attendees with power, speed and accuracy. That guy was a young Tiger Woods. A quarter-century later, it’s his robotic namesake that might be changing the game. The most influential golfer of the next 25 years might not be human.

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Two lucky readers stand a chance to each win 12 dozen Srixon Z-Star golf balls (either Z-Star or Z-Star XV), with a prize value of R8 000 per winner.

**TO ENTER
SMS the answer,
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Srixon has pushed the limits of performance further than ever with the new Z-Star Series, with the following enhanced features:

New third generation Spin Skin coating: Softer cover coating produces more friction at impact for even better approach and greenside spin control, especially from the rough.

New 338 Speed Dimple Pattern: Optimum combination of dimple occupancy and dimple uniformity creates even less drag. The result is longer distance and a truer, more penetrating ball flight on full shots.

New Z-Star Energetic Gradient Growth Core: Softer, lower-compression core enhances feel and promotes seamless energy transfer to optimise ball performance on every shot.

New Z-Star XV Dual Energetic Gradient Growth Core: Advanced two-layer core construction maximises distance by promoting higher launch, lower spin and faster ball speed on full shots.

Terms and Conditions: A year's supply denotes 12 dozen Z-Star golf balls. The winner will be able to choose between Z-Star or Z-Star XV golf balls. The winner will be randomly selected via electronic draw. The judges' decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into. Prizes are not transferable and may not be converted into cash. Entrants must have a South African residential address. Entry into this competition constitutes acceptance of the rules. Employees of New Media Publishing, sponsors, media partners and their immediate families and advertising agencies may not enter. Winners will be notified by the sponsor via telephone or email and will forfeit prize if unreachable. Names of confirmed winners will appear on facebook.com/GolfDigestSA. The competition closes on 31 March 2017. No late entries will be accepted. By entering this competition, the winner indemnifies the organisers and all parties involved in this competition against all claims that may arise from the utilisation of the prize. By entering the competition you agree to receive further communication and direct marketing material from the sponsor/New Media Publishing. Each entry is entitled to win only one prize in a period of three calendar months. SMSs are charged at R1.50 per SMS across all networks.

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WHAT A GOOD BUNK



RY NA / D LEAD

ER SHOT FEELS LIKE

THE TECHNIQUE on greenside bunker shots is quite different than what you do on every other shot. The fact that you're not trying to hit the ball first, and you're entering the sand behind it, calls for a particular mindset – and skill set. Whether you've struggled from the sand or just want a refresher course, let me give you some tips and feels for hitting quality sand shots. You'll have a clear plan when you step into a bunker.

V

BETTER

WITH RON KASPRISKE



◀ GOING BACK

DUMP THE COFFEE

The right arm and hand play an important role on bunker shots, and it starts with how they help take the club back. You want them to roll the clubface open so it's pointing skyward immediately in the takeaway. This move puts the clubhead in position to skim through the sand under the ball. ▶ The feel of this rolling motion of the right arm and hand can be duplicated with a coffee cup. Fill it with sand, and hold it in front of you with your right hand. Now take that cup and toss the sand out like I'm doing here, turning your arm clockwise. This motion is just like a backswing that rotates the face open. Copy it, and you'll be in position at the top.

▼ GOING THROUGH

LET THE CLUB PASS THE HANDS

One of the differences between a bunker swing and a normal iron swing is the relationship between your hands and the clubhead through impact. With an iron shot, the hands should move past the ball just before the clubhead strikes it. In a bunker, you want the clubhead to slide under the ball before the hands get there. You're "releasing the clubhead" by letting the right wrist bow. ▶ To skim the club through the sand, the clubface should be pointing skyward well past impact. If you looked at the club during your through-swing, the face would be looking back at you, like you see below.





▲ BEST BUNKER DRILL

MAKE RIGHT-HANDED SWINGS

To improve your feel for bunker shots, practise swinging with your right hand only. Start without a ball and make some full swings back and through. Remember the coffee cup drill for the backswing and the bowing of the right wrist during the downswing. Try to slap the sand with the back of the club-head. Gravity and the weight of the club will help it release properly and give you a good feeling for how big a swing you can make without the ball going very far. ► The one-handed motion makes it nearly impossible to cut off the swing too soon – a typical amateur mistake. Once you get comfortable, hit some bunker shots one-handed. Copy this feeling with both hands on the club, and you'll be amazed how good you can be from the sand.



THE 3 RULES ARE CHANG- ING

MON3Y
+G%LF

From the **GOLF DIGEST 50**

to television deals and beyond,

m%ney is flowing in

new ways.

BY RON SIRAK

ILLUSTRATION BY EDDIE GUY

SHORTLY AFTER THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, when the golf economy was running hot, Nike chairman and co-founder Phil Knight was asked at the annual stockholders' meeting if the company could have found a better way to spend \$100 million than by extending Tiger Woods' contract for five years at \$20 million a year. "No, it couldn't," Knight replied emphatically and, in terms of words, economically. ► When Knight said that in September 2000 at the Memorial Coliseum in Portland, Oregon, it had a ring of truth. Woods had just won three consecutive major championships – the US Open by 15 strokes, the Open Championship by eight and the PGA Championship in a thrilling play-off. Seven months later, he would complete the Tiger Slam at the 2001 Masters, becoming the first to hold all four men's major championships simultaneously.

For relatively new Nike Golf, and for golf in general, the ceiling for growth seemed to be quite high. The Woods deal unleashed a flurry of high-priced contracts as golfers followed their form of free agency – not changing teams like baseball, football and basketball players, but by changing equipment companies.

Ernie Els, Phil Mickelson, David Duval and Davis Love were among those who cashed in big-time, either by changing companies or by using the possibility of leaving to enhance deals. And equipment companies, lacking the deep pockets of Nike lined with sneaker cash, began cutting deals with players to keep them, allowing them to sell their most valuable logo space – the hat – to other companies. And thus financial services, pharmaceuticals and other concerns got into the endorsement game.

Sixteen years after Woods' groundbreaking deal, the number of equipment companies has shrunk. Nike has stopped making clubs and balls. Taylor-Made is for sale, and most say the new owners will be more cost-conscious. All that leaves some wondering if the hundreds of millions of dollars spent annually on player endorsements might be contributing to the consolidation of the equipment industry, which still showers players in money to play their clubs and balls.

That largesse can be seen in the 14th annual Golf Digest 50 all-encompassing money list. Though the names have changed – slightly – the stars are still pulling in eight figures a year off the course to supplement tour prize money, which continues to grow.



G%LF D1G3ST 50

ON-COURSE INCOME for 2016 includes all money earned on the PGA Tour and the five international tours (Japan PGA, PGA European, Australasian, Southern Africa, Asian) and the PGA Tour Champions, LPGA Tour, Ladies European Tour and the Japan LPGA through Dec. 4, 2016. It includes unofficial money won in nontour events.

OFF-COURSE INCOME includes estimates of all money earned from endorsements, bonuses, appearance fees, corporate outings, speaking engagements, licensing fees (video games, trading cards, etc.), course architecture, books, instructional videos and businesses that capitalise on a person's status as a player, such as product lines including clothing, wine and turfgrass. Investment income is not included.

NAME	PREVIOUS RANK	ON COURSE	OFF COURSE	TOTAL
1. Rory McIlroy	4	\$17 514 505	\$32 000 000	\$49 514 505
2. Arnold Palmer	5	—	\$40 000 000	\$40 000 000
3. Phil Mickelson	2	\$4 267 628	\$33 500 000	\$37 767 628
4. Tiger Woods	3	\$107 000	\$34 607 000	\$34 607 000
5. Jordan Spieth	1	\$6 403 470	\$24 000 000	\$30 403 470
6. Jack Nicklaus	6	\$42 000	\$20 000 000	\$20 042 000
7. Dustin Johnson	13	\$12 664 185	\$7 100 000	\$19 764 185
8. Jason Day	7	\$8 845 112	\$10 750 000	\$19 595 112
9. Adam Scott	18	\$8 160 920	\$6 900 000	\$15 060 920
10. Gary Player	10	—	\$15 000 000	\$15 000 000
11. Henrik Stenson	12	\$6 941 923	\$7 250 000	\$14 191 923
12. Hideki Matsuyama	22	\$5 576 454	\$8 000 000	\$13 576 454
13. Rickie Fowler	8	\$3 328 563	\$9 100 000	\$12 428 563
14. Sergio Garcia	16	\$3 845 425	\$8 500 000	\$12 345 425
15. Matt Kuchar	20	\$4 597 178	\$6 750 000	\$11 347 178
16. Bubba Watson	11	\$4 852 842	\$6 300 000	\$11 152 842
17. Patrick Reed	36	\$8 348 461	\$2 750 000	\$11 098 461
18. Bernhard Langer	19	\$4 152 459	\$6 250 000	\$10 402 459
19. Greg Norman	14	—	\$10 000 000	\$10 000 000
20. Colin Montgomerie	21	\$2 242 045	\$7 500 000	\$9 742 045
21. Justin Rose	9	\$2 314 365	\$7 200 000	\$9 514 365
22. Jimmy Walker	26	\$4 657 546	\$4 200 000	\$8 857 546
23. Graeme McDowell	39	\$3 011 088	\$5 800 000	\$8 811 088
24. Brandt Snedeker	28	\$4 735 142	\$4 000 000	\$8 735 142
25. Ernie Els	23	\$652 143	\$8 000 000	\$8 652 143
26. Lee Westwood	30	\$1 950 964	\$6 550 000	\$8 500 964
27. Branden Grace	NR	\$4 642 376	\$3 700 000	\$8 342 376
28. Nick Faldo	25	\$43 500	\$8 250 000	\$8 293 500
29. Jim Furyk	17	\$1 613 204	\$6 650 000	\$8 263 204
30. Russell Knox	NR	\$6 097 590	\$2 075 000	\$8 172 590
31. Tom Watson	24	\$147 888	\$8 000 000	\$8 147 888
32. Miguel Angel Jimenez	33	\$1 950 147	\$6 000 000	\$7 950 147
33. Zach Johnson	15	\$2 124 953	\$5 750 000	\$7 874 953
34. Danny Willett	NR	\$5 287 365	\$2 550 000	\$7 837 365
35. Martin Kaymer	31	\$1 781 000	\$6 000 000	\$7 781 000
36. Fred Couples	29	\$225 229	\$7 500 000	\$7 725 229
37. Paul Casey	43	\$5 033 060	\$2 000 000	\$7 033 060
38. Davis Love	27	\$417 319	\$6 250 000	\$6 667 319
39. Luke Donald	38	\$1 829 812	\$4 800 000	\$6 629 812
40. Justin Thomas	NR	\$4 416 366	\$2 050 000	\$6 466 366
41. Brooks Koepka	NR	\$4 073 393	\$2 000 000	\$6 073 393
42. William McGirt	NR	\$3 819 972	\$2 200 000	\$6 019 972
43. Jason Dufner	NR	\$3 553 634	\$2 400 000	\$5 953 634
44. Lydia Ko	47	\$2 691 642	\$3 250 000	\$5 941 642
45. Kevin Kisner	NR	\$3 709 354	\$2 200 000	\$5 909 354
46. J B Holmes	35	\$3 462 108	\$2 400 000	\$5 862 108
47. Kevin Chappell	NR	\$5 101 050	\$700 000	\$5 801 050
48. Bill Haas	45	\$2 766 699	\$2 600 000	\$5 366 699
49. Kevin Na	NR	\$3 626 291	\$1 650 000	\$5 276 291
50. Padraig Harrington	49	\$1 269 786	\$4 000 000	\$5 269 786

NR Not ranked among the Golf Digest 50 in March 2016.

SOURCES Figures for the list were compiled through Golf Digest interviews with agents, players, executives of companies involved with endorsements, industry analysts and through the official money lists of the professional tours.

Not only is Nike gone from the hardgoods scene, but Woods no longer has his hold on the top spot in the GD50.

For the first 12 years of the ranking, Woods was No 1, usually by a wide margin. But reduced play because of injuries and the loss of more than half a dozen A-list endorsement partners after the 2009 scandal caught up to him in 2016, when he fell to No 3 behind Jordan Spieth and Mickelson. This year, Woods is No 4 behind Rory McIlroy, Arnold Palmer and Mickelson.

Last year's No 1, Spieth, fell to No 5 mostly because he earned \$16 million less on the golf course, including only \$550 000 in FedEx Cup bonus money compared to the \$10 million top prize in 2015. That bonus went to McIlroy, helping him make more than \$17.5 million on the golf course. Remarkably, the top earner off the golf course on the 2017 list was Palmer, who died last September at 87. Nearly 45 years after his last PGA Tour win, the King made \$40 million in licensing, endorsement and design money.

Lydia Ko at No 44 was the only woman to make the list this year, in part because perennial off-course money leaders Stacy Lewis, Paula Creamer and Michelle Wie had sub-par years in on-course earnings.

CHANGES AT NIKE AND TAYLORMADE

The withdrawal of Nike from the ball and club market – it will still market clothing and footwear – and the fact that TaylorMade will soon have a new owner have changed the endorsement landscape, not so much for the best players but for everyone else.

According to Casey Alexander, a research analyst specialising in golf stocks at Compass Point Research & Trading, Callaway, Ping, TaylorMade and Titleist have 80 percent of the ball and club market. “Everyone else doesn’t have enough revenue left to compete on the marketing side,” Alexander says. “You can have the best club in the world, but if you can’t do marketing on multiple platforms (print, Internet, player endorsements, demo days, etc), you can’t compete. Every two or three years, someone gets tossed out of the ring. It wouldn’t surprise me if in five years that 80 percent of market share for those four companies was 90 percent.”

Alexander says the four big companies have profit margins in high single figures. In the heyday of golf, those margins were probably mid-teens, he says. Exactly how much money do equipment companies spend yearly on player endorsements? “No one shares that information,” Alexander says. “No one wants to.”

One source familiar with endorsement deals, speaking with Golf Digest under the condition of anonymity, estimates that TaylorMade, which says it has “more than 125 players” under contract, spends “\$20 million to \$25 million combined on its big four (Dustin Johnson, Jason Day, Sergio Garcia and Justin Rose) and then doesn’t spend that much on the rest of its players,” putting its total endorsements at \$40 million to \$50 million annually.

“Different companies have different philosophies,” the source

PAY FOR PLAY

Number of players who had compensation arrangements in 2016 with each of the 10 major equipment companies.

Titleist	799
Cleveland/Srixon	174
Ping	131
TaylorMade	126
Callaway	80
Cobra Puma	15
Nike	15
PXG Golf	13
Wilson	13
Bridgestone	9

SOURCE Equipment company websites. TaylorMade says it has “more than 125” players under contract.

says. “Titleist wants numbers (of players, to win things like the tour ball count); other companies want names. The common thread is authenticity and believability of the marketing message.” TaylorMade declined to comment for this story, as did Titleist.

“Player endorsements have been a long-term strategy at Ping as we started our tour programme in the early 1970s,” says Chance Cozby, vice president/sports development at Ping. “Product validation and brand awareness by the world’s best players provide a great foundation for a premium product like Ping to succeed in the marketplace.”

Will the departure of Nike and the impending sale of TaylorMade change the marketplace?

“Given industry consolidation, keen attention will be paid when determining whether to retain an athlete as a spokesperson,” says David Carter of the marketing consulting firm The Sports Business Group and executive director of the Marshall Sports Business Institute at the University of Southern California. “Athletes who separate themselves from the pack and who can truly deliver a quantifiable return on marketing investment will remain in a strong position to secure endorsement deals. Athletes who are only marginally differentiated from their peers may struggle to secure meaningful endorsement dollars.”

That has agents casting a wary eye.

“Clearly, this has been a unique year with golf equipment companies/professional tour-staff endorsements, primarily due to TaylorMade being in a holding pattern of sorts for most of the year and Nike abruptly exiting the equipment industry,” says Jay Burton, an agent with International Management Group. “Needless to say, the other major equipment companies are using this as an opportunity to adjust their game plans. There has been a flurry of activity from TaylorMade/Nike tour players to test other equipment/balls.”

Burton agrees that the pain will be felt by second-tier players but not the top stars. “Equipment companies need the endorsements of professional tour players if they expect to be major players in the game,” he says.

“There definitely has been consolidation,” says Mark Steinberg, an agent with Excel Sports Management, which represents GD50 players, including Woods, Rose and Matt Kuchar as well as young stars Daniel Berger and Justin Thomas. “But it hasn’t really affected the pricing as much as I thought at this point.” His clients are, for the most part, the guys at the top of the pyramid getting the big bucks.

Woods still has multiple years left on his Nike contract and will continue to wear its clothing and shoes. But he is free to make money from other equipment companies.

Alexander says the big four companies have consolidated their power by keeping prices high.

“The guys running those four companies are smart enough to know you don’t want to become a black widow and eat your mate,” Alexander says. “They do better if they don’t worry about gaining a market-share point or two. They wised up and are not discounting the price of the clubs, so that keeps the gross margins high enough so that they have enough money to do marketing. The big four don’t worry about the bottom feeders. When the bottom feeders discount, they go into a death spiral.”

Like most agents and analysts, Alexander doesn’t expect the consolidation of the industry to affect the top players. “We’re still in a marketplace of demand and supply, and the demand for quality players just went down by one company that was spending millions,” he says. “Stars will still get paid. It will take time for the Nike impact to flow into the marketplace.”

“Time will tell,” Ping’s Cozby says about the impact of

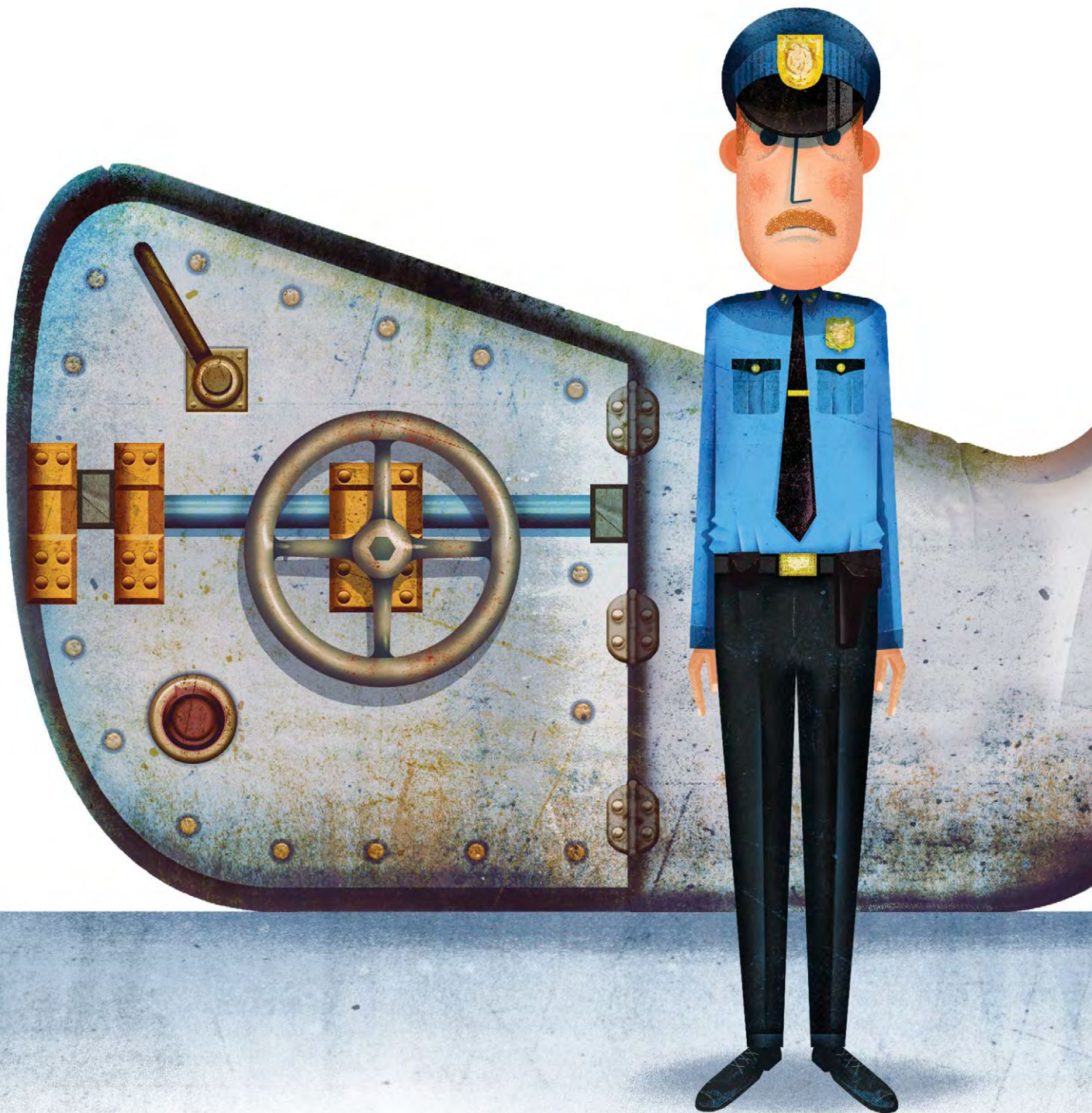
consolidation in the industry. "In the short term, there has been very little change. In the long term, equipment brands will have to consider potential changes in requirements as players move to soft goods as a primary sponsor."

Are the companies paying too much?

"Because the world has changed, should we have known what the world was going to look like five years ago?" Alexander asks.

"Are they over-paying? In hindsight, it's easy to say that. But they operated in the old framework. That framework has changed."

What kind of endorsement structure that new framework constructs is the real question. The result could be a trend set in motion by Tiger all those years ago: more money flowing to players from non-golf companies. Golfers remain the most valuable endorsement partners in all of sports. **G**





UNDER COVER TOUR PRO

MON3Y
+G%LF

Lending m%ney to fellow players can be awkward

DON'T THINK IT'S FAIR TO NAME NAMES, so all I'll say is, there's a player, a guy who had a great rookie season in 2016, who might not have ever made it to the PGA Tour if not for financial assistance from another player. He was on the mini-tours and out of money when a veteran gave him 15 grand to keep going. Enough to keep entering tournaments and eat something other than fast-food. ► Whether it was because the veteran believed in his talent, or because they're from the same home state, who knows? All I know is, the first time they were paired together, playing for real money on TV, the handful of us who were aware of the story recognised how unique it was. ► Most players don't spread wealth down the system. Generally, the view out here is, everyone is on his own journey. If you've got game, it will work out. And if you do help another golfer, you should consider it a loan that will never be paid back. Which is hard, because it's your buddy, and you want to believe him when he says, "Yeah, bro, hittin' it great; just need to see a few more putts drop." But deep down you can't. And because you probably haven't set a payoff date or any real terms, neither one of you has any idea how to behave, how to fulfill your obligation as lender or debtor. Despite the friendliest intentions, all it takes is one of you feeling awkward before you end up avoiding each other.

I'm always happy to pick up the phone to get people out on courses, take groups to dinner and that sort of thing. But I've only lent hard cash to three individuals who were pursuing playing careers. As each left the game, we inevitably fell out of touch. Money changes relationships.

When a guy makes it to the next level, he might be leaving behind a couple of roommates who are still driving range-pickers and filling divots in exchange for practice time. The friendships I formed in college golf and development tours are some of the closest I've ever known. It's a weird balance. You've got no shot of playing pro unless you can afford to be 100 percent, entirely committed to golf. At the same time, you've got to have the stones to perform when your living depends on it. Mini-tours sort that out pretty efficiently. If a friend asks me for money, I know it will feel nice to give it to him. But it's probably in both our best interests if I don't.

Everybody knows exactly how much I make. At least it feels that way. Obviously, our purse results are published, but I'm always meeting people whose guesses of what I pull down for a certain endorsement or outing are surprisingly spot on. (Hint: Prize money was the majority of my income last year, but not by much.) And when people know what you have, they want it. That's human nature, right?

After I first won, I must have had a dozen people approach me with investment ideas. My cousin's friend wanted to open a restaurant. The brother of a guy I played golf with had a plan to develop some real estate. This one knucklehead, who was sort of a friend in high school, wanted to start a T-shirt company. Virtually none had anything close to resembling a business plan. I invested a little in the real-estate project, which fizzled. No one likes bragging about losses, but I bet if you asked around the locker room, most guys have thrown money into at least one flimsy scheme.

As much as my first instinct is to help someone who's struggling – because sometimes even I can't believe how much money I make – I tell myself to sleep on it. When I wake up, I'm going to realise it's not a smart idea. — WITH MAX ADLER

THE FACT\$ %N TAX

PGA Tour pros pick

where they live

based on taxes

BY PETER FINCH

PGA TOUR STARS TEND TO CONGREGATE IN Florida, Texas and Nevada – and not just because they like fresh-squeezed orange juice, 10-gallon hats and roulette wheels.

► They make their homes there because of something those locations lack: state income taxes. ► One of the reasons that some non-American tour pros live in places like the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands and the British Virgin Islands is that these countries impose no income tax. Unlike US citizens who must pay federal income tax on their worldwide incomes, regardless of where they live, most international players can escape nearly all income taxes in their original home country by moving to a tax haven and establishing their primary residence there. ► The financial benefits are huge. When you earn more than \$1 million a year, making your home in a tax haven or no-income-tax state could save you hundreds of thousands annually. ► Phil Mickelson caught some flak for complaining about his big California tax bill in 2013. One can argue whether it was bad form to gripe about it publicly, but this much is undeniable: He does pay a lot more in state taxes than many of his fellow tour pros. Assuming Phil and his wife, Amy, are filing jointly, the Mickelsons pay the state about 13 percent of their taxable income. That adds up: Before expenses, Golf Digest estimates Phil earned more than \$37 million in on- and off-course income in 2016. Pros like Dustin Johnson (Florida), Jordan Spieth (Texas) and Ryan Moore (Nevada) can keep that state tax money for themselves.

MON3Y
+G%LF

FILING FOR TOUR PROS

Tour pros have it tough at tax time. Well, their tax preparers do, anyway. PGA Tour pros compete for prize money in multiple American states, and those states expect to take their cut in taxes. This means that, in addition to their federal 1040s, players are supposed to file tax returns in each state where they play.

Most states these days make tournaments withhold state taxes from players' winnings, says Jim Palsa, a CPA who handles taxes for a PGA Tour professional. Palsa gets a notice from the PGA Tour every month telling him how much the player made, and where.

Could he maybe just... forget to file those state returns? "Our feeling has always been to file everywhere," Palsa says. "If you don't file in a state, there's no statute of limitations. Then you're looking at interest and penalties."

Some states have been coming after players' endorsement income, too. Let's say you had \$1 million in endorsement contracts and spent 10 percent of your days this year in California. The state would expect you to pay income tax on 10 percent of that \$1 million.

For a closer look at the tax return of a typical PGA Tour player, we consulted Florida-based Art Hurley, who specializes in professional athletes and entertainers. Hurley ran the numbers for us on a hypothetical player who earned \$1.37 million in tournament purses last year and \$450 000 in endorsement income. This player competed in 29 events in 17 states, plus Puerto Rico, Mexico and Canada. Hurley calculated expenses of about \$760 000, including agents, caddies, transportation, lodging, meals, swing coach and a personal trainer.

This data is based on the 2015-'16 season of Patrick Rodgers, whose winnings were close to the median figure on the PGA Tour last season. Note that these aren't Rodgers' actual expenses, so we can't be

sure they reflect his true tax situation. But they show how it works.

How much did our hypothetical player owe in taxes? Just under \$457 000, meaning – bottom line – his bank account was \$597 000 larger at the end of the year. No question, that's a lot of money by nearly anyone's standards. But consider that it represents just 33 percent of our player's \$1.82 million gross income and 56 percent of his net income after expenses.

Some other highlights from Hurley's number-crunching:

- ▶ Our player's biggest tax bill came from the IRS (\$385 000).

- ▶ He earned his largest payday in Connecticut (\$391 000), and it cost him. He owed the state around \$17 700 in income tax on his winnings and another \$430 in income tax on his endorsements.

- ▶ Florida took no such bite from his \$142 000 in tournament earnings there, because it has no state income tax. But it saved him most on his endorsement income. As a Florida resident, he was in the state 213 days during the year, or 58 percent of the time, meaning that 58 percent of his \$450 000 endorsement income was not subject to state income tax.

- ▶ His highest tax rate was in Mexico, where the \$92 000 he netted (on a \$146 000 tournament prize) at a PGA Tour event was taxed at a total of almost 31 percent.

- ▶ There were four states (Alabama, New York, North Carolina and Ohio) where he competed and missed the cut. Those states can tax a percentage of his endorsement income based on the number of days he was there. But because of his expenses, he was able to show a net loss in those states, meaning he owed no state income tax in any of them.

Keep in mind, states with low taxes often have higher-than-average housing and medical costs.



INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE

Golfers like Justin Rose and South African Thomas Aiken own homes in the Bahamas; Mathias Grönberg and Søren Hansen have settled in Monaco, while Sergio Garcia and Adam Scott officially reside in Switzerland. These countries, and others like them, offer big tax incentives for wealthy people to relocate.

Let's say you want to make your home in the Bahamas. To become a permanent resident with the right to work (earn money) you have to invest \$500 000 in a business or residence. It generally takes about six months to set up. If you're willing to invest \$1.5 million, there's an expedited service that will usually make you a permanent resident in about six weeks.

Switzerland is a little different. It does tax income, but it allows certain non-Swiss residents who don't work in Switzerland to pay a negotiated "lump-sum" amount. This agreed amount is not based on the person's income but on the amount of living expenses. The agreed sum is invariably a much smaller amount than the person would pay living in his home country. (Some regions of Switzerland do not provide for this benefit.) **6**

KNOCK IT DOWN I

Generally speaking, you don't want to hit a wedge shot higher than it's necessary to carry an obstacle or stop it near the hole. Sending the ball sky-high just makes it harder to be accurate. This philosophy certainly holds true when you play in the wind. When I prep for the British Open, I spend time working on hitting lower shots into those firm and undulating greens. Not only do I want to keep the ball from getting knocked down too soon when I'm going into the wind, I want to get it to check up on the green when the breeze is behind me. To accomplish either of these things, you need to make the right club selection and alter your normal full-swing technique. I'll walk you through it.

— WITH RON KASPRISKE



MY KEYS TO HITTING WEDGE SHOTS LIKE DARTS BY JORDAN SPIETH

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR SETUP

You want to lower the trajectory of the shot, but you still need a decent amount of backspin so you can stop the ball on the green. For spin, you need a higher-lofted club, such as a sand or lob wedge, but those clubs also increase trajectory. What to do? To keep the shot down with a high-lofted wedge, play the ball further back in your stance than normal – nearly in line with your back foot.

Also, set up in a narrow stance to maintain balance and to prevent overswinging. Staying in control leads to solid contact for predictable ball flight and spin.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR SWING

Your main swing thought should be, *Keep the handle leaning towards the target through the impact zone.* This will deloft the club a lot – picture hitting a wedge shot with an 8-iron. Feel like your left hand is holding off the release of the club. Do that, and your swing will have a short finish, like I'm demonstrating here. Body rotation also is important: You don't need much going back, but you want plenty going forward. Finish with your belt buckle and chest facing the target. If you focus on rotating towards the target while keeping the clubshaft leaning forward, you'll hit those knockdown wedges stiff.



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PHOTOS BY ADAM VOORHES

**OUR GUIDE TO FINDING THE PLACES TO SUIT YOUR
GOLFING LIFESTYLE**



GOLF TRIPS WITH YOUR FRIENDS

and family are wonderful experiences, but if you want to make them even more memorable, there's nothing better than staying on site at a golf course and walking from your hotel room to the first tee.

Golf resorts provide special experiences, whether they are part of a trip with your mates or a getaway with your significant other. They are places to be pampered on and off the fairway, with everything within walking distance. The best resorts offer multiple courses, and we're also partial to those resort layouts that offer fun holes and dazzling scenery. Merchandise in the golf shop is abundant, with a logo you're proud to wear. They usually have an outstanding range packed with pyramids of practice balls. Some of us relish the opportunity to finally groove a swing, while others merely glance at it on the way to the first tee. Accommodation must be comfortable, neither spartan nor gaudy, and the best service is that which never leaves you feeling self-conscious. Creature comforts become second nature. That's the joy of a great golf resort. It's overstocked with activities and diversions, and we get to pick our pleasures. All this comes at a price that's well above the normal household budget for golf, but we wouldn't be recommending these resorts if their experiences weren't worth the cost.

South Africa also has many other options at non-resort courses to stay on site. These can be in the form of golf lodges, guest houses, or villas, apartments and chalets where you can have a braai after the round and do your own catering. Turn the page to reveal the inaugural Best Places to Stay & Play list.



LOST CITY PALACE



THE 10 BEST STAY & PLAY VENUES IN SOUTH AFRICA

● ● ● FANCOURT

Recognised as one of the world's best golf resorts, Fancourt epitomises what golfers are looking for in a getaway resort destination. Firstly, golf is the main attraction, and most of the guests are there for that reason. There are two quality golf courses to choose from, the Montagu and Outeniqua, plus possible access to The Links, ranked the No 1 course in Golf Digest's Top 100; outstanding practice facilities at two different sites; the choice of caddies or golf carts; terrific restaurants and a magnificent clubhouse terrace for after-golf drinks. Then there's the wide choice of other activities for singles and families, and short walks to get where you want to go. If you need a break from the resort, the immediate Garden Route area has so much variety to offer.

● ● ● SUN CITY

South Africa's original resort in the Pilanesberg bushveld is more like a small casino city, very different altogether from the intimacy of Fancourt. It caters to various audiences, mostly golfers and fun seekers. You have a choice of four different hotels, ranging from the budget- and child-friendly Cabanas, to the opulence of the wondrous Lost City Palace, one of the world's Grand Golf Hotels, with its unique African feel. You know a Grand Hotel when you see it: impressive entrances, large, stately rooms, and exceptional breakfast buffets. It's where well-heeled golfers love to stay. The Gary Player CC, thanks to its hosting of the Nedbank Challenge, is a bucket-list course to play and No 3 in the Golf Digest rankings, walking only; while the Lost City Course is



cart-only golf in more dramatic terrain. Visitors have everything on site, but an outside attraction is the Pilanesberg Game Reserve. The original main hotel, with the casino, is now called Soho, and is home to Legends restaurant, which commemorates musicians who have visited Sun City.

● ● ● **BUHALA LODGE / LEOPARD CREEK**

Leopard Creek is one of South Africa's most exclusive golf courses. If you don't know a member who can get you through the front gate to play our No 2 course, then the next best way to play at Leopard Creek is to stay at the Buhala Lodge, a few kilometres east on the banks of the Crocodile River, facing the Kruger National Park. Guests have access to tee times at Leopard Creek (a 15-minute drive),

and a terrific view of the local wildlife. Buhala Lodge is an old colonial-style farmhouse converted by the Rhodes family into a comfortable boutique hotel with 17 bedrooms. These look onto the open banks of the river, and it's not unusual for guests to have elephants or buffalo up close and personal, having forded their way across. Owner Carol Rhodes says that some guests prefer to stay on the hotel verandah all day and watch the passing parade of wildlife, rather than go into the park in an open vehicle. During the Alfred Dunhill Championship at Leopard Creek, this is the place where the TV commentators choose to say. In the heat of summer, the refrigerated wine cellar is a popular room in which to cool down before dinner while selecting a suitable vintage. There are two suites that share a splash pool.

● ● ● **ARABELLA**

A magnificent location on the Bot River Lagoon near Hermanus, just an hour's drive from Cape Town, coupled with a Top 10 ranked Peter Matkovich course, makes this one of the country's top resorts. Here, once again, there is a big emphasis on golf. All the facilities, including the golf clubhouse and pro shop, are in the multistorey luxury hotel, which overlooks the scenic waterside closing holes of the course. Practice facilities are limited, but near to the clubhouse and perfect for warming up before a round. The Arabella Spa has won awards as a top wellness retreat, while the pool to the rear of the hotel is a classic spot to not only swim, but also dine and drink. The cigar bar, Cristobal's, on the top floor close to reception, is the ideal place to unwind at any time of the day or night.



ARABELLA

STEENBERG HOTEL

The boutique hotel on this prestige Cape Town golf estate is a five-star experience with just 24 rooms, attractively positioned in the Constantiaberg amphitheatre. The hotel lies within the Steenberg Farm – the Cape's oldest registered farm, dating from 1682. The clubhouse and practice facilities are close by, as are several other attractions on the property, including Catharina's Restaurant – recommended by Eat Out in the Fine Dining category – and Bistro Sixteen82, plus a winery and spa. The rooms range from standard to the Manor Suite. The Peter Matkovich course at Steenberg is back to its best condition again, having opened 18 new greens in December following an upgrade by Golf Data. Subtle changes to some of the greens' complexes have enhanced the playing experience.

ST FRANCIS LINKS LODGE

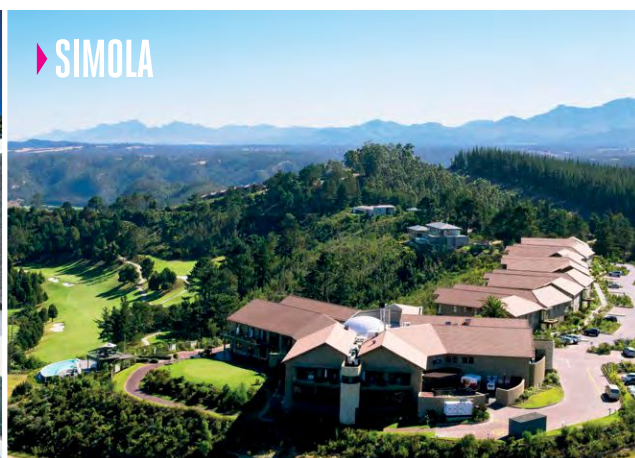
The Golf Lodge on the St Francis Links estate in an Eastern Cape seaside resort, provides boutique luxury accommodation close to the clubhouse and overlooking the first tee of the Jack Nicklaus course. It's one of the top 10 layouts in South Africa: A modern links that is regarded by many as one of Nicklaus's best designs. Ensconced in the security of the golf estate, guests have access to several facilities, including the fabulous clubhouse with its excellent dining experiences and upstairs deck. There is a good practice facility a short cart ride from the clubhouse.

SIMOLA HOTEL & SPA

Set high on a ridge overlooking the Jack Nicklaus golf course and the Knysna Lagoon, the hotel has 40 two-bedroom suites that offer spectacular views from their covered patios, each with a gas braai. There's a spa (with heated pool) and gym, a bistro-style restaurant, plus easy access from the hotel to the golf clubhouse or the practice tee. The course is ranked No 17 in our Top 100.

SAN LAMEER

Few golf destinations in South Africa can offer a true beach experience that's easily accessible and offers safe bathing, but that's what you get on this tropical KZN South Coast resort/estate, plus a genuine multitude of other facilities to keep you busy while on holiday. Accommodation is available in the hotel on site, or villas to rent. Golfers with families will love the





ZEBULA

9-hole mashie course close to the beach. It's rare to find one of these in South Africa. The San Lameer course is one of the original Peter Matkovich designs, now 25 years old, and it's an adventurous ride from beginning to end.

CONRAD PEZULA

This luxurious and beautifully decorated hotel, built high above Knysna, alongside the golf course clubhouse, has elevated suites with private patios that provide excellent views of the course and the ocean. High above the 18th hole there is a two-bedroom self-catering private villa to rent, with its own pool. The spa at Pezula has an excellent reputation, and includes an indoor pool. Pezula also has self-catering options close to the clubhouse

for golfing groups. The course, which has an excellent short game practice facility, is ranked No 19 in Golf Digest's Top 100.



BUHALA LODGE

ZEBULA

This is an outstanding and affordable bushveld resort in the Waterberg region of Limpopo, within a two-hour drive of Gauteng. It's ideal as a getaway in either summer or winter. Zebula caters for a wide variety of visitors because of its range of choice offerings. There are game drives into the neighbouring Mabalingwe reserve, plus a range of cats to be seen on site. It's a large property that can be explored by bike or car, which also means accommodation options, either staying close to the clubhouse, or away from the crowds at the luxury Waterberg Lodge. For golfers, it's a fun course in natural bushveld surroundings, ranked No 60, and the practice facilities are superb. Uniquely, there's an airstrip on site, for fly-in

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BEST OF THE REST

● ● ● KLEINE ZALZE LODGE

Overlooking the first hole of the De Zalze golf course (ranked No 37 in Golf Digest's Top 100), this establishment, with 35 rooms and six self-catering suites, is part of the Kleine Zalze wine estate. The award-winning Terroir restaurant is a short walk away, adjacent to the second tee. It's close to the centre of Stellenbosch, and surrounded by vineyards that offer running and cycling trails.

● ● ● DEVONVALE GOLF & WINE ESTATE

Accommodation here in the Bottelary Valley in the Winelands, an estate owned by sailing legend J J Provoyeur, varies from two-bedroom holiday houses to self-catering apartments and petite lodge rooms. There is a spa on site. The Devonvale course, flanked by vineyards, does not rank in the Golf Digest Top 100, yet is a fun layout in scenic surroundings, and the estate has excellent practice facilities.

● ● ● OUBAAI HOTEL & SPA

Close to Herold's Bay in the Garden Route, the modern hotel has 100 rooms. It overlooks the tenth hole of the Ernie Els course, so residents need to drive a few kilometres to the first tee at the clubhouse, which is on a magnificent site overlooking the ocean. Originally opened as a Hyatt, it's no longer part of that hotel group. We ranked No 31 in the Golf Digest Top 100.

● ● ● WILD COAST SUN

A popular and big casino hotel on the border between the KZN South Coast and the Eastern Cape's Wild Coast. Fun

spot for families and groups with its varied facilities. On site is one of the country's best golf courses, a spectacular roller-coaster ride over the hilly terrain.

● ● ● SELBORNE

Under new ownership (First Group), the hotel and spa at Selborne has been upgraded and restored back to its previous excellent quality. A relaxingly intimate and elegant escape on the KZN South Coast, with a pleasantly fun-to-play Top 100 golf course in beautiful coastal forest. Selborne is renowned as a wedding venue, having its own chapel on the estate.

● ● ● GOWRIE FARM GOLF LODGE

A favourite spot in Nottingham Road for golfers looking for a getaway in the KZN Midlands. There are five luxury en-suite bedrooms upstairs in the clubhouse, but golfing fourballs should also look to stay at self-catering cottages on the estate. The Top 50 course is unique, a modified 9-holer with 12 different greens.

● ● ● CHAMPAGNE SPORTS RESORT

A popular conference and timeshare venue in the Central Drakensberg – recent additions mean it can accommodate 750 people – it has one of the country's most scenic top 18-hole courses, with glorious views of the nearby Champagne and Cathkin peaks. There is a new wellness centre, too.

● ● ● LEGEND GOLF & SAFARI RESORT

Game drives and taking a helicopter flight to hit golf balls off the Hanglip mountain top (the Extreme 19th Hole) are two of the attractions at this Limpopo resort, a two-hour drive north of Pretoria. It boasts one of the longest golf courses in the world, the Signature, with each one of the 18-holes having a unique design stamp by a star tour player. There's also a Tribute Par-3 course, with replicas of famous holes. There are 220 rooms at the resort, and individual suites are built in the bush. The golf clubhouse is quite separate from the accommodation, and you need your own transport to get there.



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▶ PRINCE'S GRANT

BEST BOUTIQUE HOTELS

Boutique hotels are as luxurious as the resort hotels, but small and intimate. Great places to rekindle your romance. With golf.

● ● ● LODGE AT PRINCE'S GRANT

A boutique hotel golfing experience awaits visitors to this KZN North Coast golf estate. Seven of the 15 rooms are on the upper floor of the clubhouse, and offer stunning views of the course. A similar experience awaits golfers at Gowrie Farm in the Midlands, and the common denominator here is Guy Smith, who developed both.

● ● ● ZIMBALI LODGE

The Zimbali golf estate on the KZN North Coast at Ballito has two luxury hotels, but the original Fairmont Zimbali Lodge, adjacent to the golf clubhouse in the Coastal Forest and overlooking the course, is perfect for golfers who wish to be pampered. It has a spa, and splendid views from its infinity pool.

● ● ● THE LODGE AT ATLANTIC BEACH

This 20-room establishment is inside the Atlantic Beach golf estate at Melkbosstrand on the West Coast outside Cape Town, and has both a spa and leisure centre which offers tennis, swimming and a gym. The Teddy Webber academy and driving range is handily nearby. The course itself has excellent views of Table Mountain.

● ● ● ROYAL ST ANDREWS

With a grand-sounding name and situation opposite the entrance to Royal Port Alfred Golf Club in the Eastern Cape, this 1920s hotel has 10 rooms and a spa. The original building has been restored and is home to the Highlander Pub.

● ● ● ERINVALLE ESTATE HOTEL & SPA

This Cape Dutch-style hotel, with 57 rooms, is situated outside the entrance to the Somerset West golf estate, in rural surroundings with landscaped gardens, and has the magnificent Vergelegen wine estate next door. Opened in 1994 on the site of an historic farmstead, it has had Irish owners, and Skelligs is an Irish-style pub. Popular for conferences and weddings, the course is ranked No 25 in Golf Digest's Top 100.

BEST GOLF HOTELS & LODGES

● ● ● EUPHORIA

This Limpopo bushveld estate, with close access to the N1, provides luxury accommodation in 64 bush villas, and has a hydro. Both are close to the clubhouse. A feature of the estate is its mountain-top restaurant, which is accessed by cable car. Euphoria has a challenging layout designed by Annika Sorenstam, and excellent practice facilities. The estate is known for its remarkable variety of bird life, with hiking and mountain bike trails on offer.

● ● ● VULINTABA COUNTRY HOTEL

Remotely tucked away in the Northern Drakensberg, Newcastle being the nearest town, is the Vulintaba Estate, which last year opened a 69-room hotel and spa to go with the 9-hole golf course originally designed by Peter Matkovich. Ranked one of the best 9-holers in South Africa.

● ● ● GRACELAND

The glitzy and busy Peermont group casino hotel is on site at the Graceland

Country Club, a former Top 100 Gary Player links-style course in the industrial town of Secunda in Mpumalanga. It offers stay-and-play packages.

● ● ● **FAIRWAY HOTEL & SPA**

The ideal base for golfers in Gauteng, being on site at Randpark Club with its two quality golf courses, the Firethorn and Bushwillow. There are seven unique golf villas overlooking the Firethorn, each one being a 4-bedroom unit.

● ● ● **REDBOURNE COUNTRY LODGE**

Located at the entrance to Plettenberg Bay Country Club in the Garden Route and part of the Lion Roars Group, Redbourne offers luxury rooms.

● ● ● **BON HOTEL**

An attractive Gauteng venue for a weekend getaway on the Vaal River set on the grounds of Riviera Golf Club. You'll find a 9-hole mashie course and, across the river, Maccaulei Golf Club.

● ● ● **GARDEN ROUTE CASINO**

Find this Tsogo Sun hotel outside the entrance to the Pinnacle Point Golf Estate in Mossel Bay.

● ● ● **FLAMINGO CASINO**

A Sun International property that's perfectly situated for golf at the entrance to Kimberley GC in the Northern Cape.

● ● ● **MMABATHO PALMS**

A Peermont hotel and casino in the North West, adjacent to the Leopard Park Golf Club with its 18-hole Peter Matkovich layout, it's close to the Botswana border.

● ● ● **FISH RIVER SUN**

Originally a Sun International casino hotel, it's on site at the remote Gary Player golf course in the Eastern Cape, near Port Alfred.

● ● ● **DRAKENSBURG GARDENS**

Take in a traditional old resort in the Southern Drakensberg, near Underberg, with a spectacularly hilly and scenic 18-hole course.

● ● ● **KING GEORGE PROTEA**

Conveniently near George Golf Club in the Garden Route, this large hotel has more than 100 rooms and suites, including some which overlook the course's 11th hole.

● ● ● **CITY LODGE MOWBRAY**

Not only is this hotel a chip shot away from the first green at King David Mowbray, it's a perfect base for golfers spending time in Cape Town, with quick access to the N2 highway.

● ● ● **CATHEDRAL PEAK**

Another homely resort in a World Heritage site in the Northern Drakensberg, which introduced its own 9-hole golf course some 25 years ago, it's ranked among the best in South Africa.

● ● ● **SABI RIVER SUN**

This is a 60-room Tsogo Sun hotel at Hazyview in Mpumalanga with a fun 18-hole bushveld course. A popular timeshare experience because of its resident wildlife, it's close to an entrance gate for the Kruger National Park.

● ● ● **LAKE BOUTIQUE LODGE**

Close to the golf clubhouse inside Silver Lakes estate east of Pretoria, this boutique lodge offers 32 rooms and self-catering apartments.



▶ BOTHA HOUSE

BEST B&BS ON A GOLF COURSE

● ● ● BOTHA HOUSE

This historic property overlooking the Indian Ocean on the KZN South Coast at Pennington is a hidden gem, an alternative experience for guests as you step back in time to the 1920s. It's on the property of the picturesque Umdoni Park Golf Club, which has a restaurant.

● ● ● CORAL TREE COLONY / 11 ON FAIRWAY

These two smart guest houses are both on the course at Southbroom Golf Club on the KZN South Coast. Coral Tree has six luxury en-suite bedrooms.

● ● ● MOUNT EDGECOMBE GOLF LODGE

Offering six rooms for guests inside the security of this Umhlanga estate in KZN, it's a short walk to the Mount Edgecombe clubhouse, with its excellent dining and pub facilities.

● ● ● WOODPECKER INN

This five-star luxury guest house with seven bedrooms has been a fixture at Woodhill Country Club Golf Estate in Pretoria for many years, and offers preferential green fee rates for guests at this Top 100 Peter Matkovich layout.



● ● ● KORO CREEK

This Limpopo estate at Modimolle boasts a choice of attractive on-course B&Bs.

● ● ● MULLIGAN'S GUEST LODGE

A quaint and unusually decorated B&B overlooking the 27th hole at Hermanus Golf Club in the Cape, just a short walk from the clubhouse.

● ● ● HIGHLANDS RETREAT

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DO JIMMY LIKES THE DO

WHY I USED MY
LOB WEDGE
TO WIN MY
FIRST MAJOR—
AND WHY
I ALWAYS DO
BY JIMMY WALKER

ON THE FINAL hole of the PGA Championship at Baltusrol last July, I left myself in the one place I didn't want to be: short-sided in deep rough with a bunker between me and the flag. But there was never a question which club I was going to use from there to set up a two-putt and the biggest win of my life: my 60-degree lob wedge.

I'm unconventional in that I use my lob wedge for every short-game shot. I learnt this from my dad, who was a scratch player. Dad's thinking was: Why try to get good at chipping with four or five different clubs when it's easier to master just one?

My coach, Butch Harmon, says I'm the

only tour player he's ever taught who uses this approach, but Butch hasn't tried to change me because I have got good at leaning on my 60. His only advice has been to swing through to the target more, instead of cutting across the ball.

On that last hole at Baltusrol, I hit a flop shot (*left*). My keys are to stand square, lay the face open, then *think hands and speed* as I slide the bounce of the wedge under the ball, using a wristy action to let the clubhead pass my hands. If I'm not so concerned with spin and just want the ball to land soft, I'll deaden the shot by hitting the ball towards the toe.

If I want a low runner, or a shot where

another player might use an 8- or 9-iron, I set up aimed a hair right of my target and hit what feels like a baby hook. I move my hands forward at address to shut the clubface, then swing at the ball from the inside, keeping my wrist angle set and firm through the shot. For everything in between – the basic chips and pitches – I hardly manipulate the club. I'm just presenting the wedge's loft at impact by using a simple motion similar to a putt. To hit it higher or lower, I adjust ball position or add a hint of wrist through impact. I like to be creative on every greenside shot. Making the process about club choice would probably feel too mechanical to me. Just give me my 60. – WITH MAX ADLER

JIMMY WALKER HAS SIX PGA TOUR WINS AND LAST SEASON RANKED 22ND IN SCRAMBLING FROM 10 TO 20 YARDS OFF THE GREEN.

Wayne Westner, 1961-2017

A turbulent life of triumph and tragedy on and off the golf course.



Wayne Westner, who died tragically in January at the age of 55, reached the heady heights of winning the World Cup of Golf

with Ernie Els before record home crowds at Erinvale in 1996, but his career in the game also had many more low points. Just 18 months later, a freak injury during a tournament put his life on a downward spiral. He was twice a South African Open champion, and on his day one of the most exciting players to watch, yet Westner himself felt his talent went largely unfulfilled.

He is reported to have shot himself at his home in the quiet retirement village of Pennington on the KZN South Coast, where he had retreated to in recent years with his second wife Alison. In his youth, an older brother had committed suicide at the age of 21.

He was a private person, a loner by his own admission, who rarely gave interviews away from the golf course. But five years ago, in November 2011, shortly after turning 50, Westner had a revealing discussion with Golf Digest writer Dylan Rogers. It was published in the magazine's Nine Holes With column (*January 2012 issue*). The two of them played nine holes together at Benoni Country Club, where Westner first emerged as a promising junior golfer in the late 1970s. Rogers described Westner as "an exceptionally confident man who appeared to be fighting his own demons".



Wayne Westner, photographed for Nine Holes at Benoni Country Club in November 2011.

His golf career and life itself was marked by a series of ups and downs. Aged 21, he won on the Sunshine Tour in 1983 in just his fourth start as a professional, the ICL Tournament Players Classic at Kensington, with a closing 68. Yet that was followed by what he described as five years of mediocrity, which he blamed on David Leadbetter. "In six months of coaching he took my legs out of my swing and I never found them again," he told Rogers.

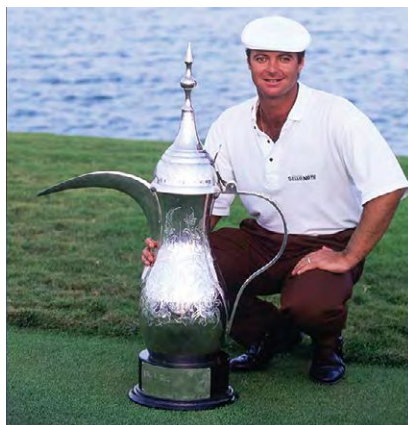
Westner's passion was trying to fathom the intricacies of the golf swing – "on tour I used to stay in my room,

and swing a club in front of the mirror" – and when his playing days were over he became a teacher himself, first in Ireland where he started his own academy. Having dwindled away his earnings, and desperate for any income, he had gone to Pennington to teach at the Lynton Hall Golf Academy, opposite the road from Selborne Golf Estate. Together with his son Matthew, he was marketing a training machine called Instant Golfer which he had invented several years ago. Instant Golfer was designed to simplify and accelerate the learning of the golf swing. He was

hoping it would restore his fortunes, and he and Matthew were due to officially launch it at the SA Open at Glendower, and then take it to the PGA Merchandise Show in America.

Interestingly, it was not any new swing theory that helped Westner regain his own game in the late 1980s, but rather a better mental approach. A man who dabbled in various religions during his life, he met up with a scientologist, Rene Kurensky (author of *The Right Mind for Golf*), who provided him with a technique which helped him overcome any fear on the course. It led to him winning two SA Opens (1988 and 1991) and two European Tour titles (Dubai Desert Classic 1993 and FNB Players Championship 1996). Three of those wins were at Durban CC, and Westner loved that course and also the Wild Coast. "I used to kill the oaks at Wild Coast," he said. "I loved the wind, because I had the ability to hit a low stinger."

He was one of the most stylishly dressed players on tour, in an era when pros were nowhere near as sartorially elegant as they are today. He concealed his thinning hair with either a Ben Hogan flat cap (when the wind was blowing) or a big cowboy hat. In the 1995-96 season he won the Sunshine Tour Order of Merit, with



Westner with the Dubai Desert Classic trophy in 1993.

three victories.

However, in the 1998 Madeira Open on the European Tour, he ruptured tendons in his ankle after a retaining wall collapsed on him while looking for a playing partner's ball in the pro-am. "That was the final straw," he admitted. "I didn't have anything left to get up again after that."

He took his wife and three children to Ireland, and it was a turbulent eight years in his life. "I drank a helluva lot when I gave up the game and was working in Ireland. But I never drank when I was playing golf. Drink was a destructive force, and I gave it up in 2008." He di-

vorced his first wife Kathryn, and became engaged to an Irish professional golfer, Hazel Kavanagh. That relationship ended embarrassingly for Westner. Having parted acrimoniously, he went to watch her playing in the 2007 Women's World Cup at Sun City, and ended up being escorted out of the resort by security guards after he had made inappropriate comments to her on the 18th green. "They banned me from Sun City for two years," he said.

An incident in Ireland where he was beaten up in his own home by unknown assailants – he had eight broken ribs, a blood clot on the brain, and a resulting epilepsy condition – made up Westner's mind to return home to South Africa in 2006. He invested first in a game and golf lodge near Lanseria Airport, then a game lodge in the Waterberg, but both were failed ventures.

There was a brief comeback on the Sunshine Tour in 2009, but it didn't go well, with eight missed cuts in 10 outings in the smaller tournaments. He entered the 100th SA Open at Durban CC in 2010, but had to retire hurt with a bad back during the first round. "I was carrying my golf bag down the stairs at my hotel, and slipped."

That was his last competitive round on tour, a sad one, in that it was the day he conceded defeat in his quest to master the game. **G**

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Too Much of a Low Thing?

Are low scores on the PGA Tour hurting the image of golf?

BY JAIME DAIZ

Birdies are seductive. Seeing a lot of them can almost make golf compare in excitement to a T20 cricket match.

Golf's favourite stretch of holes is the back nine at Augusta National, where eagles can fly. Last year's favourite major was the Open Championship, where Henrik Stenson and Phil Mickelson made 14 birdies and an eagle between them in a final-day showdown at Royal Troon. The scoring pyrotechnics at Hazeltine National last September made the Ryder Cup match especially memorable.

Already, 2017 has been marked by a flamboyant burst of low scoring on the PGA Tour. Justin Thomas opened with a 59 at the Sony Open in Hawaii and won with an all-time 72-hole scoring record of 253. Nine days later, at the CareerBuilder Challenge in California, Adam Hadwin shot the first 59 on a par 72 course (La Quinta) on the PGA Tour since David Duval in 1999.

Of the now nine sub-60 rounds in PGA Tour history, six have come since 2010, and three in the past six months, including Jim Furyk's record 58. On the Web.com Tour last year, German pro Stephan Jaeger had a 58 in a 30-under 250 total at the Ellie Mae Classic.

Furyk's was as close to a perfect round as has ever been seen. He hit every fairway and every green in regulation. Still, it didn't generate the excitement of the first 59, by Al Geiberger in Memphis in 1977 (which, although played with preferred lies, unofficially featured the same flawless tee-to-green stats). Thomas' round got



New young star Justin Thomas, 23, won the first two PGA tournaments of the year in Hawaii, and was 49-under-par for eight rounds, including a 59 in the Sony Open.

more buzz than Furyk's, probably because he was just coming off a victory at Kapalua; his long-driving young-man's game; and because he finished with an eagle.

So the question arises: Is professional golf, what many pro athletes consider the most difficult sport, getting too easy?

The answer lies in balance. In any sport, there is danger when the exceptional starts becoming too commonplace. Tennis faced this with too many aces, and baseball with too many home runs. Officials slowed down the ball in both sports.

On the other hand, big-time sports compete to provide entertainment in a cultural landscape with an exponentially increased number of choices. In golf, power is crowd-pleasing, but for the game to be truly compelling, it still must be accompanied by a pro's most mesmerising quality: skill. Ironically, when birdies are too plentiful, it can work against the most skilled player asserting his advantage. That's mainly why Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods avoided tournaments considered "birdie fests".

But a clinical measurement of skill is not always feasible. As Tom Kite once said, if you wanted to find out the most skilled golfer, everyone would play with hickory shafts and gutta percha balls. Other than fresh air, golf as a spectator experience suffers in comparison to team sports. From an audience perspective, golf's image as too hard and too slow has to be countered.

Accordingly, equipment limitations have been moderate, allowing players to continue to gain distance and control. The most valuable innovation might be portable launch monitors that players routinely take to the practice tee to help keep their swings in tune. Agronomical advances make for flawless fairway turf and impeccable putting surfaces. Other than the majors, the tour's week-to-week course setups feature light rough, reasonable green speeds and firmness, and only marginally hidden pins. When the weather is benign, low scores follow.

Before the CareerBuilder, defending champion Jason Dufner noted the trend. "I think some of it goes into golf courses that we're playing now. Some of them are becoming a

little too easy, distance-wise, setup-wise,” he said. “I think the biggest deterrent to low scores is probably a good amount of rough and firm, fast greens. Not rough where it’s hack-out, but where you lose control. So I think that if the trend continues, you’ll continue to see a lot of low scores.”

Another thing that is important is the increasing number of wedge approaches players are left with after the now-routine 300-plus-yard drive. It’s why many pros carry four wedges (two was once the standard), usually ranging from a 46-degree pitching wedge to 60-degree lob wedge. With a wedge, a pro has his best chance of getting an approach inside 10 feet, the distance where birdies are disproportionately converted. (Tour players make 50 percent of eight-footers, but the rate drops to 30 percent from 12 feet and down to 25 percent from 14 feet.)

Dufner said that at last year’s US Open at Oakmont, Larry Nelson told him when he won there in 1983, he hit 3-iron and 4-iron approaches into the then-469-yard first hole. Dufner said he hit pitching wedge into the now-482-yard hole in three of the rounds and sand wedge the other. The course was rain-soaked both years.

As Johnny Miller, whose 63 at Oakmont in 1973 remains by consensus the greatest low round ever shot, said the day before Hadwin’s 59, “The only disadvantage that pros have now is that the courses are longer. Except that they really aren’t, because the

LOWEST ROUNDS IN OFFICIAL TOURNAMENT GOLF

58

Ryo Ishikawa
Stephan Jaeger
Jim Furyk

Japan Tour 2010
Web.com Tour 2016
PGA Tour 2016

59

Eight on PGA Tour

Al Geiberger (1977), Chip Beck (1991), David Duval (1999), Paul Goydos, Stuart Appleby (2010), Jim Furyk (2013), Justin Thomas (2017), Adam Hadwin (2017).

Five on Web.com Tour

Notah Begay (1998), Doug Dunaway (1998), Jason Gore (2005), Will Wilcox (2013), Russell Knox (2013)

One on LPGA Tour

Annika Sorenstam (2001)

One on Sunshine Tour

Peter Karmis (2009)

One on Champions Tour

Kevin Sutherland (2014)

Two on European Challenge Tour

Adrien Mork (2006),
Nicolo Ravano (2016)

None on European Tour

clubs they’re hitting in are shorter.”

Miller notes that when he was shooting 61s in back-to-back weeks while winning in Phoenix and Tucson in 1975, “my average approach club was 6-iron through 8-iron. Very occasionally, a pitching wedge,

almost never a sand wedge. Way more 4-irons into par 4s than wedges.”

He continued, knowingly treading into polarising “our era was better” territory. “There are more good players now, and with all the advances, it’s a good time to be a pro golfer. I don’t think I’m living in the past to say it used to be harder to be good. You add everything up, and I’m surprised there haven’t been more 59s.”

If they keep coming, it might be most due to the mental factor. Just as four minutes stopped being a magic number for the mile run after Roger Bannister broke the barrier in 1954, 59 isn’t quite as magical in golf. Hadwin said as much when he described his late-round mindset: “If anything, I was thinking 58.”

Perhaps the players are catching up to a moment when an adjustment will be needed, similar to how course setups got noticeably longer and tougher in the 1960s and 1970s after several scoring records were established on short parkland courses in the 1940s and 1950s (from 1951-’57, seven different players shot 60).

It’s not difficult to make tournament courses harder, and it will probably happen eventually. But we are far from critical mass, or any sort of backlash. The birdie hasn’t been devalued. Until further notice, rounds in the 50s will have much more upside than down. For now, may they keep coming. **G**



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Callaway Chrome Soft



M


arc Leishman's teacher had a plan for his young student in 2002: "Marc had players he looked up to – like Greg Norman and Ernie Els – but we never tried to copy a swing. We continually tried to develop a better version of Marc Leishman."

At 18, Leishman, who is Australian, met teacher Denis McDade and entered the renowned Victoria Institute of Sport in Australia. VIS is the government-funded programme that has produced players like Geoff Ogilvy and Stuart Appleby and has become a blueprint worldwide for developing elite golfers.

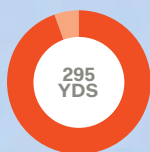
Now 15 years later, McDade has seen Leishman go from top junior player to 2009 PGA Tour Rookie of the Year to major-championship contender. (He lost to Zach Johnson in a playoff at the 2015 British Open.)

Leishman got an early start in the game, at Warrnambool Golf Club across the street from his childhood home. He says he learnt more by playing than practising and was always challenging someone to a contest. "The course required creativity and the ability to manoeuvre the ball," McDade says. "The result is a player who has more shots than anyone I've ever coached." – ROGER SCHIFFMAN

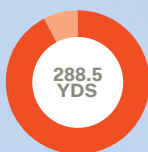
A RELAXED START

 In his setup, Marc Leishman is balanced, athletic and tension-free, with his head well behind the ball. "All great keys for driving it long and straight," says his teacher, Denis McDade, director of coaching at BannLynch Golf in Melbourne, Australia.

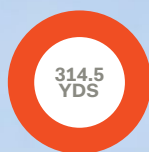
► DRIVING DISTANCE (2016)



Marc Leishman (55th)

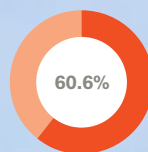


Tour average

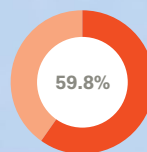


J B Holmes (1st)

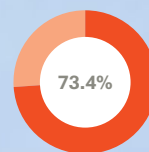
► DRIVING ACCURACY (2016)



Marc Leishman (90th)



Tour average



Colt Knost (1st)

SOURCE: SHOTLINK



TOGETHERNESS

► “Marc is swinging his arms and the club away in sync with his upper-body rotation, and his lower body is providing a stable base,” McDade says. “Look at how the ratio of arm swing, upper-body turn and lower-body turn are in balance with each other.”

STAYING LOOSE

► At the top, Leishman is coiled but shows no stress. Note the relaxed look of his arms – he even lets the left elbow bend – which allows a free-wheeling motion down and through. “Amateurs tend to tense up going back,” McDade says. “Marc’s as tension-free as they get.”

LOWER BODY LEADS

► Starting down, Leishman shifts towards the target and starts his move into impact. “His upper body is still closed to the target, his arms are still relatively soft, and his head is staying back,” McDade says. “Those positions are perfect for driving with power and control.”

AN AGGRESSIVE RIP

► Leishman looks balanced, tall and strong at impact. His body has rotated open relative to address, which supports the impact position of the hands leading the clubhead. “Impact is the only frame where Marc looks like he has any tension in his arms,” McDade says.

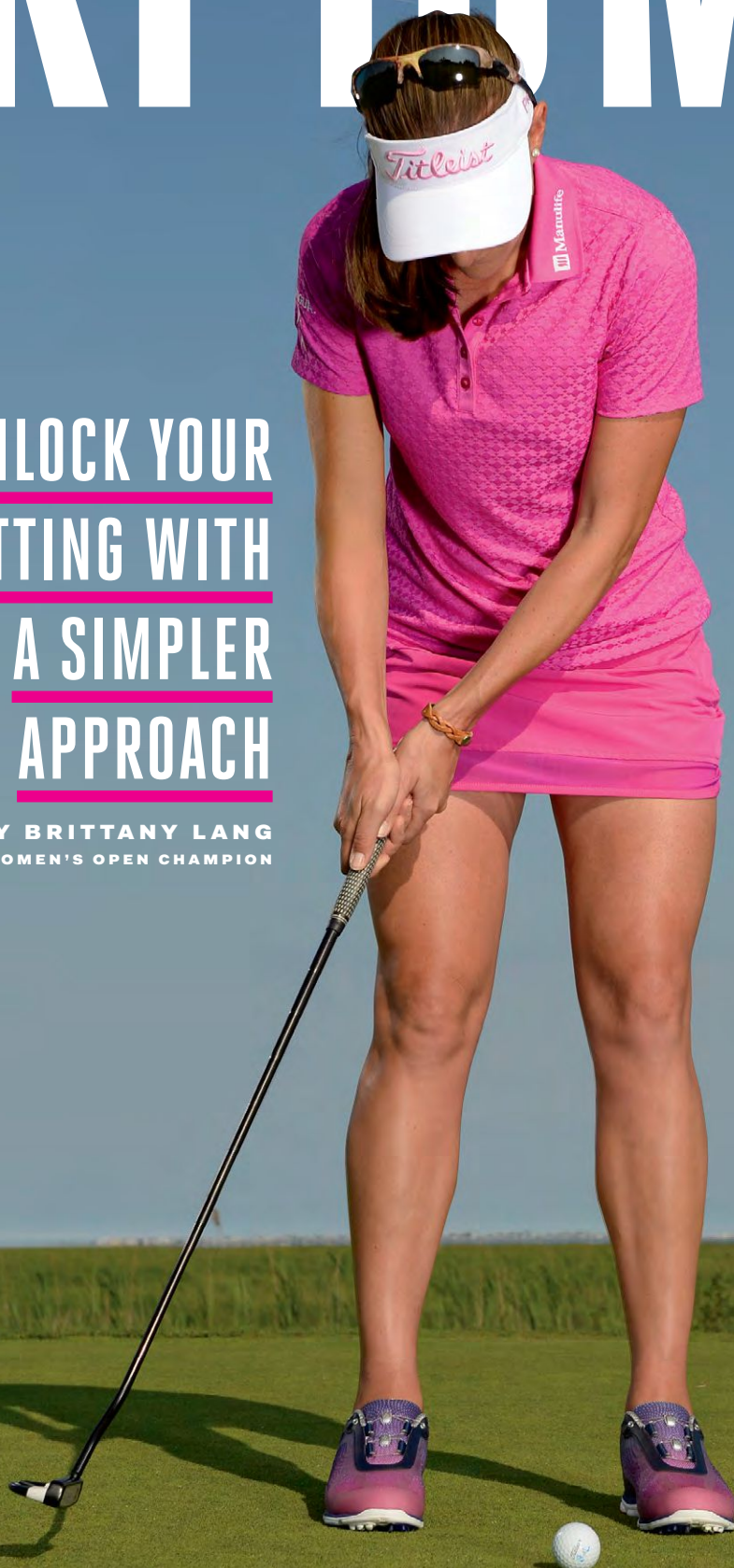
FINISHING TOUCH

► It’s all about rotation here. “In every frame of the downswing Marc’s head is turning forward,” McDade says. “He’s a little inflexible in his left hip, so to make a full release and stay in balance, he lets his left foot rotate out. It’s another way of matching his swing to his physical capabilities.”

TRY TO MAKE

UNLOCK YOUR PUTTING WITH A SIMPLER APPROACH

BY BRITTANY LANG
US WOMEN'S OPEN CHAMPION



► All week at the 2016 US Open at CordeValle in California – where I won my first major – I was working on two things with my putting: staying down and fully committing to every putt. Reading the putt on 16 during the final round, tied for the lead, my brother, Luke, and I picked a line we liked: a ball out left. I committed to that line completely, and just let it roll. That mindset helped me drop the putt and take the lead.

I'm never mechanical with my putting when I play. It's just *this* ball in *that* hole. But your putting has to be grounded in some mechanics. I've worked with Dave Stockton, and he's big on the left hand (for righties with a traditional grip) being the aim hand. So the left hand is super important to me. I like to hit practice putts left-hand-only, isolating the feeling of the left hand in control. My putting grip is left index finger over right pinkie, which gives me the feeling of the back of my left hand going to the hole.

EVERYTHING

Where the left hand goes is where the ball goes.

I also like the stroke being equal on both sides (*photos*). I don't want to take the putter back short and make a long through-stroke, or go back too far and have to decel coming through. Here's a drill I like to work on when I practice. Put a tee just outside the toe of the putter at address, then stick a second tee 10 centimetres behind it (on the backstroke side) and another 10 centimetres in front (through-stroke side). Hit some short putts, making sure the putterhead doesn't go past either tee during the stroke. Groove that feeling of the same distance back and through.

The last mechanical key I'll give you is acceleration. If you're not accelerating the putterhead through the ball, you're not a good putter.

When I feel like I'm not accelerating, I'll go to the practice green and work on taking it back short and exaggerating the motion through the ball. I'll putt a bunch of

three-footers focusing only on acceleration. When I play, I still want equal parts backstroke and through-stroke, but I never want to lose sight of accelerating the club through the ball.

In the end, you have to figure out *your* best putting style. Practice putting with one ball, and identify the speed you're most comfortable with. Putt from various distances and breaks. Do you like to have the ball die at the hole? (That works best for me.) Or are you better hitting it with some speed? Once you find out how you like to putt, you'll develop a feel for distance and start to see break better.

The point I want to leave you with is, the best putters don't always have the best mechanics. I see too many amateurs trying to copy other putters, trying to imitate what they see on TV. The great ones know what works for them, and they believe they're going to make putts. Period. If you get yourself thinking that way, you're going to be a better putter. — WITH KEELY LEVINS



BRITTANY LANG, 30, won the US Women's Open in a playoff against Anna Nordqvist. Lang ranked 10th on the 2016 LPGA Tour in putts per green in regulation.



BUST THIS RULE!

GOOD HITTERS CAN'T
CHIP, AND GOOD
CHIPPERS CAN'T HIT

BY CHRISTOPHER SMITH

► Consider this: Golfers with great long games tend to be weaker around the greens, and those with terrific short games often struggle with ball-striking. Why? Because a full swing and a chip or pitch are fundamentally opposite motions, yet many of us approach them the same way. The fix begins with understanding “kinematic sequence.” Simply put, the sequence of motion for a short-game shot should be the reverse of a full swing. On big swings, the lower body leads the downswing; in the short game, the clubhead initiates the first move to the ball. Here’s what you need to know to get good at both.

RIP IT

FULL SWING

► In most athletic motions, energy courses through the body like a whip. Say you’re throwing a punch. You plant your lead foot and your body weight sinks into that thigh. Next, your hips start to rotate open. As your hip rotation slows, your torso rotates faster. As your torso slows, the power travels to your arm, then your hand and, ultimately, your poor victim’s nose. This acceleration and then deceleration of each body part is called the kinematic sequence.

The golf swing is a classic example. The lower body begins the downswing (*left*). Your energy then moves to the torso, then the arms, with the force multiplying along the way until it’s unleashed at the tip of the whip, the clubhead.

Too much information, right? The beauty is, because this whipping action happens faster than we can consciously control, all you need to do is nail the first move to set it in motion. With any full swing, start the downswing by imagining you’re squashing a spider with your lead foot. That image will get things going.

If you’re a slicer, you probably start down with your upper body. A drill to correct that is to take a middle iron and hit full-speed shots stopping right after impact. This cut-off finish will train your body to release its speed at the ball.

AND



SHORT GAME

► Here's a scene from the short-game area: A golfer toils away on short pitches, chunking or blading every other ball. His phone rings, and as he holds it and casually swings the club with just his right hand – *presto!* – he starts hitting it pure.

A one-arm swing with the dominant hand induces proper short-game action. And the sequence of motion is nearly the opposite of a full swing: The clubhead drops to initiate the downswing, and the energy flows to the hands, the arms, the torso and finally to the lower body. Swinging one-handed, it's almost impossible to start down with anything but the clubhead.

How close to the green should you be to reverse your sequence? It's more about the contact you want to make. On pitches and chips, the trailing edge of the clubhead strikes the turf first, slightly behind the ball. This lets the bounce (the wide bottom of a wedge) slide through and get a clean, soft strike. On full shots, with the lower body leveraging, it's ball-first contact, with the leading edge ripping a divot.

Hitting one-handed isn't easy, so start without a ball. Rest your left fist on your chest to get it out of the way (*right*). At first, just try to scuff the grass. You'll quickly feel how the sequence differs from the full swing. – WITH MAX ADLER

CHRISTOPHER SMITH
is the PGA lead instructor at Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club outside Portland, Oregon.



CHIP IT!

VORSTER WINS UNDER-15 CROWN IN BIRDIE FEST

Two future stars emerged at the Nomads SA Under-15 championship when Martin Vorster (Pinnacle Point) edged Casey Jarvis (State Mines) in a remarkable 54-hole David and Goliath duel at Koro Creek.

Vorster, who turned 15 later in January, shot 67-66-69 (202) against the 68-66-69 (203) of 13-year-old Jarvis as they tore the Limpopo course apart. Vorster, who is 1.85 metres tall and drives the ball 300 metres, had 14 birdies and two eagles, while 1.5-metre tall Jarvis made 15 birdies. Remarkably, Jarvis only had two bogeys.

Jarvis has already tasted international success, having won the Boys 11-13 division at the IMG Junior Golf Tour Florida Challenge over 54 holes in the United States in December.

Third-placed Liam van Deventer (Benoni Lake) was 12 shots further back on 215 at Koro Creek, with Kieron van Wyk (Ruimsig) fourth on 217.



Garrick Higgo at Royal Durban with Mark Burmester from Nomads Furtherance of Golf.

SA JUNIOR TEAM FOR ALL-AFRICA CHAMPS

Christo Lamprecht (the No 1 ranked junior in SA), Garrick Higgo and Jayden Schaper, all new caps, plus Luca Filippi, will represent the SA Junior team in the All-Africa Junior Championship at Royal Harare GC in Zimbabwe from March 28-31. Higgo had a winning start to the year in the 54-hole Nomads Junior Order of Merit Coastal event at Royal Durban with a 14-under-par total of 205, and he was joint runner-up in the Greg Norman Junior Invitational at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in December with Zimbabwe's David Amm, behind Australian Jason Hong.

GOLF DIGEST AMATEUR RANKINGS (AT FEBRUARY 1)

1	Kyle McClatchie	Serengeti	1773
2	Albert Venter	Centurion	1567
3	Aubrey Beckley	Potchefstroom	1381
4	Matt Saulez	Durban CC	1226
5	Andre Nel	Kingswood	1183
6	Darin de Smidt	Krugersdorp	1164
7	Jovan Rebula	George	1075
8	Jason Smith	Irene	978
9	David McIntyre	Eagle Canyon	947
10	Louis Albertse	Dundee	908
11	Herman Loubser	Theewaterskloof	870
12	Garrick Higgo	De Zalze	846
13	Marco Steyn	Modderfontein	844
14	Malcolm Mitchell	Kloof	771
15	Dylan Naidoo	Modderfontein	766
16	James du Preez	Pretoria CC	734
17	Angus Ellis-Cole	Glendower	729
18	Luca Filippi	Milnerton	699
19	Brandon Cloete	Pezula	695
20	Quinton Wilsnach	Middelburg	670
21	Dylan Kok	Woodhill	666
22	Therion Nel	Bloemfontein	663
23	Luke Jerling	PE Golf Club	646
24	Jason Rossiter	Krugersdorp	582
25	Danie van Niekerk	Lichtenburg	561
26	Richard Joubert	Centurion	517
27	Aneurin Gounden	Glendower	516
28	Siyanda Mwandla	Mt Edgecombe	496
29	David Meyers	Dainfern	478
30	Allan Lones	PEGC	465
31	Combrinck Smit	Vryheid	428
32	Jade Buitendag	Kingswood	411
33	Neswill Croy	Stellenbosch	394
34	Greg McKay	Mt Edgecombe	361
35	Dylan Mostert	State Mines	354
36	Steven le Roux	Wanderers	353
37	Altin vd Merwe	Bellville	351
38	T Bezuidenhout	Rustenburg	342
39	Andrew vd Knaap	Centurion	339
40	Philip Kruse	Woodhill	328
41	Clayton Mansfield	Durban CC	325
42	Andre van Heerden	Walker Park	316
43	Jason Broomhead	Durban CC	313
44	Sentania Minnie	Glendower	302
45	Luke Trocadero	Atlantic Beach	300
46	Caylum Boon	Oubaai	293
47	Cameron Moralee	Dainfern	292
48	Luke Mayo	Mt Edgecombe	281
49	Noel Anderson	Fancourt	271
50	Franklin Manchest	George	269

TOURNAMENT WINNERS

JASON SMITH

**Free State Open,
Maccaulei GC**

Scores: 65-70-66-72 (273)

Runner-up: Andre Nel
73-67-67-69 (276)

How he did it: It was a first win since 2014 for Smith (Irene), who had fallen to No 15 in the Golf Digest rankings at the end of 2016. Smith, 22, played for SA in the 2014 World Amateur in Japan after winning the SA Strokeplay that year, but his last victory had come in the 2014 Ekurhuleni Open. Smith led wire-to-wire at Maccaulei (he had a six-shot lead going into the final round), opening with a 9-birdie 65 (31-34), and he finished with 19 birdies and an eagle over 72 holes.

NOTABLE: Andre Nel (Kingswood), 21, has been one of the most consistent performers the last two years, heading the Golf Digest rankings in 2015, but his only victory in that time has been at matchplay, the 2015 WP Amateur. Surprisingly, this was his best 72-hole tournament finish. He had 18 birdies and two eagles.



AUBREY BECKLEY

**Gauteng North Open,
Wingate Park CC**

Scores: 70-67-72-65 (274)

Runner-up: Malcolm Mitchell
69-67-68-71 (275)

How he did it: Beckley (Potchefstroom) celebrated his third major 72-hole tournament win, adding this to the Ekurhuleni Open (2013) and Cape Province Open (2016) titles. Starting the final round five shots behind Malcolm Mitchell (Kloof), the 36- and 54-hole leader, Beckley, 23 in February, produced an 8-birdie 65 (30-35), with three birdies in the last four holes. He also had a closing 65 when he won the Cape Province title.

NOTABLE: First-round leader Erhard Lambrechts (Stellenbosch) had a hole-in-one at the 16th in an opening 68. Beckley had 18 birdies and two eagles over the four rounds, against the 20 birdies and one eagle by Mitchell.



SENIORS & MID-AMS

Kevin Sharp (Modderfontein) celebrated his first Mid-Amateur victory in three years when the 45-year-old claimed the Central Gauteng title at Kyalami CC with 69-70. He had an eagle two at 15 in his opening round. Sharp edged Gerlou Roux (Bellville 72-68), who went to No 1 on the Mid-Am rankings ahead of Ryan Dreyer. Roux played his last 27 holes in 8-under, after taking 40 shots for his first nine of the day. Tied third on

143 were Elton James (Westlake) and Cliff Howes (Wanderers) on 143, ahead of Logan Lofstedt (Glendower) and Dino de Abreu (Kempton Park) on 144.

Sishen's **Ludwig Albutt** shot 72-75 at the new Heron Banks course in the Vaal Triangle to win the Free State Senior Open, after a playoff with Rurik Gobel (Randpark 75-72). Gordon Wessels (Wingate Park 78-72) and Derik Piek (Centurion 73-77) tied for third ahead of Naude and Wellington on 151.

Greg Gleeson (Kyalami) triumphed in a three-way playoff to win the Gauteng North Senior Open, his second victory on the circuit following the Northern Cape Open last year. He moved to No 8 on the Senior rankings. Gleeson shot 69-75 with 11 birdies at Woodhill, to edge Richard Bruyns (River Club 73-71) and Gerhard Strydom (Waterkloof 72-72) in sudden-death. Jock Wellington (Kyalami 71-75) was fourth ahead of Francois le Roux (De Zalze), Stephen Johnston (Ruimsig) and Schalk Naude (Randpark) on 148.

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WINNING LETTER

ALLOCATION OF STROKES AT COURSES NEEDS TO BE REVISED BY SAGA

I am no more than an active social golfer. With my infrequent competitive play I was interested to read the views of the Handicaps Network Africa website which said the following (September 2016 newsletter): “The strokes on the holes have, of course, no impact on individual Stableford scores and are mainly there for matchplay games. If you consider that just about every game of golf played in South Africa has a “private game” between the players, where players get these strokes is important. Most games have a fairly small difference in the handicaps and so the strokes tend to come on the low stroke holes.”

It might be true that strokes on holes are not relevant for individual Stableford, but from what I have seen the majority of competitive handicap golf is either betterball or alliance, where strokes on the holes are relevant, particularly when double strokes are taken.

I agree that there are many side-bets in these rounds, but would suggest the majority of these privates are played within the confines of the overriding handicap event and therefore these matches are played off full handicap. I have not seen any privates reduced to scratch, which would be the only reason for the location of low stroke holes to be relevant.

If most matches are not played off scratch and most handicap golf played as BB or alliance, is there not a case to stroke holes based on BB scoring rather than match play games with the low handicap moved to scratch? Even if this means rounds start or end on the lowest strokes for the respective nines.



Arnot Golf Club in Mpumalanga boasts what we believe to be the longest par 5 on a 9-hole course in South Africa. It's 601 metres, and not only is there the length to master, you also have to keep your tee shot straight. There is a dam bordering the left side of the fairway, with out-of-bounds right. Golf Digest invites readers to contribute to the Gallery with photos or stories of unusual holes they have encountered on their travels.

Durbanville GC in the Cape have ignored the SAGA recommendations when it comes to stroking holes. Their strokes are all over the place. Strokes 1-2-3-5-8-9 are all on the back nine, which the club recognises is the stronger nine. The only low strokes on the front nine are the first (stroke 7), third (6) and ninth (4).

King David Mowbray GC has strokes 1-3-5 in the last four holes of the round, recognising the strength of their finishing holes, even if this contradicts the SAGA recommendation that odd strokes go on the front nine, and low strokes should be avoided near the end of each nine.

In my opinion, all holes should be stroked based on actual difficulty and need for strokes, rather than the current system. And do we really need to have odds and evens on separate nines? – Stuart Casteling, Cape Town

Paying by the hour for golf, and waving the white flag

There was a story on golfdigest.com about a Missouri golf club taking an innovative stance against slow play by charging golfers for the time they spent on the course (\$10 an hour), rather than a flat green fee. If they play slowly, they pay more. Also, you can play for an hour and leave the course.

My take on slow play is that it mostly happens when fourballs with higher handicaps are placed in front of golfers with lower handicaps. And if the higher handicaps are slow, they sometimes get the lower handicaps hitting drives into them. A high handicap has the same privileges as the lower handicap to enjoy the round. For new golfers, it's no fun starting a sport, and having seasoned guys hit balls into your fourball.

Lower handicaps will always wait behind a fourball of higher handicaps, irrespective of how fast they play. They will often wait to play their second shots on par 5s, for the green to clear, so this also slows down the game. My solution is that golf clubs should reserve certain times for certain handicaps. Low handicaps, for example, can tee off early morning and early afternoon, and high handicaps later.

Then there is the issue of faster fourballs playing through a slower fourball. The problem lies in the awkwardness of asking to play through. Can clubs not implement a system where they hand each fourball a white flag? As soon as you wave this to the fourball in front, they can see you are willing to pass. In return they wave their flag back to show they are happy with this.

Lastly, I have never in my life played social golf with anyone who timed their search for a lost ball. One or two minutes saved here per hole can make a huge difference. *Heinrich du Preez, Pretoria*

Top Teachers Correction

In your list of top regional teachers in the Best Teachers feature (December), Stef Visage is incorrectly listed under Wingate Park CC in Pretoria. He has not coached here for years, and tells me he is no longer teaching. The teaching pro at Wingate Park is Philip du Preez, who is PGA qualified and a certified fitness specialist. *Tobie de Haas, trainee manager, Wingate Park CC*

FRIENDLY WELCOME AT SAKABULA

On December 24 I played at Sakabula, near Howick in the KZN Midlands. I made a booking via the club's online system, and explained that, as it was my birthday, I would appreciate an early tee time. When I pitched at Sakabula on the day, Chris and Gene van Zyl, the owners, welcomed me by name. Being a stranger at such an early time meant it could only be me!

They made my birthday memorable by a few unexpected

gestures, and we spent half an hour after the round discussing anything and everything. It wasn't what they gave me that made a lasting impression, but the way they made me feel special. Their friendliness and attention to detail shows that golf clubs can be proactive in retaining members. Judging by the friendly atmosphere at Sakabula, and the members' obvious enjoyment of the club, it is paying dividends. *Ray Bienenfeld, Gauteng*



Sakabula celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, and boasts the only 18-hole course in the Midlands, just a few kilometres from the N3. It's a privately owned course, designed by the late Gerrie de Jong, a farmer, businessman, and member of parliament, who founded the Sakabula Country Estate in Merrivale. He read books on golf course architecture to help him with the design.



Comparing the spectator experience at two pro events

I was fortunate to attend both the Nedbank Challenge at Sun City and Alfred Dunhill Championship at Leopard Creek late last year. These two excellent events do South African golf proud, and attending both allowed me to witness the remarkable contrast between the two.

As a Nedbank Wealth client I was one of many invited VIP guests at Sun City (16th green pictured), and I was able to appreciate the enormous budget that Nedbank and all the other lesser sponsors invest in the event. The organisation was slick from the welcoming reception to the huge hospitality tent and VIP grandstand.

The Gary Player CC is always a treat for galleries. I don't know what the gate was, but the course was full and the marshals did a pretty good job. On the negative side, it is difficult to follow one group for 18 or even nine holes. The reason is that spectators have to follow the cart paths and this often means that by the time you get from the green to the next tee, the players have teed off and are well down

the fairway.

I timed a visit to the Kruger to coincide with the Leopard Creek event. The Alfred Dunhill is a lot more laid-back than Sun City. I would guess that the on-course spectators numbered about five percent of those at Sun City. The organisation is just as slick, but less obvious. One hardly notices the ropes even though they are there. The spectators were a lot closer to the golfers at Leopard Creek and it was easy to overhear the general chat among players, mostly about game sightings.

The marshals were excellent in that they seemed to be only where they were needed. It is hard to believe that this course could be any better than it is and yet all the kikuyu turf is to be lifted and replaced with indigenous turf grass.

Watching the pros up close is an awesome experience. They all hit the ball miles. On a number of occasions I positioned myself on a par 5 where the drives were finishing, then watched the ease with which they hit the green in two. The second hole at Sun City is one example. What impressed me is the live sound that the club hitting the ball makes. Something we hackers never experience in our own golf. *John Reid, Cape Town*

WINNING LETTER PRIZE

Golf Digest and Titleist South Africa have teamed up to offer the sender of the best letter for the month a box of Titleist Pro V1 golf balls and a Titleist cap.



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stuart.mclean@newmedia-pub.co.za. Please include your full name, address and phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or otherwise reused in any medium.



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Happy Days!

Golf's rule-makers announce a welcome change

Golf's governing bodies have supplied a reason to get excited about 2017. With the blessing of The R&A and USGA (effective January 1), courses and tournament committees can enact a Local Rule that says if you, your caddie, your partner or your equipment (or that of your opponent) accidentally move a ball or ball marker on the putting green, there's no penalty, and the ball should be replaced. ► You read that right. Rule-makers did something *really* good for the game, and the reaction from professional tournament organisers has been extremely positive: All the major pro tours and the Masters Tournament said they will use the rule in 2017.

"We're golfers, too, and when we saw players penalised for minor movement of a ball on the putting green, it didn't sit well with us," says Thomas Pagel, senior director of the *Rules of Golf* and amateur status for the USGA. "I hope people are excited about the change and it's well received."

Pagel said he could envision this Local Rule becoming permanent when the next revisions of the *Rules of Golf* go into effect in 2020, but "I'm not going to guarantee anything," he says.

The new Local Rule was a reaction in large part to the messy situation that affected Dustin Johnson at the 2016 US Open. Johnson was deemed to have accidentally moved his ball on the fifth green during the final

round and later received a one-stroke penalty, although video evidence seemed inconclusive, and Johnson said he didn't cause his ball to move. The way Decision 18-2/0.5 is worded, if the weight of the evidence indicates that it's more likely than not that a player caused the ball to move, the penalty must be assessed. In Johnson's case, the USGA said there was no other reason more likely than Johnson.

Another key reason for the change is agronomy. As green speeds have become faster, keeping a ball at rest has been a challenge. Something as innocent as stepping in to address a putt could cause the ball to move.

So what happens if the Local Rule is not in effect? The one-stroke penalty for violating Rules 18-2 (ball at rest moved by player, partner, caddie or equipment), 18-3 (ball at rest moved by opponent, caddie or equipment in match play) or 20-1 (lifting and marking) would still apply. Those rules specify a penalty for moving a ball or ball marker in many situations, including accidents such as kicking the ball or moving it when you make a practice stroke.

Keep in mind that the new Local Rule applies only if a ball is on the green – by definition, when any part of the ball is touching the putting surface. Furthermore, if the ball should move on the green as a result of wind, water or some other natural cause, such as gravity, the ball must be played from its new position. A ball marker that moves as a result of strong winds, for example, should be replaced.

But put all of that aside for now, and just take a moment to salute The R&A and USGA for doing something positive for golf.

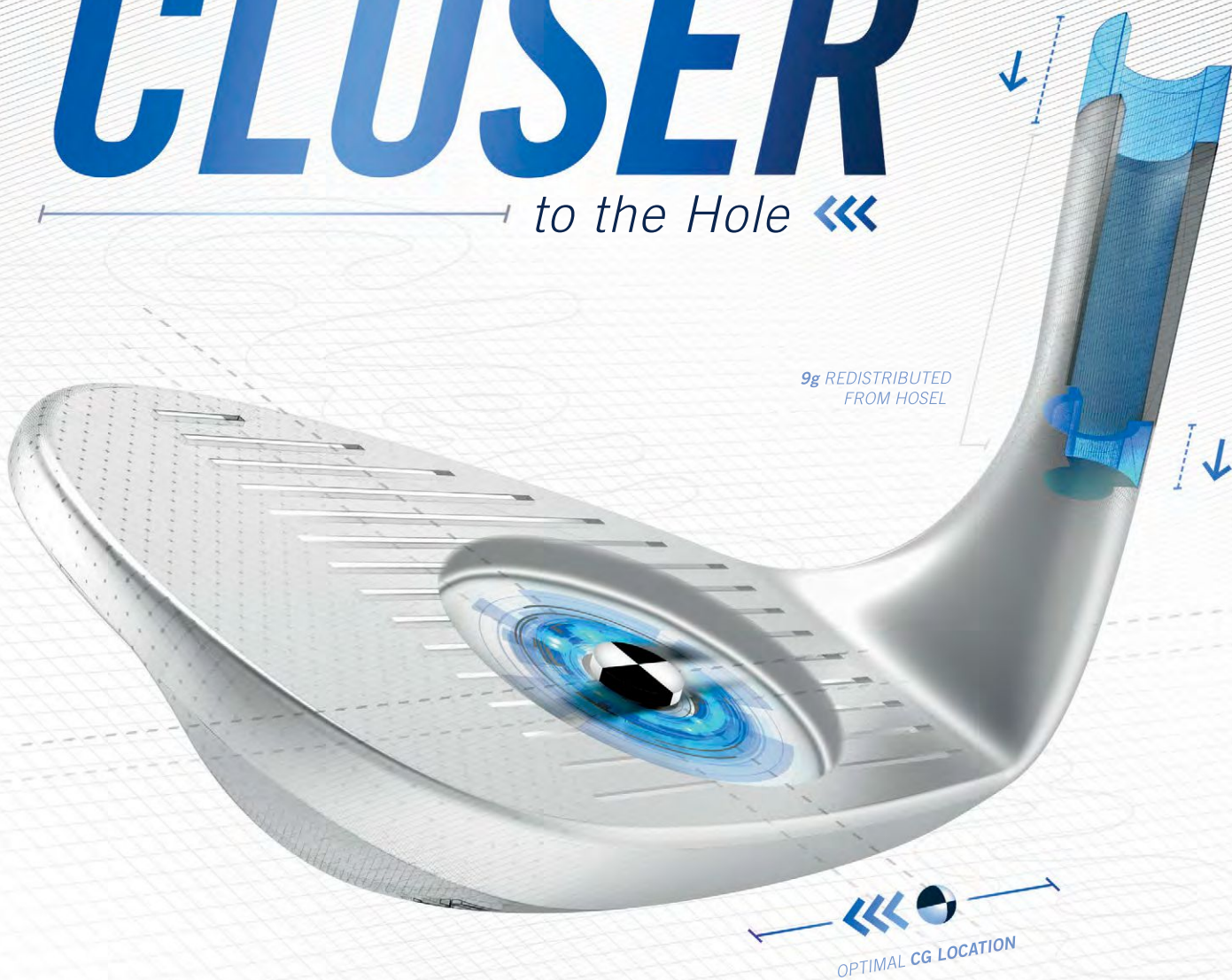
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