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Sincerely,
Chris Wilson
President



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Volume 52, Issue 2

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46: All in the Family

Amanda Balionis says her mom is her biggest cheerleader. Jim Nantz and the brass at CBS Sports are big fans too. So are we.

50: Marshal for a Day

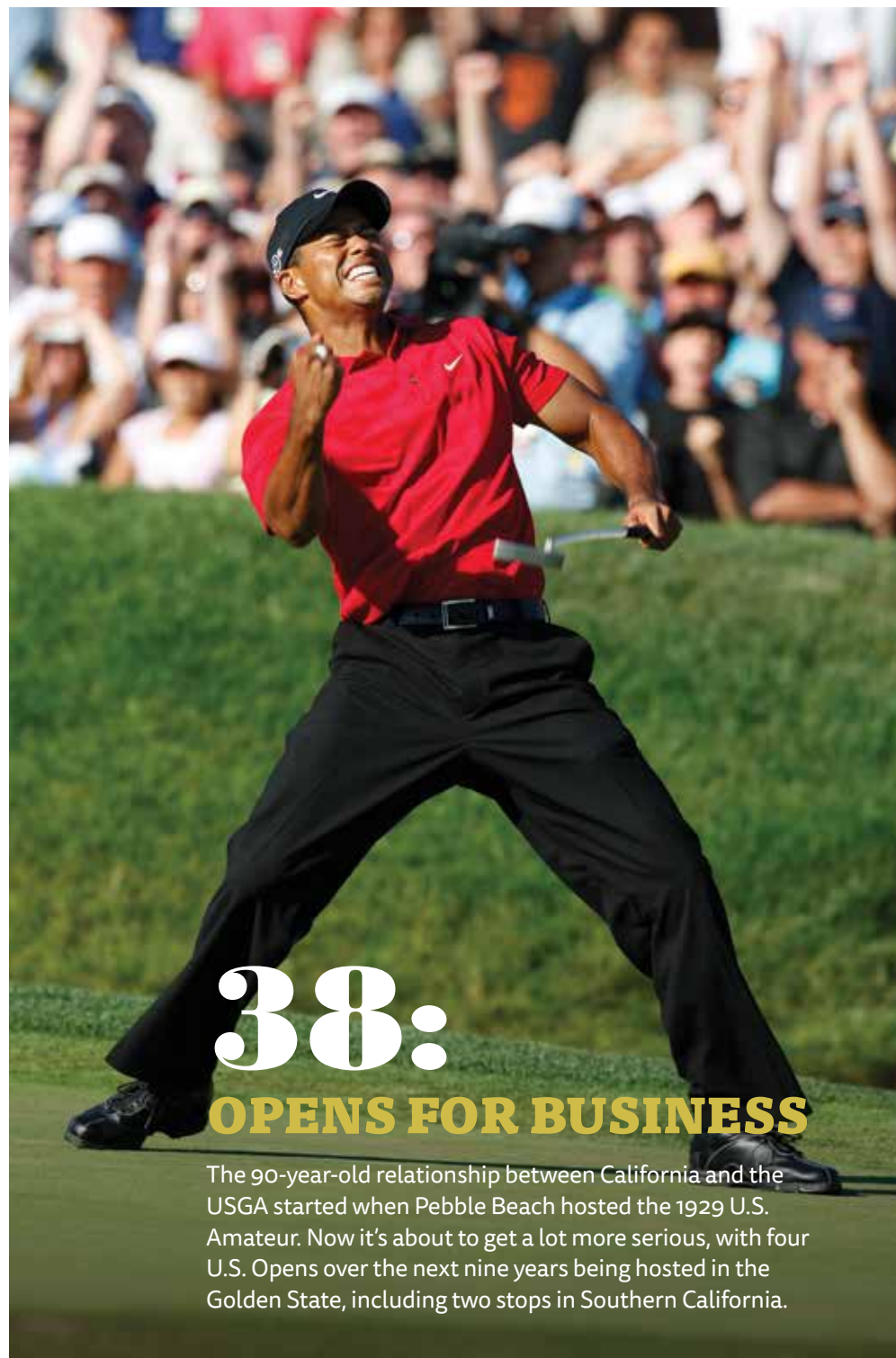
Whether they're called "player's assistant" or "course ambassador," the job is the same: Move players along. Our writer morphs into a marshal for a day to see what the job entails.

54: Travelin' Joe

In our newest regular feature, "Travelin' Joe" Passov takes us to Royal Portrush to preview The Open Championship, with some other hot tips for while you're across the pond.

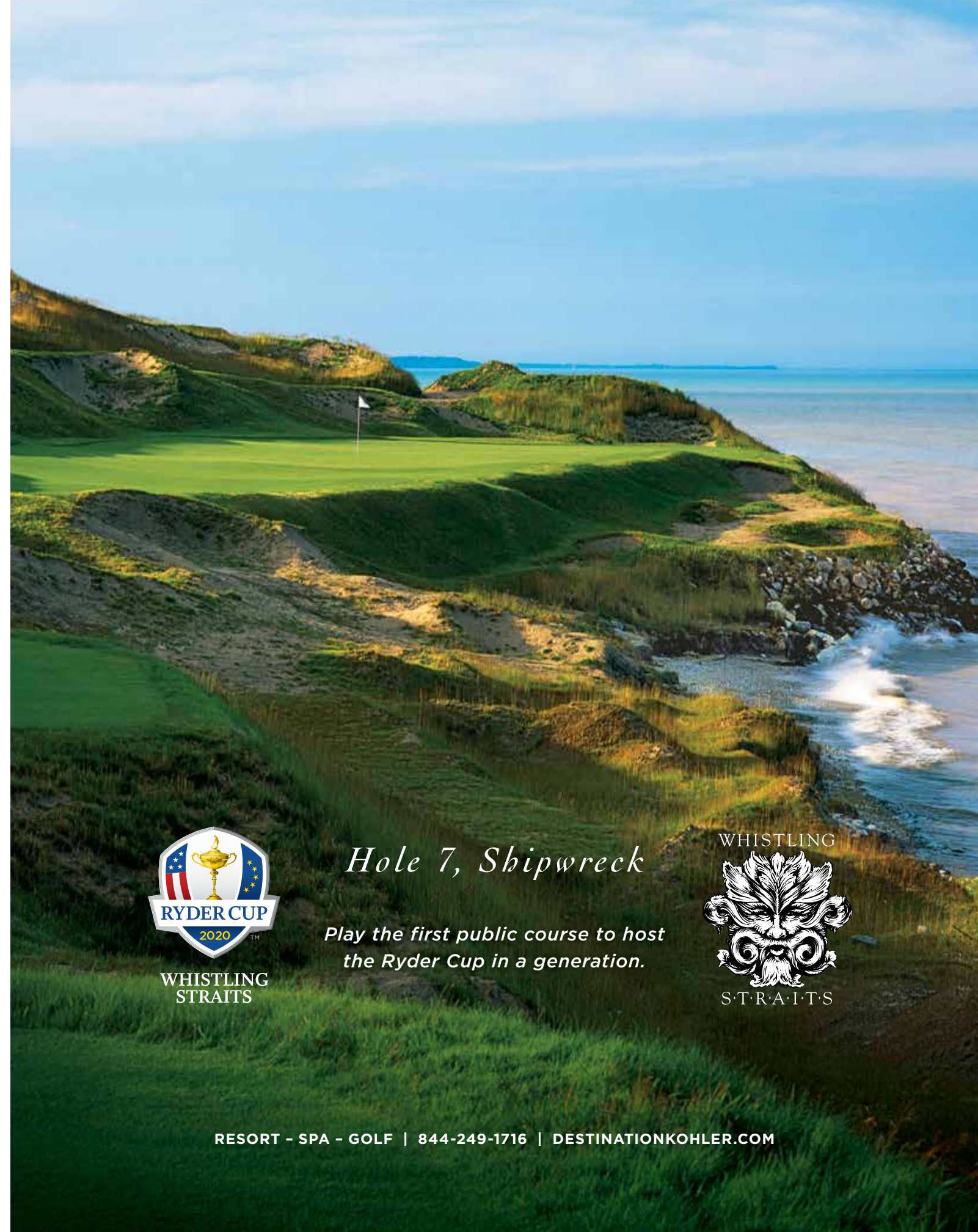
60: Gold Country

The 49ers struck gold in the Sierra foothills back in 1849. You will too when you visit this charming area nowadays.



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The 90-year-old relationship between California and the USGA started when Pebble Beach hosted the 1929 U.S. Amateur. Now it's about to get a lot more serious, with four U.S. Opens over the next nine years being hosted in the Golden State, including two stops in Southern California.



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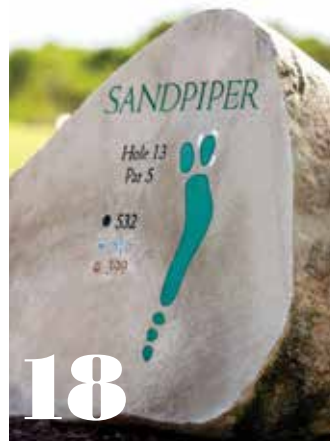
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ON THE TEE



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No. 13 at Sandpiper GC in Goleta is California golf at its oceanside best. It's also one heck of a hole.

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Fess Parker Winery & Vineyard produces some of the Santa Ynez Valley's best wines ... and some fun childhood memories.

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Lakeside GC is getting ready to host the 120th SCGA Amateur Championship in July. It'll likely be the first time many participants have played this iconic club with a star-studded history.

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Jentry Barton shares a core activation exercise using an exercise ball.



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90: 19th Hole

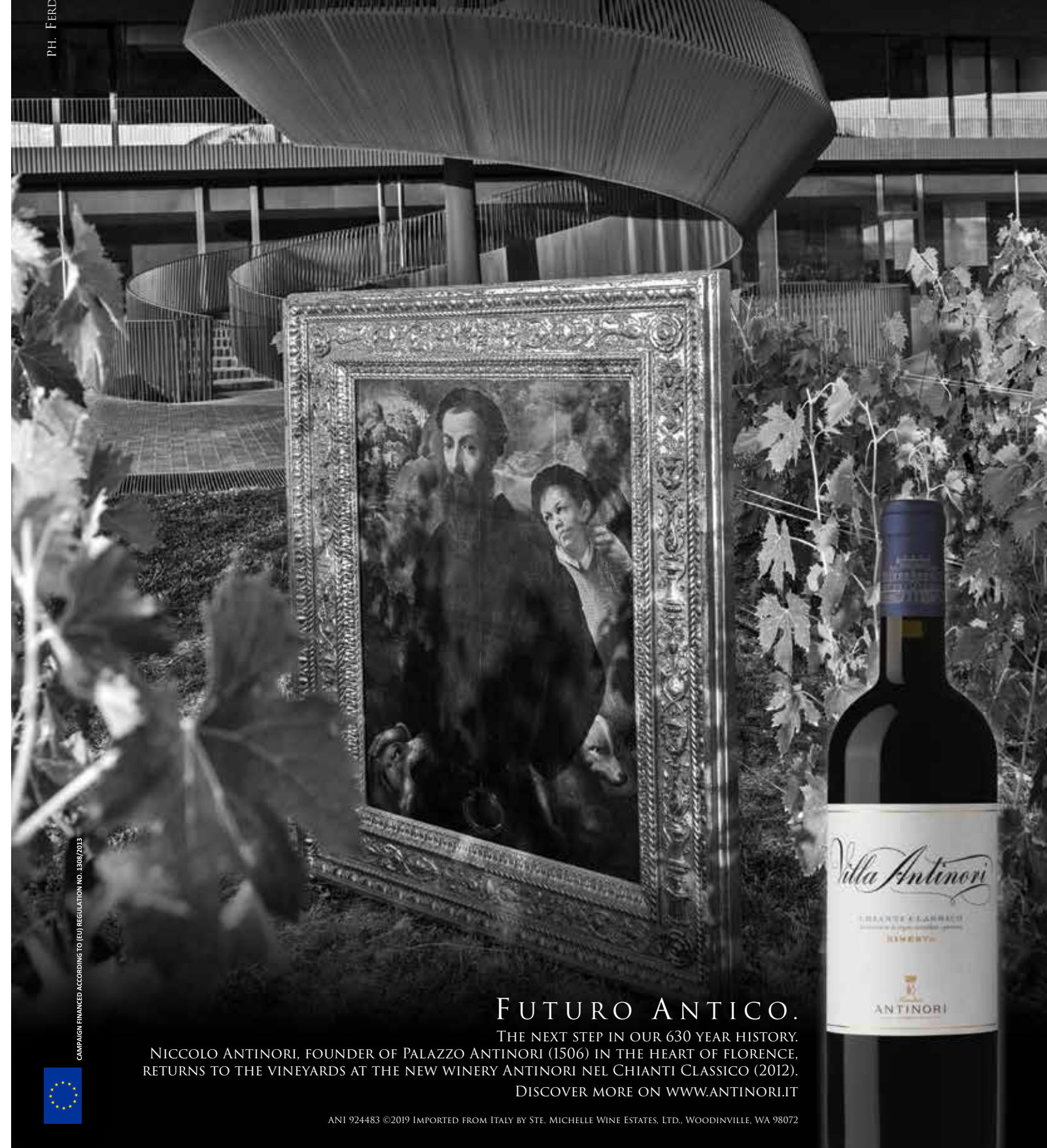
A visit to Ernie's at PGA West reveals serious golfers enjoying seriously delicious food and drink.

94: Around the Southland

SoCal ladies at the Augusta National Women's Amateur, SCGA Junior Golf Foundation upcoming events and the SCGA Rules Crew is back!

100: The Podium

The PGA TOUR needed to make a bolder statement regarding the Saudi International this past February. They didn't.



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ON THE TEE

The Read | State of the Game | First Cut | Whistle | Equipment | Classic Course

RECOMMENDED READING

The Evolution of Course Design

IF YOU'RE A GOLF ARCHITECTURE FAN, THIS ONE'S FOR YOU

By Keith Cutten
(cuttengolf.com, \$68)

Golf course architects are magicians, aren't they? Their ability to conjure up 18 holes out of thin air always amazes me. Argue all you want about the quality of those finished products — what's not debatable is the skill and passion of the very best architects in the field.

In *The Evolution of Course Design*, architect Keith Cutten admirably displays a deep appreciation for the history of his craft. Based in Ontario, Canada, Cutten uses a chronological timeline from the early 19th century to modern day as a foundation to examine the industry's development by decade. Multiple eras, with their own distinctive design styles and trends, are described artfully, if briefly. From Allan Robertson's impactful

widening of fairways on the Old Course at St Andrews around 1850, to David McLay-Kidd's use of massive hole corridors on Sand Valley's Mammoth Course in Wisconsin just last year, Cutten highlights how numerous tricks of the trade have come full circle.

This is not an instructional guide on designing a course. While there are many original routing plans and mesmerizing hole images shown throughout the 368 pages, Cutten does not dig deep in the dirt to find the secrets underneath the most admired layouts. Rather, he provides a broad but illuminating journey through the history of golf course architecture, one that rightly includes a chapter on the notable efforts made by women, including Marion Hollins, Molly Gourlay and Alice Dye.

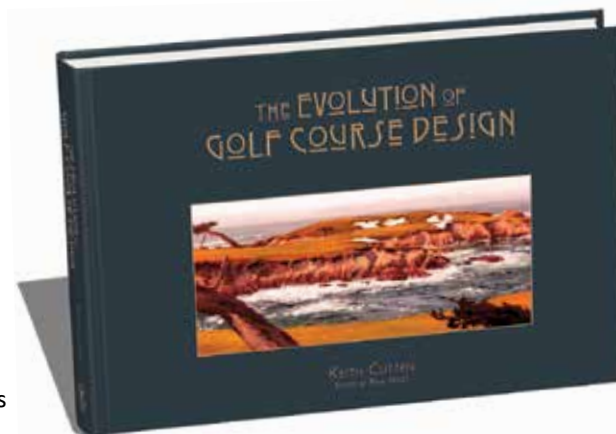
The second half of the book is a Who's Who of the golf course architecture world. First are mini-biographies of more than 50 designers, from the famous forefathers (Old Tom Morris, Alister MacKenzie, James Braid, etc.) to the modern crop of minimalists (Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw, Tom Doak, Gil Hanse, etc.). Then come profiles of 12 golf-related authors (Southern California's own Geoff Shackelford, among others), plus info on five men Cutten deems golf course visionaries, including Mike Keiser of Bandon Dunes fame.

The book ends with a fitting quote from Harry Colt, perhaps best known for designing Swinley Forest and Sunningdale's New Course in his native England, about the motivation shared by course architects through the decades. "An architect's

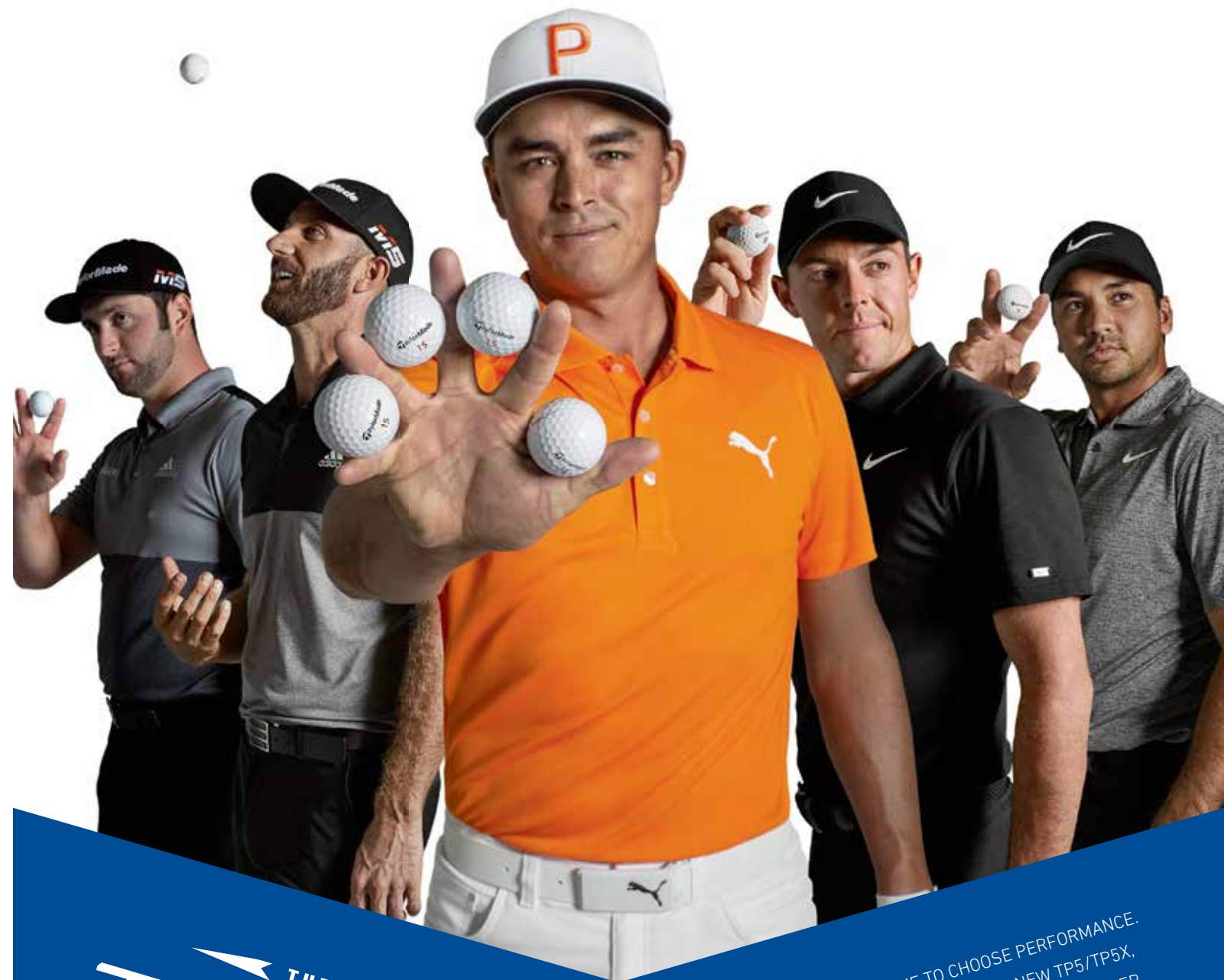
From Allan Robertson's impactful widening of fairways on the Old Course at St Andrews around 1850, to David McLay-Kidd's use of massive hole corridors on Sand Valley's Mammoth Course in Wisconsin just last year, Cutten highlights how numerous tricks of the trade have come full circle.

earnest hope is, without doubt, that his courses will have the necessary vitality to resist possibly adverse criticism, and will endure as a lasting record of his craft and of his love for his work."

I'm sure Cutten shares that hope for this book. With it, he has crafted a valuable resource for any golf course architecture aficionado. And a superb starting point for anyone who may wish to become one. — **Tom Mackin**



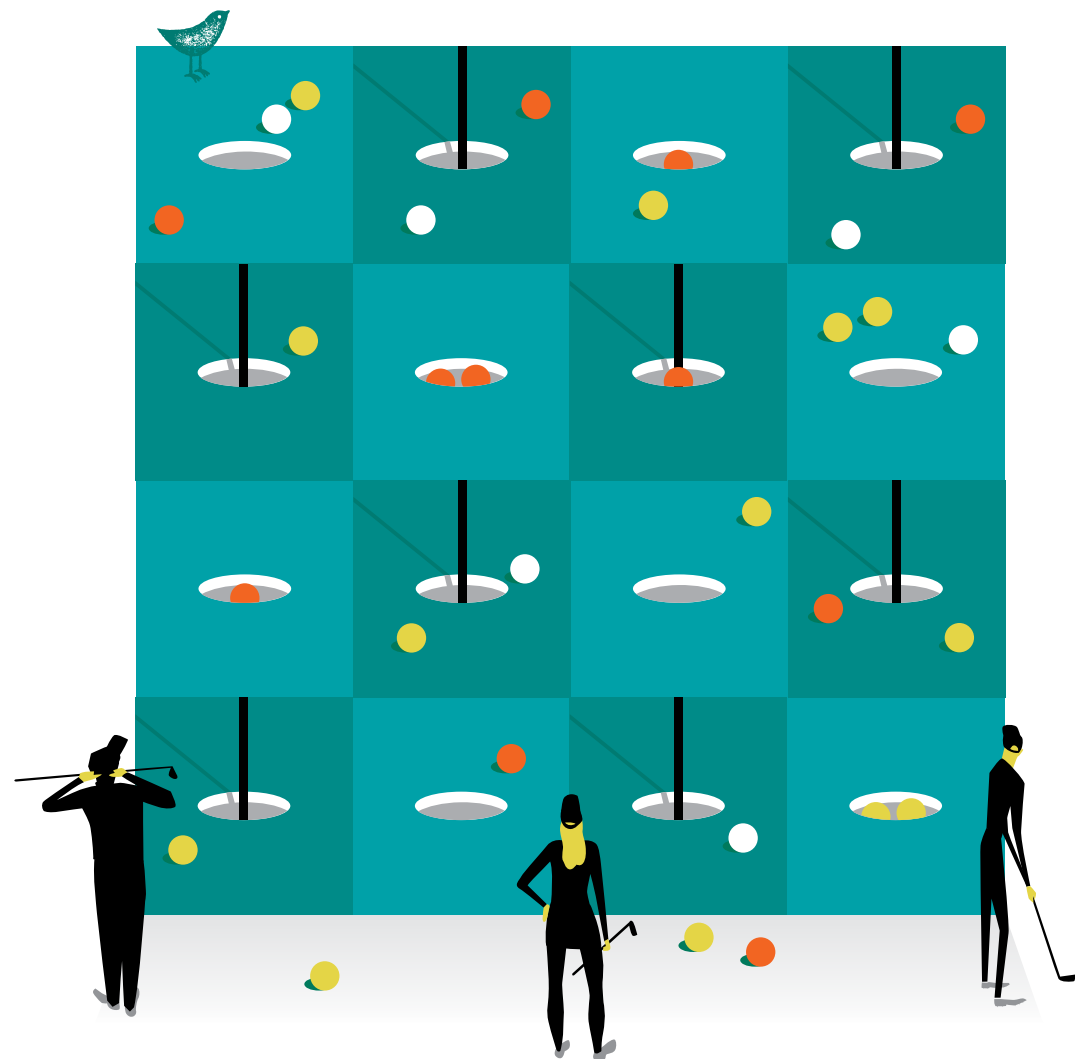
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STATE OF THE GAME

THE GREAT DEBATE

IN OR OUT, THAT IS THE QUESTION

By Gary Van Sickle

Golf has a hot new discussion topic, and in a major upset, it has nothing to do with Tiger Woods. The Great Debate centers on this simple question: In or out?

The newest trend on the PGA TOUR is putting with the flagstick in. That didn't used to be an option. It was formerly a 2-stroke penalty if a golfer's ball struck the flagstick after being played from the putting surface. That penalty was eliminated this year, one of a number of significant revisions by the USGA and The R&A to modernize golf's rules, simplify the game and speed it up.

Now that it's legal to putt with the flagstick in, you have to regularly ask your playing partners, "In or out?" I prefer to say, borrowing the title of a revived game show, "Deal or no deal?" Answering "Deal," means leave the pin in. Answering "No deal," means no flagstick, pull it out.

So which side of the issue are you on? In or out? Deal or no deal?

The pros are divided. Bryson DeChambeau, a Southern Methodist University alum who won four times in 2018 and played on the U.S. Ryder Cup team, is known for his detailed scientific approach to golf. DeChambeau said last year he planned to leave the flag in most of the time when putting. His comments then were met with skepticism, sometimes bordering on That's-Bryson-being-Bryson ridicule.

A few months into this year, no one is laughing. DeChambeau is leading an army of copycats following his example. You can't watch 30 minutes of televised golf without



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“THE RESULTS WERE CONCLUSIVE,” PELZ SAID. “YOU WILL HOLE A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF PUTTS WHEN YOU LEAVE THE FLAGSTICK IN.”

seeing a flagstick-in putt, sometimes even on putts from six to eight feet.

Leaving the flag in is definitely a plus for TV viewers, who often had difficulty telling exactly where the cup was before. When pros leave the flagstick in, the target is clear.

The Great Debate still rages among TOUR players, TV analysts and fans. Many golf traditionalists don't like the look. Tiger Woods said he's had a tough time getting over "the mental hurdle" of putting with the stick in, so he doesn't do it.

Justin Thomas can't pull the trigger on the new putting option, either. "If I have an eight-footer to win a golf tournament, I can't take myself seriously if I keep the flagstick in," he said. "If I have a putt I'm trying to make, that thing's coming out."

Masters champion Patrick Reed said flat-out, no, not ever. "I don't know how many times I've putted on the practice green with the flag in and it's like there's a shield around the hole," Reed said. "It never goes in."

Short-game expert Dave Pelz would probably enjoy debating with Reed. Pelz conducted a thorough test in 1990 for *GOLF Magazine* on how balls reacted to hitting flagsticks. Pelz used a putting device that rolled two-foot putts at different speeds, laser-aimed at different parts of the pin and on a variety of slopes — flat, uphill and downhill.

"The results were conclusive," Pelz said. "You will hole a higher percentage of putts when you leave the flagstick in. The reason is that a significant amount of energy is lost from a putt's speed when the ball hits a fiberglass flagstick. The speed-loss enables gravity to pull the slower-moving ball into the hole more often. Even though balls have changed since my testing, holes and flagsticks have not."

Pelz is the preeminent expert on chipping and putting. Would I argue with him? I'll quote Reed and say, no, not ever.

As more TOUR players opt to leave the flagstick in, this new rule is forcing players to make a decision on each putt. That brings



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It also means that it's only a matter of time before some player wins or loses an important tournament on the 18th green or in a playoff after deciding to leave the flagstick in while putting.

Imagine if the flagstick-in rule had been in place for the 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines. What if Woods left the flag in on that must-make putt at the 72nd hole, hit it dead center and ... it clanged off the stick. We'd still be second-guessing Woods.

The closest we've come to anything like that was the 1960 Masters Tournament. While hitting the flagstick with a shot played from the putting surface was first declared illegal in 1908 and became a 2-shot penalty, the rule was waived in 1956, then curiously reinstated in 1968.

So it was legal in 1960 when Arnold Palmer, who trailed Ken Venturi by 1 shot in the Masters' final round, left the flagstick in the cup for his 40-foot uphill birdie putt at the par-3 16th. The putt was headed in but shockingly glanced off the stick and ended up 18 inches away.

It looked as if Palmer's decision to leave the flagstick in might cost him the Masters.

[Palmer's putt at 16 can be seen in the classic archive video on masters.com.] There was a happy ending for Palmer, however. He coaxed in a 20-footer for birdie at 17, notably leaving the flagstick out, then holed a five-footer for birdie at 18 to edge Venturi and win the Masters.

DeChambeau believes Pelz is correct that leaving the flagstick in is an advantage. It will be interesting to see how many more players come around to that way of thinking.

If leaving the flag in proves to be an advantage, how long before a major championship such as the Masters starts

using flagsticks made of Flubber (the fictional rubber of Disney movie fame) or something less conducive to allowing putts to drop?

So what should you do, fellow golfer?

There are two good reasons to leave the flag in while putting. One is Pelz. I believe in him, but I also experimented with leaving the pin in all the time for several rounds last fall in Pittsburgh. I didn't have any putts kicked out by the flagstick. The biggest thing I learned was depressing — my first putts don't hit the hole all that often, so it's usually irrelevant where the flagstick is.

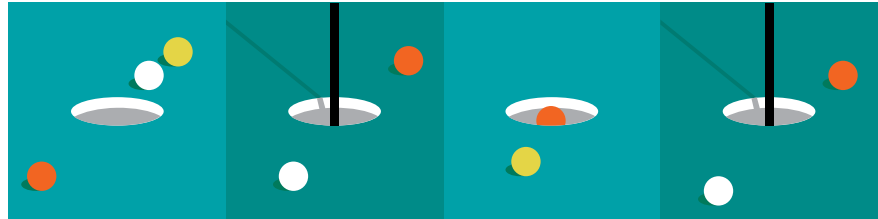
I also experimented with three-foot putts. You'll be surprised how hard you have to hit a ball to get it to carom off the stick and not drop. It's a convincing endorsement for leaving the flag in.

The other reason to leave the pin in is speed. Bill Yates, a late California golf official known as the Pace of Play Guru, did extensive observations of amateur golfers. He estimated that a foursome of amateurs could save 40 seconds on each green if they left the flagstick in for all putts. Do the math — that's 12 minutes per round.

Of course, that assumes everyone in a foursome is willing to putt with the flag in. Otherwise, you may pull the pin and put it back in a couple of times. Can we get four people in America to agree on anything? The day I came up with "Deal or no deal," we had one holdout who wouldn't putt with the flagstick in. I kept asking, "Deal or no deal?" even though I knew his answer because I was hoping to wear him down. It didn't work. Can't we all just get along?

Does anybody out there want to make more putts AND finish their round 12 minutes sooner?

Yeah, I thought so. The USGA got this rule right. And the correct answer to the Great Debate is: In. Pass it on. ■



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1 GREEN CIRCLE
There's never much shame in playing it safe. If you're looking to enjoy a relaxing stroll and take in the wonderful views rather than mutter obscenities after a wayward hero shot ends up on the beach, simply take out a 9-iron and find the farthest left portion of the fairway. From there, the green opens nicely for another short-iron third shot and hopefully a good look at birdie.

2 BLUE SQUARE
Your second option, highly recommended, is to take a long-iron or fairway metal and aim at the left side of the green. The beauty of this sightline is that the worst-case scenario is a pulled shot left, which will leave you a perfect angle from 60–80 yards into a receptive green sloping front to back. Best case scenario is a butter cut that sits softly on the left portion of the green. If only it were that easy.

3 BLACK DIAMOND
If there's never been a shot that scares you, or perhaps your name is Roy McAvoy, this is the play. Take out that 3-wood and give it a rip. Ideally, you play a high fade to get your shot to stay on the putting surface. Otherwise, you may need to hit the flagstick to get your ball to stop on this sliver of a green. Don't let the barranca, or the bunker, or the deep rough behind the green hold you back.

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WHISTLE WHILE
YOU WORK

THERE GOES JOHNNY

AS THE LEGEND
DEPARTS, PAUL
AZINGER STEPS IN

By **George Fuller**

It was a bittersweet moment in February when Johnny Miller concluded his 29-year career as an NBC Golf analyst at the Waste Management Phoenix Open. Far more than an “Elvis has left the building” moment, it was a chance for all of us to reflect on and appreciate the brilliant broadcaster he had become.

His colleagues gave emotional tributes, social media sang his praises, and a handful of players thanked him on video for his mentoring, despite its unorthodox manner, which mixed on-air criticism with in-person coaching.

“Sometimes a father to his son says some things that sound a little tough, but it’s for the right reasons,” Miller remarked. “I feel like I almost look over these young guys and want them to step it up and move up a notch. Sometimes it takes some commentary to get them to check things out.”

He had become a broadcast legend.

But Miller’s style wasn’t always so appreciated. There were times when his honesty rubbed some players the wrong way. And in 2012, during and after the U.S. Open at The Olympic Club, Miller was heavily criticized by players, fans and the media alike for some of his commentary. “How does Johnny Miller have a job?” asked a *Golf Digest* story after the tournament.

Stepping into the broadcast booth is not always an easy transition for former players. Rare is the Tony Romo or Nick Faldo, both of whom seemed to quickly mesh insight with charm to deliver us a better viewing experience.

More commonly we see former players confusing ego for knowledge, and we’re scrambling for the mute button before the predictable commentary starts about what they might have done during their playing days in a particular situation.

Miller’s are big shoes to fill, and NBC has brought in another sometimes-caustic personality, Paul Azinger, to replace him. Azinger is a known entity in golf broadcasting, moving over to NBC after 14 years at ABC/ESPN and Fox. He, too, is one of those guys with strong opinions and a large ego who has been known to rub viewers and players the wrong way.

“In fairness, it took Johnny a lot of years to get it right,” I told a friend as I was thinking

Stepping into the broadcast booth is not always an easy transition for former players. Rare is the Tony Romo or Nick Faldo, both of whom seemed to quickly mesh insight with charm to deliver us a better viewing experience.

OK, so he proclaimed Graeme McDowell “a driving genius,” just before McDowell hit a tee shot into the trees. We all miss one once in a while.

In recent years, though, Miller hit the sweet spot almost every time. His trademark “tell it like I see it” approach remained unsullied, but somehow he delivered his punches in a manner that was welcomed, particularly by the younger players for whom he was more of an icon than a contemporary.

about writing this column. “Maybe Azinger will grow into the role too.”

“There’s always hope,” my friend replied sort of sarcastically. I imagined him searching the pillows on his couch for the mute button on the remote control.

“Continue to tell it like it is,” was the message Miller is said to have relayed to Azinger when he was announced as Miller’s replacement.

My message: “Tell it like Johnny did at his very best.” ■

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TRENDS

Farming the Back Nine

CREATIVE USES FOR FORMER GOLF LAND

By George Fuller



AT TIMBERS KAUAI, FARMER CODY TENDS ORGANIC FRUITS AND VEGGIES ON FORMER GOLF LAND.

In 1988, Jack Nicklaus designed two golf courses for developer Chris Hemmeter on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. The Kiele Course at Kauai Lagoons, with several holes adjacent to the Pacific Ocean, was the acknowledged superior of the two, but the Lagoons Course offered a lower-key round and was a good venue for beginning players, corporate tournaments and so forth.

Today, the Kiele Course has been renamed the Ocean Course at Hokuala, and remains one of the best layouts in Hawaii. But on the Lagoons Course land, things have changed. Farmer Cody is now growing organic salad greens, eggplants, mangoes and other fruits and vegetables on a couple of the former holes; walkers and runners traverse the former cart paths, enjoying the island's unique tropical environment; and stilts, Koloa ducks and several other species of native birds are nesting undisturbed around an overgrown lake.

Adjacent to the recently debuted Timbers Kauai resort, the switch from golf to alternative land uses makes perfect sense here. Much of the food grown on the former golf holes is used in the resort's restaurants, farm tours are popular with guests as well as with local schoolchildren, and the bird sanctuary and walking paths are well utilized by guests who want to experience an authentic landscape.

These alternate uses of former golf land reflect a growing awareness on the part of both resort and residential developers that golf is not the “build-it-and-they-will-come” lure it once was.

But what is happening with the golf courses at Timbers Kauai is not an isolated occurrence. In fact, it's not even the only example of golf changes on Kauai. On the island's North Shore at Princeville Makai, a 27-hole facility has been transformed into one outstanding 18-hole traditional championship course, and the third nine now features a championship disc course,

with traditional golfers and disc golfers alternating tee times.

On the island of Lanai, the former upcountry Experience at Koele golf course is now closed and the land is being repurposed with an art/sculpture walking park planned for the lower holes, while the holes higher on the mountain will be used for a zip-coaster and a rope course. (Down at the coast, the Manele GC, perched on tall sea cliffs above the ocean, remains open for visitor play.)

Back on the continent, in Palm Springs, a new residential community called Miralon is moving forward with plans to repurpose an 18-hole course — part of a recession-failed development called Avalon that was planned for the site — into olive groves, walking paths, community gardens and even dog runs.

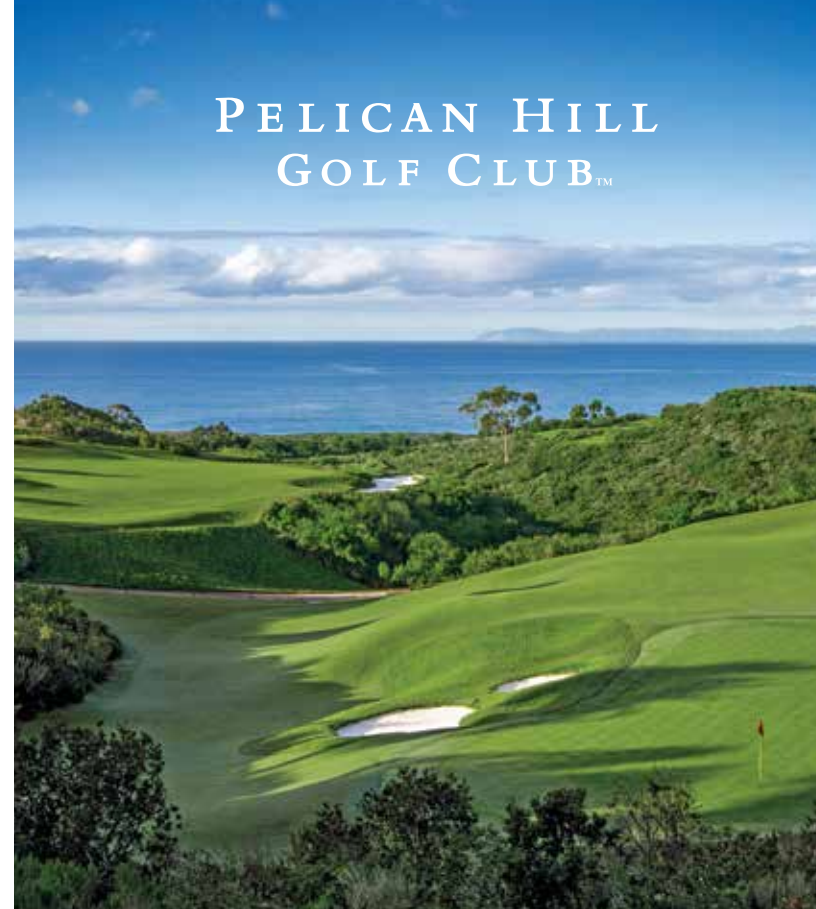
These new uses of former golf land reflect a growing awareness on the part of both resort and residential developers that golf is not the “build-it-and-they-will-come” lure it once was. And in an area like Palm Springs, where golf courses are plentiful, appealing to a broader base of consumers is economically sensible.

It also reflects an ongoing market correction from the overbuilding boom of the late 1980s and '90s, when a course a day for the foreseeable future was opening somewhere in the U.S. Nowadays, while

the number of golfers seems to be holding steady in the 26–27 million range, we're still seeing more courses close annually than open.

But that's showbiz. A trend to do something more creative with former golf course acreage than simply cram more McHouses on the land? That's to be applauded. ■

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For those of us of a certain age, the name Fess Parker (1924–2010) likely conjures deep-seated childhood memories of America’s frontier days ... at least as they were portrayed on 1950s and ‘60s television. Parker — born Fess E. Parker, Jr. in Ft. Worth, Texas — played legendary frontiersmen Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone, both roles that defined for our young minds what it was to be a man in America. You had to be strong, resourceful, brave ... you had to stand up for what you believed, even if it meant bending the rules a bit in the process. If you had a coonskin cap, so much the better.

Parker quit showbiz in 1974 at the age of 48. In 1987, he purchased the 714-acre Foxen Canyon Ranch in the Santa Ynez Valley, just north of Santa Barbara, with the dream of running a few head of cattle, planting some acreage in wine grapes and creating a family legacy. Thirty years later, with his son Eli and daughter Ashley still actively involved — and with Ashley’s husband, Tim Snider, the winery’s president — that dream has not only come true at Fess Parker Winery & Vineyard, but it’s thriving.

“Now the third generation has entered the business,” Snider says. “Our son and daughter have recently joined the company. That was one of Fess’ biggest aspirations for the company ... a place for multiple generations to come and participate. He’d be very proud.”

The grapes they grow and the wines they make at Fess Parker split between Burgundian varietals such as Pinot Noir

and Chardonnay — both of which benefit from the colder and foggy maritime climate nearer the Pacific — and Rhône-style varietals further inland such as Syrah, Viognier and Riesling.

“What’s surprising to many people when they visit is the diversity of what we produce,” Snider says. “Our region runs perpendicular to the coastline, which creates funnels of air running off the ocean and straight up our valleys. The microclimates allow dramatic changes in the types of wines and varietals we can produce. That’s unique to the Santa Barbara area. You’ll find our wines are fresh, balanced, with wonderful fruit flavors and lots of character.”

Snider, an enthusiastic golfer and SCGA member, says: “I have a couple favorite courses around here. It’s hard to beat Sandpiper. I’ve taken many friends and business colleagues there and they’re thrilled to find a mini Pebble Beach overlooking the ocean in Santa Barbara. Rancho San Marcos is a bit closer to wine country. It’s framed by the hills with a river running through it ... a great course.”

Fess apparently was not much of a golfer. “But when he got his 6’6” frame into it, the ball would go a long way,” Snider says. “We didn’t always know which way it was going, but it was impressive.”

Impressive is a perfect word to describe the winery, inn and family empire Fess Parker created in the Santa Ynez Valley. It’s a trip well worth making and, since I know you’re wondering, yes, you can get a coonskin cap in the gift shop.

— **George Fuller**



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IF ONLY Chillin' With Dylan

By **David Weiss**

The fantasy Q&A below is extrapolated from a brief encounter with Bob Dylan at the legendary Weddington Golf & Tennis driving range in Studio City a few years back (Bob Hope, Jim Brown and Jack Nicholson also used to fritter away their idle hours there).

I can't say Bob was thrilled to be recognized under his hoodie-over-a-golf-cap disguise, but I addressed him nonetheless, finding him in no mood to discuss what wrenches he had in his bag, or whether Tiger would ever win another major. Nope, he barely withstood even a few of my inane ministrations, then shuffled off to a black, windowless van and vanished into the smoggy afternoon.

With apologies to The Man who needs no introduction, herewith is how things might have gone had I cajoled him into the 19th hole for a cold pint of ale and a wee chat. Harp music please, Maestro!

WEISS: Bob, now that you've taken up golf, I wonder if you still stand by your trademark maxim that "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows." That may work well as allegory or metaphor, but certainly a quick look at *Weather.com* before booking a tee time might prove prudent, would it not?

DYLAN: Listen up, Bones, I don't need to be schooled on the finer points of meteorology! I'm the guy who wrote "Blowin' in the Wind," ain't I? And trust me, I know how to club down when an angry nor'easter whirls in like a torrid bottle blonde at a Tucumcari poker parlor, if you follow my drift?

I do indeed, and stand corrected, sir. The Scottish ground game is not unfamiliar to you apparently! Um, do you have a repertoire of swing thoughts that you file through before every shot? In other words, are you a mechanics-oriented player, or do you lean more toward feel and instinct?

Holy Ben Hogan, man — you really don't pay attention to what I sing, do you? Who have you been digging all these years, Wayne Newton? When I wrote "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" it's obvious I was referring to the mental game of golf! Like Allen Ginsberg

used to say — quoting from the Bhagavad Gita — "First idea, best idea." To me the very phrase "swing thought" is an oxymoron.

Understood, sir — please have a slug of that lovely Guinness and calm down! Now I know you don't go in for awards and accolades, but, tell me honestly, would you rather have that gleaming Nobel Prize in Literature or get fitted for a natty green sports jacket at Augusta National?

Hey, you're not going to squeeze in a "Masters of War" pun here, are you? 'Cause if you do, I'm outta here! I didn't write these enduring anthems to have some smart-aleck golf writer comb my songs for topical references. If so, it's all over now, baby blue.

Actually, a quick click of the old Google reveals you to have invoked the G-word several times in your work. In the song "I Shall Be Free No. 10," you wrote the following: "I'm gonna ride into Omaha on a horse / Out to the country club and the golf course / Carry the New York Times, shoot a few holes, blow their minds." Great stuff, Bob — except for the fact that nobody shoots a game of golf, per se.

Ever heard of poetic license, Wordsworth? Listen, I might blow off a little steam hitting a bucket of balls now and then, but my core audience isn't the polo shirt and pony crowd. My fans don't know the difference between a birdie and a bogey, and certainly prefer Henry Miller to Johnny Miller. P.S., 'Zinger will never fill his FootJoys, in my humble opinion. Johnny spoke truth to power like a real man ought to.

Nice finish there, Jokerman. If the music thing doesn't work out, you might think of doing stand-up.

Hey, don't criticize what you can't understand, Einstein. The tee times, they are a-changin'. ■



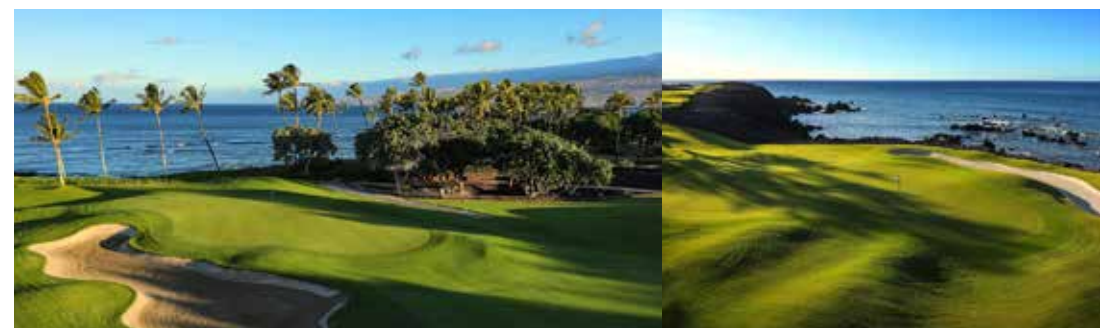
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FIRST CUT

Workin' 9 to 5

AIN'T NO WAY TO MAKE A GOLF SWING

By **Madison Lomas**

Recently I was invited to play at the Hugel-Air Premia L.A. Open Media Day at Wilshire CC, and I haven't had such mixed emotions in a long time.

Why wouldn't I want to show off my Division I golf skills to my co-workers on a bucket-list track? Unfortunately, once I graduated from college and started working full-time, I had played golf maybe five times a year and my clubs literally had dust on them. I started thinking, "There's no way I'll even make it a full 18 holes, let alone have a score to brag about in the office." This was the first organized golf event on my calendar in more than two years.

It was in this moment that I understood the intimidation golfers feel when they are invited to play a round with colleagues and executives. Just like at any work function, you want to make a good impression. It was hard to think that was possible if I was shanking it all over Los Angeles. After I stopped having nightmares of being Roy

and nervously setting up on the first tee. I didn't think it was enough.

Growing up, I had heard the phrase "Beware the sick golfer." When your sinuses are congested and you're covered in mucus, the ups-and-downs for par are not as much of a concern. I shot the lowest round of my life while coughing my lungs out at Morro Bay GC once. I wasn't sick this time around, but I thought if I lowered my expectations like I do when I'm sick, instead of trying to break the course record, I'd at least have a respectable round. So, I gave myself a few simple guidelines:

1. With the putter, speed over alignment
2. Pick a yardage and swing away
3. Tempo and ball position

This made for a fun round of golf where I was able to socialize with my playing partners and enjoy the day without too much stress.

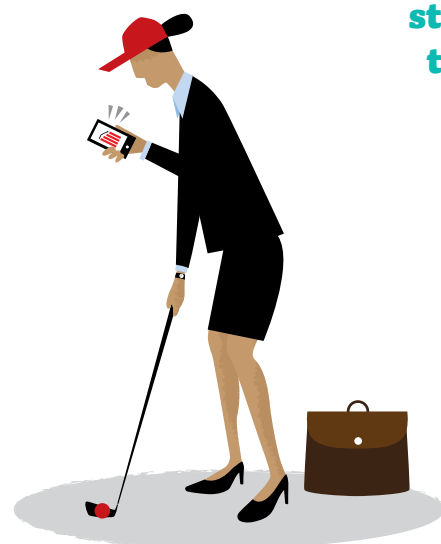
"Unfortunately, once I graduated from college and started working full-time, I had played golf maybe five times a year and my clubs literally had dust on them."

"Tin Cup" McAvoy on the driving range at the U.S. Open, I started thinking logically about what would help me enjoy the day and get something out of it as well.

As I've focused on my career, my relationship with golf and I have had somewhat of a falling out, so I was trying to get to the driving range before heading to Wilshire. But, as much as I wanted to practice and prepare for the "big day," life happened. The only prep I had was on the putting green between tying my golf shoes

The whole objective of these types of golf outings is for people to network and have fun. It didn't matter how terrible or incredible I was out there. The hardcore duck-hook drive I had on No. 18 that nearly flew into the parking lot didn't keep me from exchanging information and ideas with the new connections I made throughout the day.

The only person who judged that shot was me ... well, at least to my knowledge, anyway. ■



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More Than a Game

FOR COBRA PUMA GOLF, RELAXING TOGETHER IS PART OF THE GAME

By **Madison Lomas**

Rickie. Bryson. Lexi. Cobra Puma Golf boasts some pretty hip names on tour, so why would their golf club in Carlsbad be any different? When a casual day entails hitting the links after work to try out some new Cobra prototypes, it's safe to say the Cobra Puma GC is pretty "cool."

"We are a golf company that is focused on making cool stuff that works and making the game more fun for everyone," said Ben Neal, Cobra Puma's research and development testing technician and president of Cobra Puma GC. "We like to remind ourselves that we get to make toys for adults."

Ten years ago, they decided to highlight that trend internally by creating a golf club specifically for staff.

"We wanted to create an environment for everyone, no matter what skill level, giving them a chance to go out and play golf using the latest and greatest equipment offered," Neal said.

Cobra Puma GC prefers local tracks around San Diego, but that's not much of a sacrifice when your home courses are places like Torrey Pines and The Crossings at Carlsbad. At the end of the day, it's more about the competition and the opportunity for the staff at Cobra Puma to spend time together out on the links, to contrast the weekly conference room meetings.

"The neat thing about this club is that

we have a great mix of men and women, and there are people from customer service all the way up to top executives as members," Neal said.

The club championship is always a crowd favorite. It's held every summer and always has a full field of players because, well, who wouldn't want to boast about the desirable championship title around the water cooler?

"It's fun to get together, share stories and make memories, but also compete in a pressure-packed golf tournament," Neal said. "In the end, we all are trying to achieve that status and coveted prize known around the office as the 'Battle for the Belts' Champion."

Because these 50 club members work in the golf industry, it's safe to say they love the game. But it's being a part of the Cobra Puma GC that reminds them why.

"Whether it's breaking a milestone score, pulling off a difficult shot or limiting

your number of putts, there's always a way to find a small victory in a round of golf," Neal said.

According to Neal, a dream day for the club would be to play as many holes as the sun will let them at a local seaside resort and laugh the night away together at the 19th hole. Neal and his compatriots feel a certain relaxed way about the game, despite the admiration for competition, and they hope that perception of the game can be shared across all golfers.

"It's more than a game," Neal said. "It's a stable employer, it's entertainment and it's recreation. It is not an elitist sport. There are lots of \$20 golf courses where carpenters, plumbers, teachers, doctors and lawyers all play." ■

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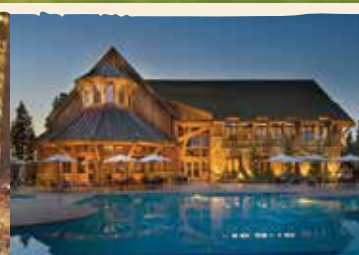


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HOLLYWOOD STAR

LAKESIDE GOLF CLUB SET TO HOST SCGA AM

By Joe Passov

BA-DA-BING: (LEFT TO RIGHT) HEAD PROFESSIONAL MACDONALD SMITH WITH BING CROSBY AND WALTER HAGEN. CROSBY WON FIVE CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS IN HIS DAY.



GREAT TIMES AND UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS have defined Lakeside GC since its inception. As the 95-year-old Toluca Lake landmark readies itself to host the 120th SCGA Amateur Championship (July 11–14), an anecdote from its opening day, November 14, 1924, perfectly illuminates the spirit of the club.

As writer D. Scott Chisholm described it at the time, “The eighteenth green is located near to the menagerie where the wild animals used in Universal Pictures are housed or caged. It was near feeding time when George Von Elm went up to make a twenty-foot putt. Just at that very moment one huge African lion realized he was hungry and let out the most terrific roar imaginable. That started a chorus in which more lions, tigers, elephants, hyenas, giraffes and even mules joined. It was the most awful conglomeration of hideous noises ever heard thereabouts. Of course Von Elm missed his putt but greatly enjoyed the unusual incident.”

Enjoyment. Camaraderie. Adventure. Fun. Each has been paramount at Lakeside from the start. Bing Crosby, who joined in 1930 and would win five club championships, said of his favorite stomping grounds: “This is no ordinary golf club. Raillery, gags, ribs, frame-ups, put-ons and put-downs are incessant, and often hilarious — and no one is immune.”

The A-list of Hollywood celebrity members was long then, and remains so today. Still, no one waved the Lakeside flag more proudly than Bob Hope. Golf’s greatest ambassador joined in 1937 and made it his home club for the rest of his life. His stories of matches at Lakeside with the likes of Crosby, Ben Hogan and Humphrey Bogart, and of happy, later-in-life, nine-hole loops with wife Dolores continue to resonate today, threads that are indelibly woven into the fabric of the club.

Yet, so rich is Lakeside in characters and lore that the superb quality of its golf course has perhaps been overlooked. A recent renovation by architect Todd Eckenrode and his Origins Golf Design team and the hosting of Southern California’s most prestigious amateur event should help change that perception.

PHOTO BY EVAN SCHILLER

“ONE OF THE WORLD’S GREATEST”

The original architect, Max Behr, crafted a one-of-a-kind design, featuring man-made dunes on sandy soils along the urban Los Angeles River. Behr cleared wide fairways, allowing for multiple choices off the tee and an emphasis on angles into the large, mostly open greens, leading to a maximum variety of shot options. He draped a minimum of formal bunkers atop the layout, and those that he placed were strategic, rather than penal.

Behr eschewed the use of rough. Instead, he advanced the notion that the property’s bold contouring would supply the bulk of the challenge, precisely the ideology that Alister MacKenzie and Bobby Jones — two early Lakeside supporters — embraced when they later designed Augusta National. Handsome presentation, few lost balls, lots of fun.

One of history’s preeminent architects, MacKenzie was especially impressed with Lakeside. The man responsible for designing Cypress Point and Royal Melbourne, as well as co-designing Augusta National, gushed about Behr and Lakeside in his book, *The Spirit of St. Andrews*. “In Southern California, there are many good courses. By far the best of these is Max Behr’s course at Lakeside GC,” wrote MacKenzie. “It has been so admirably designed and constructed that it compares favorably to any inland course. The interest of the course is entirely due to the undulating character of the land and not due to the bunkers, which at many of the holes are non-existent ...

“It was originally a flattish orchard. Now the whole ground has been made undulating and the undulations have such a natural appearance that they have a close resemblance to linksland ... In a word, Lakeside is one of the world’s greatest courses.”

“IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, THERE ARE MANY GOOD COURSES. BY FAR THE BEST OF THESE IS MAX BEHR’S COURSE AT LAKESIDE GOLF CLUB,” WROTE MACKENZIE.



PHOTO BY EVAN SCHILLER

CHANGES AFOOT

Over the years, however, as with many classic courses, Lakeside’s maintenance practices and philosophies shifted. Rough sprouted and trees were planted to provide additional definition and challenge. Greens and fairways shrank significantly. Eventually, much of the character that Behr had brilliantly coaxed from the terrain disappeared. Fortunately, change was afoot.

Lakeside turned to a concerned group of members, who enlisted Eckenrode and his Origins Golf Design team to restore the course to its Golden Age glory. Aply assisted by club superintendent Robert Hertzling, and a host of talented builders, Eckenrode turned back the clock.

Former Lakeside, SCGA and SCGA Junior Golf Foundation president Jim Vernon, who first set foot on the property in 1962 (and who later served as president of the USGA),

articulated the intent of the project. “We knew we had to address the golf course infrastructure,” said Vernon. “The irrigation, drainage, bunkers, grasses — they all had to be redone. Once we started in on that, and saw the success, it became an easier sell to the membership to remove more and more trees. Not only did tree clearing enhance the health of the turf, but it led to restoring aspects of strategy and playability that had been lost from Behr’s original vision.”

Phase one of the renovation commenced in 2011. Fairways were carpeted in hybrid Bermuda, and approaches to the greens were opened and firmed up, reinstating the ground game as an option. Reducing water use helped the course play firmer and faster. Yanking out trees increased the sun and air circulation that not only improved turf quality, but also brought back handsome views that hadn’t been seen in decades.



Eckenrode’s phase two renovation project wrapped up in 2018, with the focus on restoring as much of Behr’s original creation as possible, while also adapting Behr’s design principles for modern play. Eckenrode, Hertzling and the design team utilized old aerial and ground photos to expand green perimeters to resemble their Golden Age versions, eliminated non-original bunkers, repositioned others and widened fairway corridors — at times by removing even more trees — to conjure up the width and subsequent accompanying strategic options that Behr originally furnished. As it was in the beginning, it’s all about the land.

“The terrain is the highlight of the course,” said Eckenrode. “We really strived to showcase it and have it influence play as it was intended. There are so many more opportunities now for the golfer to use the incredible contours that Behr built.”

Perhaps the most striking difference in the restored Lakeside layout is around the greens, most of which now feature closely mown turf that characterized the course in its infancy.

Hertzling illustrates the point emphatically: “When I arrived here nine years ago, every green was a circle surrounded by deep rough. You’d miss the

green, grab your 60-degree wedge and you knew there was no other option. Now, adding some short-cut around the greens, widening some hole locations, you don’t know what shot you’re going to play until you get up there. It’s options, playability, more fun for everybody.”

SWEET SURPRISES

There are at least a dozen candidates in the “most improved hole” category, a testament to the thoroughness and success of the renovation. Kevin Bailey, who started working at Lakeside in the bag room as a teenager and who is now at age 48 the head professional, identifies the 166-yard, par-3 sixth. “You used to hit a flop shot from two feet off the green. Today, with the bunkers reshaped, trees removed and the closely mown areas reestablished on some great contours, it’s so much better. They hit a home run.”

For its strategic shot values, Vernon favors one of the toughest holes, the 465-yard, par-4 fifth, an uphill dogleg-left, which sports a wildly rolling fairway; and also the 417-yard, par-4 14th, with its infinity green restored.

Peter Barsocchini, a member since 1980, vouches for the 450-yard, par-4 seventh,

IN THE HOUSE: LAKESIDE WAS LAUDED AS ONE OF THE BEST COURSES IN THE COUNTRY IN ITS EARLY YEARS, AND VIPS SUCH AS BOBBY JONES (BOTTOM) WERE FREQUENT GUESTS.

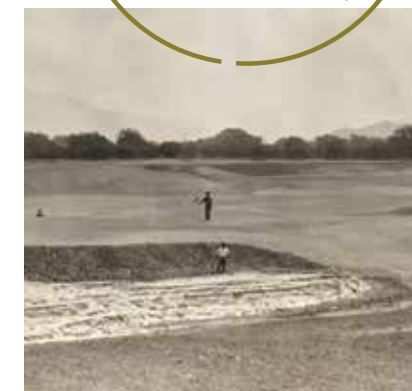




PHOTO BY EVAN SCHILLER

a dogleg-right that plays uphill into the prevailing wind and generally calls for a cut off the tee and a draw into the green.

Without question, however, the tiny, unique par-3 15th is the showstopper. A mere 90 yards or so and surrounded by sand in its original incarnation (as the sixth hole), it was lauded by MacKenzie. However, another green appeared in the 1960s, stretching the shot to 160 yards, and eventually the short green was rendered basically useless, half of its putting surface blocked by a 50-foot cedar tree.

The current version recaptures the magic. Eckenrode felled the tree, expanded the green by nearly three times its size, reintroduced “wing” hole locations to the sides, and a backstop in the middle, and surrounded the green with sand, as it was originally. As Eckenrode acknowledges, “It’s so difficult not to play directly at the hole when it’s under 100 yards! Therein lies the

danger, as it can be extremely challenging with certain hole locations and if the golfer chooses to play boldly for birdie.”

Toss in sweet surprises such as the drivable par-4, 302-yard 13th, with its superb “go-for-the-best-angle” or “go-for-the-green” risk/reward choice; or tall orders such as the 245-yard, reverse-Redan par-3 ninth, which is the consensus pick as toughest hole to par, and it’s clear that variety is king at Lakeside — in tandem with its amazing setting.

Barsocchini crystallizes the essence of Lakeside’s indelible sense of place. “When you stand on the seventh tee, your back to the Universal building, and you look up and say, ‘I’m in the middle of one of the most densely populated areas in the United States and all I can see is mountains and beautiful natural terrain’ — it’s pretty spectacular.”

Still, SCGA Amateur competitors can’t let themselves be distracted by aesthetics.

From the scorecard alone, Lakeside wouldn’t appear to intimidate. It checks in at 6,840 yards, short by modern standards, with a quirky 35-35 par sequencing. There are only two par-5s on the entire layout, the second and fourth holes, precisely like fabled Merion (East) in Philadelphia. Don’t be fooled, however. Short-siding yourself to the modestly sized greens will punch your ticket to a ride on the bogey train. Vernon predicts that the short-iron maestro, the player who controls his distances best, will likely emerge as champion.

In the late 1920s, legendary Walter Hagen labeled Lakeside the finest, most enjoyable golf test in the West. He added further, “Lakeside does not appear severe but when arranged for championship competition it is one of the most interesting and testing courses in America.”

Look for The Haig’s words to ring true this July. ■



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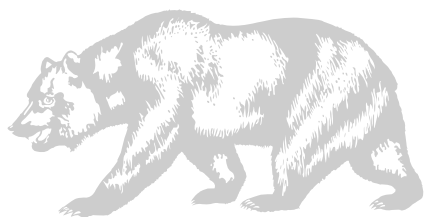
By **Tom Mackin**

THE 90-YEAR-OLD RELATIONSHIP between California and the USGA started when Pebble Beach hosted the 1929 U.S. Amateur. It's about to get a lot more serious. Four U.S. Opens will be played over the next nine years in the Golden State, including two stops in Southern California.

The remarkable run kicks off this June at Pebble Beach, followed by a return to Torrey Pines in 2021, first-time venue The Los Angeles Country Club (LACC) in 2023, and back again to Pebble Beach in 2027.

"To get to California with all of those magnificent golf courses, the history, the weather, and the West Coast from a television broadcast standpoint, it just works on so many fronts for us to be out there," said John Bodenhamer, the USGA's senior managing director of championships.





SPREADING THE U.S. OPEN around the country — 19 states have hosted it since 1895, with California hosting 12 times between 1948 and 2010 — is now balanced with other factors. “In the past I would say that’s been a pretty significant consideration trying to get to all parts of the country, but I think it’s really driven by the golf course first,” said Bodenhamer. “Even more so in recent years by the economics, the market, and other considerations. California knows how to handle big events; they have them all the time. Especially places like the Monterey Peninsula, San Diego and Los Angeles. They’re just good at it.”

“There are a lot of reasons why a West Coast U.S. Open is good for television and the USGA,” said LACC member and former SCGA President Peter James, who also served on the USGA’s executive committee. “You can have the afternoon on Saturday and Sunday extend into prime time and a lot more fans are able to see it. There are fewer weather issues as well. There may be some fog delays [at Pebble Beach and Torrey Pines], but that’s just part of being a coastal golf course in June. In Los Angeles I doubt that will happen because it [LACC] is just enough inland, so we’ll have very reliable weather. When I talked with the USGA in relation to the 2017 Walker Cup (played at LACC), I said, ‘You don’t need to send your meteorologist. There won’t be anything for him or her to do.’”

That’s exactly what Danny Sink wants to hear. As director of U.S. Open championships since 2008, he will be entrenched in the state overseeing all of the outside-the-ropes issues at the upcoming venues. “Getting fog for an hour at Torrey Pines or Pebble Beach is much better than six inches of rain at Merion GC like we did in 2013, or



about 20 months prior to play with four people on-site: the championship director, and a person each in charge of volunteers, public safety and operations. “That expands to 10 full-time people right before the championship, and then 150 more people from USGA headquarters in New Jersey and regional offices during the championship,” said Sink.

The build process, which typically includes up to 600,000 square feet of canvas-enclosed floor space — last year at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club in New York, the merchandise tent alone measured 37,000 square feet — starts three months before the championship and goes right up to the last second. “From Memorial Day to the first day of play is the busiest time,” said Sink. “The tear-down process afterwards takes two and a half months.”

How to improve the championship is in the forefront of the USGA’s planning process. “We’re thinking long term over the next few years about the experience and how we can modernize and also use technology,” said Bodenhamer. “We have a wonderful new app where people can follow players and watch play, and maybe one day be able to order a hot dog from their seat. It will always change, it will never be cookie-cutter.”

“IT’S SUCH A GREAT GOLF STATE AND SOME OF OUR MOST ICONIC SITES ARE THERE. AS LONG AS IT WILL HAVE US, WE’LL COME BACK.”

eight inches of rain at Bethpage in 2009,” he said. “Rain is the one thing we can’t control. But we have a better chance with Mother Nature on the West Coast.”

Not surprisingly, traffic, parking and spectator access are key issues. “Ingress and egress are among the biggest concerns we have,” said Sink. “You can’t bring everyone in through one central point or it would just cause a huge backlog of people. All three California venues have multiple entrance points, fortunately.”

Preparations at a U.S. Open venue usually ramp up

And don’t be surprised by more U.S. Open visits to California, north and south, beyond 2027. “It’s such a great golf state and some of our most iconic sites are there,” said Bodenhamer. “As long as it will have us, we’ll come back.”

■ **The U.S. Women’s Open Championship will visit Northern California twice in the next five years. The game’s best will tee it up at The Olympic Club in 2021 and Pebble Beach in 2023. Stay tuned for coverage in an upcoming issue of FORE.**



★ ★ ★

PEBBLE BEACH (2019/2027)

★ ★ ★



Celebrating its centennial this year, **Pebble Beach** is a familiar venue, having already hosted five previous U.S. Opens between 1972 and 2010. “For us to go back to Pebble, well, it’s just such a national treasure,” said Bodenhamer. “It has history that few places have. That’s a very special place for us.”

The 2018 U.S. Amateur provided a test run of sorts for this June’s national championship. “It wasn’t a U.S. Open setup from the standpoint of things like rough height,” said Bodenhamer. “But we did some things that informed us, like how firm we could get the greens before we went too far, and what the weather did in certain instances.”

Depending on those weather patterns, Bodenhamer expects to see the course this year look relatively close to what it was in 2010, when Northern Ireland’s Graeme McDowell shot an even-par 284 to become the first European to win the title since Tony Jacklin did so at Hazeltine National GC in Minnesota. But there will be some differences from the 2010 layout: the ninth, 13th, 14th and 17th holes all have rebuilt greens, and the ninth has a new tee box. There will also be fewer spectators than in 2010 as part of an effort to enhance the overall experience for attendees.

The pros also might experience USGA’s new playoff format that went into effect last year: a two-hole aggregate total rather than 18 holes; if tied after two holes, it becomes sudden death. “The 18th plays relatively short now for those guys, but you think about 17 and 18, especially with the new playoff format,” said Bodenhamer. “What a magnificent way to do it on two holes where so much history has been made.”



ICONIC PEBBLE BEACH HAS BEEN THE SITE OF MANY MEMORABLE WINS, INCLUDING TOM WATSON’S CHIP-IN ON 17 IN 1982 (ABOVE) AND TIGER’S STUNNING WIN IN 2000 BY 15 STROKES.



MORE THAN A DECADE HAS PASSED SINCE THE U.S. OPEN FIRST VISITED TORREY PINES IN 2008, BUT FEW GOLF FANS WILL EVER FORGET THE DRAMA FROM THAT WEEK.



★ ★ ★
**TORREY
PINES
(2021)**
★ ★ ★

More than a decade has passed since the U.S. Open first visited **Torrey Pines** in 2008, but few golf fans will ever forget the drama from that week. Tiger Woods made a dramatic birdie putt on the final hole (on a broken leg no less) to force a playoff he eventually won, earning the most recent of his 14 major victories.

It might be hard to top that spectacle when the U.S. Open returns in two years, not to mention the crowds. Sink believes it was the first time the championship ever featured an opening-day grouping of the world's first, second and third-ranked players (Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson and Adam Scott, respectively).

"They were teeing off at 7:15 a.m. that Thursday and I think we had 25,000 people through the gates by 7 a.m.," Sink said. "I still remember being in our office that morning and working with our transportation companies who had never seen anything of that magnitude. And during the playoff, we had almost as many people following two golfers around the course."

An estimated \$14 million renovation project, expected to be completed later this year, is now underway on the South Course in advance of the U.S. Open. The work involves enhancement of the irrigation system, bunkers, tees and areas around the greens.



★ ★ ★
**LOS ANGELES
COUNTRY CLUB
(2023)**
★ ★ ★

Imagine if New York City's Central Park had 36 spectacularly good golf holes. That's what **LACC**, set on 320 acres between Beverly Hills and the UCLA campus, already offers. "We've been trying to come to The Los Angeles Country Club for many, many years," said Bodenhamer of the famously private club. That goal becomes reality in 2023.

A sneak peek at the artful bunkering and surprising elevation changes of the North Course (originally designed by George C. Thomas Jr. and restored by Gil Hanse in 2010) came during the 2017 Walker Cup. The par-3 15th was an attention-getter then, and will likely be again in the U.S. Open.

"That hole played as little as 78 yards in the Walker Cup, and the green is magnificent," said Bodenhamer. "You'll likely see that distance in the U.S. Open [making it the shortest hole ever in championship history]. The course is about the bunkering and the green complexes. It's just so unique. We don't have to do too much to it. We will narrow it a bit and grow some rough, but it really takes care of itself."

Peter James, who joined the club in 1981, notes that Thomas created a lot of potential configurations within the

North Course layout. "The two Walker Cup captains said it was a terrific 'accordion' golf course," said James. "You can play it long or you can play it short. It can be played with seven par 4s of more than 500 yards and with two drivable par 4s. It can also have two par 3s that approach 300 yards. There's so much variety available to the USGA to do interesting things."

LACC's rookie status as a U.S. Open venue has accelerated the prep schedule, according to Sink. "We've made a concerted effort to start working on that championship two years in advance of when we typically would," he said. "Just to account for not having had a major championship in the middle of one of the biggest cities in the United States."

Wilshire Boulevard, which runs between the club's two courses (the South Course will be used for championship infrastructure purposes), is a logistical concern. "We're working on ways to traverse that without completely backing it up more than it is on a daily basis," Sink said.

It's no small sacrifice for a public facility or private club to host the national championship. Both Torrey Pines and LACC will lose their second course for a couple of months. "Everyone focuses on the week of the U.S. Open, but there will be four to six months of the second course being down," said Sink. "We're building a small city, essentially, the majority of which will be on that second course. LACC North will be up and running the week after the U.S. Open, but the South Course is going to be really impacted. It's the same at Torrey Pines, where the North Course will be affected."





CALIFORNIA U.S. OPEN WINNERS

BEN HOGAN
1948
Riviera Country Club

JACK FLECK
1955
The Olympic Club

BILLY CASPER
1966
The Olympic Club

JACK NICKLAUS
1972
Pebble Beach

TOM WATSON
1982
Pebble Beach

SCOTT SIMPSON
1987
The Olympic Club

TOM KITE
1992
Pebble Beach

LEE JANZEN
1998
The Olympic Club

TIGER WOODS
2000
Pebble Beach

TIGER WOODS
2008
Torrey Pines

GRAEME MCDOWELL
2010
Pebble Beach

WEBB SIMPSON
2012
The Olympic Club



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**BE
THERE**



ALL IN THE FAMILY

THE STARS JUST KEEP LINING
UP FOR **AMANDA BALIONIS**

By **Tod Leonard**

THERE WAS NEVER a question that Amanda Balionis was going to eventually fall in love with golf. It was just a matter of when. Her maternal grandparents in Pittsburgh met on a golf course, and her parents, Tony and Dana, were avid players. They, of course, wanted their only child to also enjoy the game.

In the early years, that wasn't easy. Amanda dutifully took lessons, played in junior golf tournaments and accompanied her dad to the course late in the afternoons to engage in putting games.

"They'd play for quarters and she liked that," Dana Balionis recalled with a laugh.

Amanda mildly enjoyed golf, but it was far from her passion.

"She'd say, 'I like it, but volleyball is more exciting,'" Dana said. "She was just so active. Golf was never active enough for her."

It's funny how life works out. Today, golf keeps Balionis on the run for a good chunk of her waking hours.

"She's never loved golf more than she does now," Dana said.

In the span of a mere two years, the 33-year-old Balionis, who lives in San Diego, has become one of golf's rising stars in broadcasting. She made her debut for CBS Sports at the 2017 Genesis Open at Riviera CC, and now she does interviews and analysis at all of the TOUR events for the network.

She has also done NFL and college football sideline reporting, and at this year's Super Bowl, Balionis served as CBS's first-ever social media reporter for the game.

"It's just so surreal," Balionis said. "I literally call my mom and ask, 'Is this really happening?' I grew up watching Bonnie Bernstein on the sidelines when I was in seventh grade. That's what I wanted to do. Rarely do you get to do what you said you

wanted to do in middle school when you actually get here at 30.”

Balionis is a classic case of an “overnight success” in broadcasting who took nearly a decade to break through.

For years after getting a broadcasting degree at Hofstra University in New York, she toiled in sportscasting’s minor leagues, covering just about every high school sport imaginable on digital platforms and cable in the New York tri-state area. She later did much the same for the PGA Tour’s website.

“I felt like I had hit my ceiling. I thought the TV thing was never going to happen for me,” Balionis said. “I gave it my best effort, and I was kind of letting it go.”

The reality is that Balionis was simply too good at her work, and far too driven, to not have something eventually go her way. She had been that way since she was a kid.

“She was very competitive, very goal-oriented,” her mom said. “Even when she was a little girl she had a calendar in her room and she would write down her goals.”

The big opportunity came not long after she moved to San Diego in 2016 and began working for Callaway Golf in its media department. She had been in Carlsbad only a few months when Turner Sports called with an offer to work the 2016 PGA Championship, and Balionis’ efforts there got the attention of CBS Sports. Her tryout came at Riviera in 2017.

“The nerves were insane,” Balionis recalled. “But there was also this feeling that I had worked so hard for this. I had kind of given up on the dream, and I thought, ‘I’m going to be live on CBS for at least one time, so, technically, I achieved my dream.’”



A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

She was no one-broadcast wonder; CBS was immediately impressed.

“I think Amanda is a breath of fresh air,” said Sean McManus, chairman of CBS Sports. “She adds a different perspective to our coverage. She has a lot of credibility with golfers, and they respond well to her.”

Added CBS golf anchor Jim Nantz: “She is unflappable. It’s live TV — no prompter, no notes, just knowledge. And it’s delivered with warmth and kindness — a reflection of who she truly is.”

Balionis seems to be able to strike a balance between being cheerful and upbeat without seeming as if she’s fawning over the players.

“It’s never been a problem for me,” she said. “The questions are what they are, and it’s always obvious to me what you have to ask the guys. It’s not so much about being a cheerleader, but I think you can really root for a guy’s story. If I wasn’t a fan of the game or the story line, I wouldn’t be able to do my job well. If you’re not a fan of the sport, then you probably shouldn’t be doing it. You have to bring passion to this game.”

She noted, “I might be friendly with a guy and his wife for the last decade. And I’ll still look at him and say, ‘I’ve got to ask you about this.’ When you’ve done this long enough, they trust you. Players are generally used to being asked the tough question. How they handle it and answer it is on them. It’s my job to ask the question.”

Balionis points out that golf fans are among the most knowledgeable viewers in sports, and it’s both her job and nature to prepare diligently.

“SHE IS UNFLAPPABLE. IT’S LIVE TV — NO PROMPTER, NO NOTES, JUST KNOWLEDGE. AND IT’S DELIVERED WITH WARMTH AND KINDNESS — A REFLECTION OF WHO SHE TRULY IS.”

— JIM NANTZ, CBS GOLF ANCHOR



“They’re fanatical, and they know what they’re talking about,” Balionis said. “If I say something wrong or phrase something in a way they don’t like, I’ll hear about it from the fans immediately.

“I say this all the time — if you are the most prepared one, it doesn’t matter what you look like or sound like. No one is going to question you if you know what you’re talking about. The problem people fall into is that they rely on their looks or if they have a big name.”

With a schedule that put her on the road last year for 22 golf events, 12 college football games and two NFL games, Balionis calculated that her air travel

put her around the world about two and a half times. She doesn’t get much down time, sneaking in beach trips and yoga near where she lives in San Diego’s Pacific Beach.

She also experienced an enormous loss in her life when her dad died last September. Tony Balionis never fully recovered from injuries he suffered when he and Dana were involved in a horrific head-on car crash near their home in Florida in 2016.

“I feel lucky we got the extra two and a half years,” she said. “I spent every second that I could with him. Me covering the Masters, that’s something he would have been excited about.”

She gets more than enough support from her mom and their many family friends, who literally call out to each other during broadcasts with, “She’s on!”

“My mom is my biggest cheerleader,” Balionis said. “She’s over-the-moon excited for me. If I didn’t have the support system of my parents, I would have never persevered to this point.”

A die-hard sports fan, Dana Balionis can’t possibly tire of seeing her daughter live her dream.

“It’s really been amazing,” she said. “Just all of the twists and turns to get to where she is. It’s been one crazy thing after another. The stars just kept lining up.” ■



A DAY AS A GOLF COURSE MARSHAL

DON'T BLAME THE MESSENGER



By **Judd Spicer**

Like the mailman rounding the corner with one check and three bills in-tow, the golf course marshal can be both a welcome sight ... or not.

But don't kill the messenger.

A task almost universally performed by 60- to 80-year-old retired men, the marshal is present to help, namely for the purposes of pace. As the job title itself connotes "the law," recent years have seen an attempted softening of the handle, converting marshal (or ranger) to "player's assistant," or, "course ambassador."

Yet the appellation doesn't change the task at hand, a responsibility that is probably as much police officer as it is mailman. Like a cop, the marshal arrives at work each day knowing — despite his best intentions — that the distinct potential for confrontation awaits.

At Indian Wells Golf Resort (IWGR) in the heart of the Coachella Valley, the veteran team tasked with marshaling the Troon-managed Players and Celebrity courses are well aware of the gig's capacity

for conflict. Working with the "player's assistant" moniker, the crew finds that to produce pace, a smile bears far better results than a sneer.

"A scenario that presents potential confrontation, that's the hardest thing," says Joe Williams, director of golf at IWGR. "The guys can't take anything personally. We can't let it escalate to that. If it has, we haven't done our job correctly. Our job is to inform the guest — to request of them — what they can do to help us improve the pace."

What better way to understand the marshal's journey than to walk in another man's soft spikes for a day.

PREPARING TO PLAY THE PART

It's a shade before 7 a.m. on a peak-season morning in the desert, and Marissa Valdez is already hard at work.

On my face.

An expert makeup and special effects artist, L.A.-based Valdez may know nothing about golf — but she knows how to help



SLOW PATROL: THE AUTHOR (LEFT) IN FULL "OLD MAN" MAKEUP, HEADS OUT ON THE INDIAN WELLS COURSE TO SEE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE MARSHAL FOR A DAY.

me look the part of a marshal, as IWGR allowed me the opportunity to join its marshaling staff for the day, outfitting me with a staff cap and shirt to complement Valdez's efforts.

Valdez applies several sections of premade prosthetics to my face and neck, along with latex to my hands. The two-hour process intends to age me three decades to better blend with the rest of the team.

Little by little, my transformation takes final shape as Valdez shades distinct wrinkles on my face and grays the fringes of my hair. It's a rather incredible sensation to look in the mirror and not wholly recognize oneself.

Across her portfolio of film and television work, Valdez has both a penchant and a serious talent for creating monsters.

As my marshaling duties await, is this what I've become?

PAIRING PERSONALITY AND TECHNOLOGY

Manner alone does not a fully enabled marshal make.

As with most things 2019, the tools of technology play a vital part.

On Williams' desktop: a GPS program lets him know the location of every cart across the two courses, provides a color-coded system for pace and gives him the ability to message carts directly, if need be. His team of marshals (two per course per shift; 18 all told) is provided the same, real-time information on their own cart screens.

When carts display yellow (or worse, red), Williams passes the technology baton to the human element. The IWGR philosophy is for marshals to approach players with a combination of humor and deference.

"An icebreaker, to let players know you're not a speed cop, but rather there to assist them," Williams says. "When these situations arise, the approach is, 'I need a favor from you,' so as to not come at a player with a negative engagement, but rather an involved question."

The resort's seasoned team of marshals is well-versed on the need to approach with



Valdez applies several sections of premade prosthetics to my face and neck, along with latex to my hands. The two-hour process intends to age me three decades to better blend with the rest of the team.

PHOTOS BY JOHN HENEBRY



NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART: IT'S BEST TO "KILL THEM WITH KINDNESS" SAYS ONE SEASONED MARSHAL ABOUT DELIVERING THE "HURRY IT ALONG" MESSAGE.



honey in lieu of vinegar.

"I like to introduce myself, ask people where they're from and see if there's anything I can do to better their experience," says Stan Hyatt, a lifetime PGA member, now in his seventh season as a marshal at IWGR. "If need be, I might mention that the group behind has a bit of a problem with a pace complaint."

Fellow PGA member Daniel Cantoni, in his fifth year as a marshal at IWGR, sees the value of approaching slow play with a smile.

"If people are having problems on the course, it's about killing them with kindness," Cantoni says. "You need to evaluate each situation; maybe I'll rake the bunkers for them or get the flagstick to help them along."

Should methodical pace persist, there's always the swizzle stick fallback.

"If push comes to shove — and it doesn't happen too often — we have the OK to tell a group that if they skip a hole, we'll get them a complimentary drink," says Cantoni, smiling. "And then they'll get a double martini."

Whether it be at IWGR or any golf

course across the globe, there will always be the potential for a salty golfer.

"Everybody is a little different and the reactions are never quite the same, but 95 percent of the time people are good," Hyatt adds. "It's just that 5 percent who ask why we're bothering them."

In the hiring process, Williams looks for an ability to let the proverbial water roll off one's back.

"Sometimes it can be hard for them," Williams says. "These guys were all successful — maybe they were the CEO of a big company — and now they may need to eat a little crow from a 30-year-old whippersnapper."

Combating the ornery attitude with the time-tested Golden Rule is a valuable tool in the marshal's bag.

"I treat people as I'd like them to treat me," says Lloyd Baker, a 12-year marshal at the resort. "Sometimes, that means biting your tongue, even if you'd like to say, 'Did you have a charisma bypass?' But I try and laugh with 'em, and most times that works."

And in the rare instance a player doesn't laugh back?

"Maybe a couple of times a year, a guest wants to get into it; our guys need to be the cooler head, to be the one to mediate the situation," Williams says. "And if they can't, they need to remove themselves and they need to call me."

Hyatt concurs: "We're not gonna stay there and have a confrontation; if that should start to arise, I exit."

JUST ONE OF THE GUYS

Having adopted a slight hunch and measured gait to go with Valdez's makeup, I get into a cart with Hyatt and we begin working the courses.

The pace of morning play, Hyatt says, is generally better than afternoons, and the grouping readouts on the cart screen echo his learned assessment.

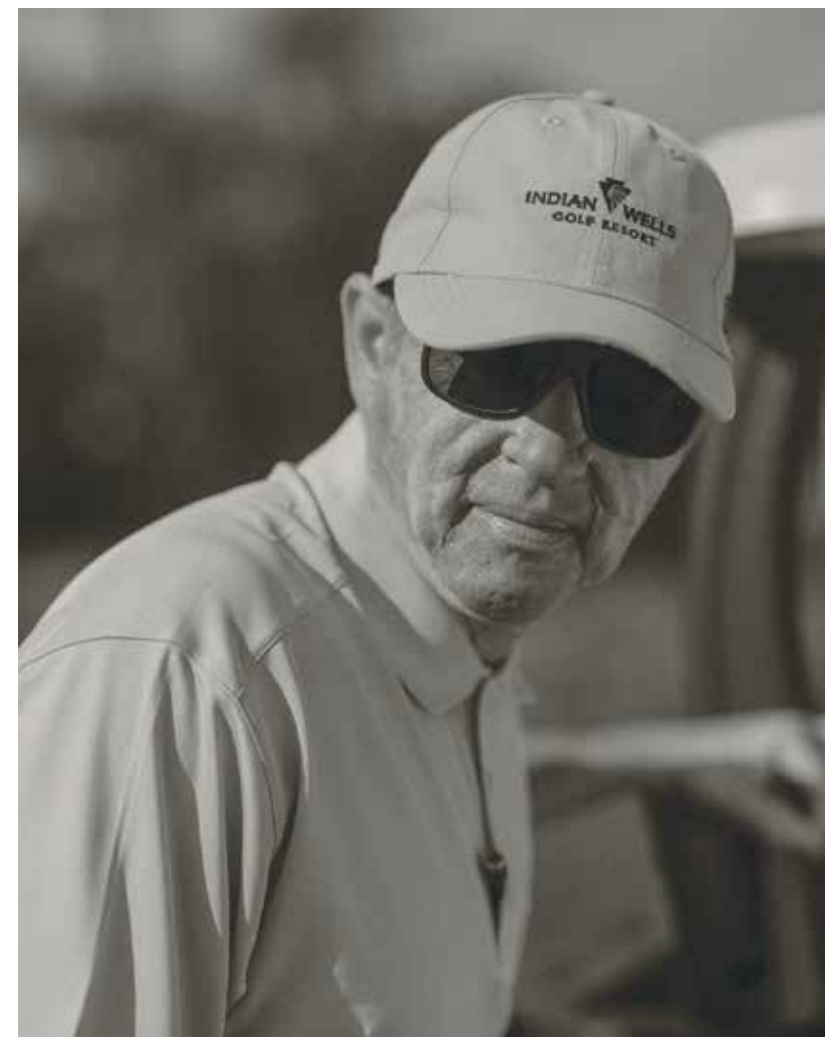
Rolling across the well-manicured grounds, we greet players on boxes with cap-tips and smiles and Hyatt works to ensure guest contentment.

Studying the pace screen, I consider what IWGR's other marshals have told me prior to our excursion. "I don't let them see me," Cantoni told me of employing on-course discretion. "I see them, but they may not see me."

Marshal Physed Rathell works the grounds with the tenet of praise in mind. "Greet 'em with a big smile, and when you approach people, have your sheet with their name; it's important to know their name," he says. "And after asking somebody to move quicker, it's important to make sure you go back to see them again on the course after they've played faster to congratulate them."

Outwardly, my faux wrinkles hold form in tune with the smiles, and rare is the guest double-take at my disguise. Inside, however, I have a genuine feel of unease. The day is beautiful, the courses

And to be told, however politely, that you need to please play faster while in the midst of making an 8 isn't an easy message to receive. Nor is it an easy one to deliver.



are beautiful, the task at hand is benevolent ... and yet I don't like the feel of being the messenger. This isn't as much like being the mailman as it is, based on a few sideways glances, like being the Grim Reaper come to deliver a message of dread.

Many players, nice as they are to us, still eye our cart warily as we round paved bends. Upon engagement ("Who's the lucky golfer today?" Hyatt will ask), the vast majority of guests respond with a speedy quip, along with body language that suggests they want you to be far, far away.

I don't like the feeling of being perched, even at a distance, behind somebody's tee shot, and I don't like how a chosen few of the players seem to think our presence is a vehicle for venting. It's a strange sense being on the opposite side of this equation, and not one I gather I could stomach once the real wrinkles set in.

While the Players Course proves tidy with all groups ahead of pace, the Celebrity does offer a few stragglers. The cart screen displaying one group coded in red, we roll up to the culprits from a wide angle and, upon closer review, they've got a few max-handicappers to be sure.

They hack and bunker their respective ways to the green, and our cart nears. In shared silence, Hyatt and I look at their cart number before glancing back to the pace screen to ensure these are indeed the pace offenders.

We approach them at the green with smiles and, as they dig for wedges, Hyatt turns to me with a glance that says, "It's your time."

I look at one of the players as he exits his cart and preps to make his triple. He looks back at me, knowing what I'm about to request ... but the words don't come. It's not a matter of nerve, but instead empathy. I've been there. We all have at some point. And to be told, however politely, that you need to please play faster while in the midst of making an 8 isn't an easy message to receive.

Nor is it an easy one to deliver.

Being a marshal takes tougher epidermis than I thought. And finds me ready to return to my own skin.■



PORTRUSH REDUX



THE RETURN OF THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP TO IRELAND MAKES AN EMERALD ISLE TRIP EXTRA-COMPELLING

By *Travelin' Joe Passov*

AFTER 68 YEARS, The Open Championship is finally returning to Ireland. Golf's oldest major touches down in mid-July at **Royal Portrush GC** in Northern Ireland, the same venue that played host to the only other Open visit to the Emerald Isle, back in 1951. One glimpse of the fabled links will surely yield this question: Why did it take so long to come back?

Situated in the furthest reaches of the country, Royal Portrush dates to 1888. Its present 7,317-yard, par-72 championship layout, called the Dunluce Links (named for a nearby castle) is perennially ranked among the world's top 15 courses and features the handiwork of British design legend H.S. Colt, who completed a thorough redesign in 1932.

Colt's creation sports the rippled, wind-whipped fairways and cunningly configured bunkers that make links golf so irresistible, but it also zigzags through towering dunes along the Irish Sea, furnishing beauty, menace and drama in generous portions.





Lobbying for a return engagement of the Open began in earnest in 2011, when three recent major championship winners from Northern Ireland with direct ties to Portrush voiced their support. Graeme McDowell, the 2010 U.S. Open winner, grew up there. Darren Clarke, the 2011 British Open winner, owned a home there and Rory McIlroy, the 2014 Open winner, set the course record there with a 61 — as a 16-year-old. So why the holdup?

Peter Dawson, The R&A chief executive at the time, was sympathetic, but blunt: “You can’t base where you hold the Open on where the players come from. I think that should be obvious to anyone.”

Dawson’s objection concerned the classic major championship venue disqualifier - infrastructure. Major events need access roads, hotels, corporate tent space, television broadcast capabilities and gallery room, in addition to a terrific, testing layout. So Royal Portrush staged an audition, the 2012 Irish Open. To say it was wildly successful is an understatement.

Returning to Northern Ireland for the first time since 1953, and to Royal Portrush for the first time since 1947, the Irish Open set European Tour attendance records, 112,000 for four days, and 131,000 for the week. After additional hemming and hawing, the R&A at last relented. Royal Portrush passed the audition and earned its Open.

BEAUTIES & BEASTS

Infrastructure notwithstanding, there was also a more subtle negative attached to Portrush. Its two closing holes were forgettable. A superb round on a superior course ended with a downer, on two long, dull holes on flattish ground. At the suggestion — some would say insistence — of The R&A, the club engaged architects Tom Mackenzie and Martin Ebert, who

performed the acclaimed renovations to Turnberry’s Ailsa course, to effect a fix. Did they ever. They abandoned the old holes and subbed in two new ones that are numbered 7 and 8 on the championship Dunluce course.

Borrowing from the old fifth and sixth holes on the club’s adjoining Valley course, the new seventh is an uphill, 590-yard par-5 that commences from an elevated tee and skirts a primary dune formation. The 430-yard, par-4 eighth is a risk/reward, dogleg left that demands a daring drive over a chasm that flirts with a dune wall. The backdrop features the ruins of Dunluce Castle, perched on a cliff edge overlooking the shore. Both holes are no mere replacements. They’re newly minted all-stars on a course laden with them.

The course now closes with the former 15th and 16th holes playing as Nos. 17 and 18, significantly improving an already stellar layout.

The two most memorable tests are from the Colt layout, the par-4 fifth and the par-3 16th. Aptly named White Rocks, the 382-yard, par-4 fifth begins at the highest point on the course and provides glorious views of the churning sea and limestone cliffs. Beyond lies the Dunluce Castle ruins that give the course its name.

On paper, this bunkerless dogleg-right seems gettable. Sandhills adorned with shaggy rough squeeze the fairway, however, and even with the wind, you’re not quite sure whether you want to trust your driver to carry the dune that hugs the right elbow. The approach plays slightly uphill to a green framed by humps and hollows, with a severe drop-off to the right. Long is definitely wrong, as the beach awaits. The fifth is eye-candy but potentially lethal, and a true joyride.

At 236 breeze-fueled yards, the par-3 16th isn’t quite “fun,” but is unquestionably memorable. Called “Calamity Corner,” or



more commonly, “Calamity,” the hole spent most of its infamous existence as the 14th. Newly numbered and newly lengthened by 26 yards, this is one of earth’s most challenging one-shotters.

Clenching the club with a death grip when the wind is howling off the Irish Sea is a mistake, because if you don’t release the club, you’re destined for a fade or slice, into a yawning, 75-foot chasm short and right of the hole. A “safe” play to the left is no bargain either, as the terrain is dotted with heathery hillocks. The innocent-looking green holds its own brand of terrors: Tom Kite three-putted here in the 2004 Senior British Open and eventually finished 1 shot behind the winner.

(Your humble narrator managed one of the most satisfying pars of his life in 2011. On a day that was so rainy and windy that Rory McIlroy canceled his afternoon tee time, he lost his tee shot into the abyss to the right, lobbed a shocking recovery to 10 feet and drained the putt. Take that, Tom Kite!)

RETURNING TO NORTHERN IRELAND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1951, THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP LOOKS TO BE A ROYAL DOOZY AT AN IMPROVED PORTRUSH.



THE IRISH OPEN SET EUROPEAN TOUR ATTENDANCE RECORDS, 112,000 FOR FOUR DAYS, AND 131,000 FOR THE WEEK. AFTER ADDITIONAL HEMMING AND HAWING, THE R&A AT LAST RELENTED. ROYAL PORTRUSH PASSED THE AUDITION AND EARNED ITS OPEN.



NEW & NOTABLE

While Royal Portrush undoubtedly is the crown jewel of Irish golf in 2019, there is a fistful of other stars in the constellation that earn “must-visit” status when you go. Atop the list is the Golf Course at **Adare Manor**, in Limerick. Prized since the mid-1990s as perhaps Ireland’s finest parkland course, Adare Manor featured a rugged, handsome Robert Trent Jones Sr. design that was strong enough to host several Irish Opens.

That wouldn’t do for new owner JP McManus, a renowned Irish businessman and friend to the Tour pros, who in 2015 tapped Tom Fazio to perform an extreme makeover. Fazio’s experience as consulting architect at Augusta National served him well, as the resulting transformation

has provided a Masters-like course in appearance, conditions and aura.

Fazio and associate Tom Marzolf sand-capped the entire course, installed SubAir systems for every green complex and created state-of-the-art drainage. With only 42 bunkers, all of simple shapes and gleaming white sand, floral displays on every hole plus speedy greens propped up well above the fairways, you get a firm, fast, gorgeous Augusta-like layout no matter how much rain falls.

The driveable par-4 15th and the outstanding par-5 18th, a risk/reward thriller that’s bisected by the River Maigue, are individual highlights. Pair the virtually new course with the completely refurbished Adare Manor hotel, one of the planet’s elite retreats, and you have an unbeatable combination, including

its convenient location, 30 minutes from Shannon International Airport. At 7,509 perfect yards and checking all of the right boxes, Adare Manor could very well see a Ryder Cup in the not-too-distant future.

Another dynamic do-over is the two-year-old **Hogs Head** in Waterville, County Kerry, in southwest Ireland. Hewn from the remnants of the defunct Skellig Bay course that lasted only 11 years, Hogs Head is the first Robert Trent Jones II creation on the Emerald Isle, and it’s worth the journey.

Conceived by a pair of Wall Street capitalists with the motto, “Built by friends, for friends, for fun,” Hogs Head is just that, a remarkably varied 7,140-spread that scampers across headlands, à la Pebble Beach. The swift-rushing Finglas River affects play on the inland-style front nine, while the back side sports a series of exhilarating bluff-top holes that peer over the Atlantic Ocean.

Jones and his team paid homage to classic architects on some holes, with nods to MacKenzie, Colt and Tillinghast, while others are true originals. Sandwiched between the par-4 12th along the cliff edge and the par-5 14th with its double green is Hogs Head’s most memorable hole, the par-3 13th that rolls out two separate greens, one that hugs the ocean.

BEYOND THE FAIRWAYS

Ireland has few peers for that epic golf buddies trip, but many Americans are making the pilgrimage to the old country due to the genealogy craze sweeping our shores. Companies such as Ancestry.com and 23andme.com are helping to spur renewed interest in finding our roots, with Ireland one of the most popular destinations.

The only Irish I have in my blood is from its superb whiskies, such as Jameson Original, the world’s top-seller; Bushmills Black Bush, produced in Northern Ireland from what’s considered to be the country’s oldest licensed distillery; and my personal favorite, Redbreast 12 Year Old, a smooth yet robust star of the single pot still variety.

My wife, however, traces her Ryan roots to Waterford in southeast Ireland, where they turn out a pretty nice water pitcher or two, and her Doyle roots to Co. Kerry in the Southwest. When I mentioned my wife’s family origins to two Irish golfers of my acquaintance, each nodded, beamed and said of her family, “Ah, horse thieves.”

There’s no shortage of fabulous attractions in Ireland before and after golf, from the Giants Causeway in the north, salmon fishing — try the marvelous K Club Resort, Ryder Cup venue in 2006 and its River Liffey — and the Cliffs of Moher near charming Lahinch GC, site of the 2019 Irish Open. If you’re a contortionist, partake in the kissing of the Blarney Stone near Cork, not far from Ireland’s most spectacular golf course, the Old Head of Kinsale, the city known as the Gourmet Capital of Ireland.

Still, if you do one thing only after golf in Ireland, it is the pub crawl. The *craic* (fun and conversation) over a pint of Guinness (be patient, a draft can take five minutes for the glass to fill when properly pulled) is a cultural phenomenon. It never disappoints. Neither does Ireland. So here’s to raising a glass, with a hearty “Sláinte” to golf and the good life on the Emerald Isle. ■



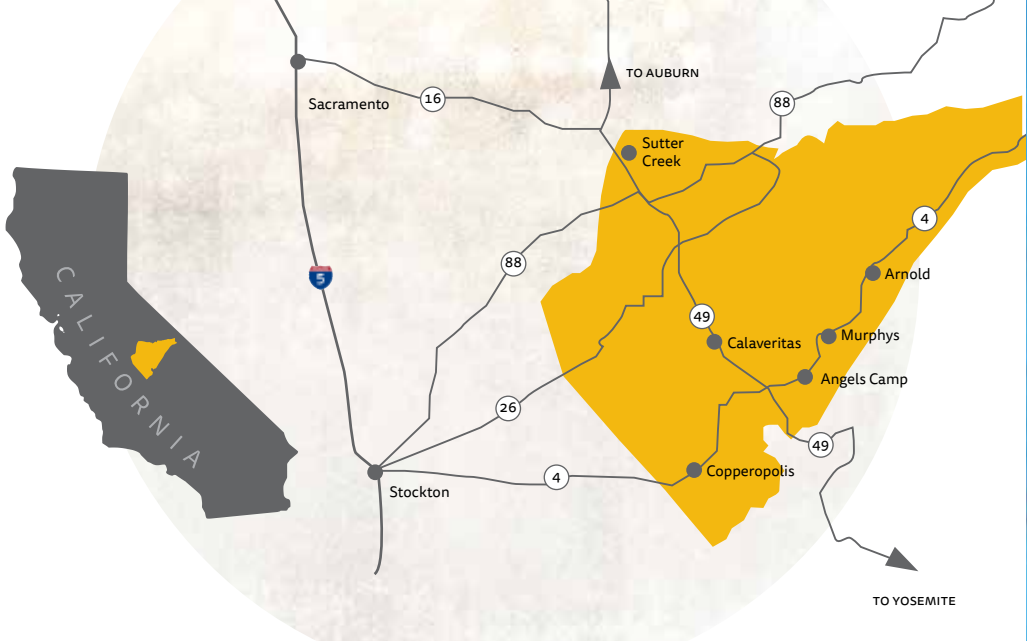
ABOUT TRAVELIN’ JOE

One of the most celebrated golf journalists of the day, Joe Passov served for 13 years (2005–2018) as senior editor/managing editor for travel and course rankings at GOLF Magazine and Golf.com, and was chairman of the international panel that ranks GOLF Magazine’s Top 100 Courses in the World. An avid traveler, Mr. Passov’s journeys have provided him with experiences on more than 1,800 courses in all 50 states, 35 countries and at more than 100 of the world’s top-ranked resorts.



TRAVELIN' JOE





on the west and the Sierra Nevada on the east, in recent years Gold Country, as it is known, has experienced an increasing surge of visitors for outdoor adventure, wine tasting, culinary indulgences and exploring quaint towns sporting frontier storefronts and wood-plank sidewalks. And though this gilded region may not pop up on the radar as one of California's high-profile golf destinations such as Palm Springs or Monterey, the Mother Lode boasts a glittering lineup of courses to push the needle on the Golden State's golf junket meter.

GOLF PROSPECTING

In 1996, the town of Copperopolis (its claim to fame came from another valuable metal that aided the Civil War effort) joined the

golf trail when the tees opened at the Jay Moorish-designed **Saddle Creek GC**. Planted on a serene hillside below the Sierra snow line and above the Central Valley fog, the 6,826-yard layout takes superb advantage of the natural elevation changes that open views to Half Dome in Yosemite National Park from the 10th and 17th greens. Plus, with no adjacent fairways and real estate set far back from the course, golfers benefit from a secluded playing experience.

Forecasting a rising demand for country-style living from San Francisco Bay Area refugees, modern-day prospectors CV Development Partners, LLC, purchased Saddle Creek GC in November 2018, along with the entire 900-acre master-planned community. The company has ambitious plans to enhance the development for

GOLDEN DRIVE

JUMPING FROGS OR MAKING BIRDIES, CALIFORNIA'S GOLD COUNTRY IS A GEM

By **Robert Kaufman**

THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD in California's Sierra Nevada foothills southeast of Sacramento in 1848 inspired a horde of fortune hunters to "Go west young man" in an attempt to cash in on the shiny nuggets. They became known as 49ers and the small towns that grew in their wake were infamous for the freewheeling lifestyle of the men who inhabited them. Even Mark Twain made a visit to the area in 1865, during which he scripted his famous short story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County."

The tale Twain told is brought to life each year at the **Calaveras County Fair & Jumping Frog Jubilee** (May 16–19, 2019), a spectacle intriguing enough to jump in the car and head up Highway 49 to explore this lesser-known part of California. If you're so inspired (and who wouldn't be?!), you can rent a bullfrog from a "Frog Spa" that is set up during the four-day fest and jump it in the competition! Winners receive a brass plaque in the Frog Hop of Fame along with an impressive trophy and cash prize. But don't forget to pack your golf clubs. Bookended by the Central Valley



A FROG AND HIS HANDLER COMPETE IN THE JUMPING FROG JUBILEE.



members and guests, including adding new restaurants, shops, an amphitheater and a hotel around the town square.

"This is going to evolve into a true gem for folks from all walks of life, not just golfers," said Rick Morgan, the club's general manager since July 2015.

Saddle Creek is a good home base for exploration of the area, with 17 two-bedroom 1,200-square-foot bungalows. From there, it's approximately 15 twisty miles to **Angels Camp**, where Twain's story is set. Home to one of the most picturesque historic downtowns in California's Gold Country, Angels Camp has boutique shops,

a bakery, two restaurants and a wonderful carriage and wagon museum.

There are many visible reminders of Twain's brief visit to Angels Camp, including a bronze statue of the writer sitting on a bench in front of the clubhouse at **Greenhorn Creek Resort**, where Robert Trent Jones, Jr. created 18 scenic holes for another master-planned community. This 6,749-yard layout also opened in 1996, and requires accuracy over distance on its sloping fairways. The tee box on the plunging par-3 13th offers up panoramic views of the surrounding foothills and of New Melones Lake.

Greenhorn Creek has preserved a cluster of period artifacts around the field of play, including a rock wall built by Chinese miners near the fourth, the remains of an old Chinese oven bordering the fifth fairway, and the 12th green that sits atop the Tuff Nut Mine, one of several shafts weaving underground around Angels Camp.

WINE & SHINE

A bit further east on Highway 4, the village of **Murphys**, accentuated by galleries, inns, chichi boutiques and



CALIFORNIA'S GOLD COUNTRY
BECKONS WITH QUAIN TOWNS,
HISTORICAL LANDMARKS,
GOOD FOOD AND WINE, AND
ADVENTURES GALORE ... GOLF
INCLUDED.

upscale eateries, is a welcome reprieve from hooks and shanks with a walk along Main Street sampling any of the two dozen tasting rooms representing most of the area's family-owned wineries. The big kid in the wine neighborhood, **Ironstone Vineyards**, is a five-minute drive from Main Street, but well worth the detour for their superb wines and to lay eyes on Gold Country's crown jewel, the world's largest (44 pounds) chunk of crystalline gold, unearthed in nearby Jamestown the day after Christmas 1992.

And while the vino roster may steal the spotlight, the gift of hops can be savored at the congenial **Murphys Pourhouse**, the town's lone and lively taproom serving a rotating menu of 16 craft beers.

A forward ascent into the Sierra Nevada continues to the town of **Arnold** (4,000-foot elevation), and our golden trail's last golf outpost, **Sequoia Woods CC**, before crossing paths with **Calaveras Big Trees State Park** and **Bear Valley Resort**, where, if you catch the right climate window on the calendar, a golf/ski combo day would be a brilliant bonus nugget on a Gold Country itinerary. ■

HERE'S A MOTHER LODE OF RESOURCES TO HELP BLAZE YOUR GOLD COUNTRY TRAIL:

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gocalaveras.com
calaveraswines.org
visitgoldcountry.com
gogoldcountry49.com
visitmurphys.com

GOLD COUNTRY, AS IT IS KNOWN, HAS EXPERIENCED AN INCREASING SURGE OF VISITORS FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURE, WINE TASTING, CULINARY INDULGENCES AND EXPLORING QUAIN TOWNS SPORTING FRONTIER STOREFRONTS AND WOOD-PLANK SIDEWALKS.



AT THE TURN

Honma | Equipment | Tina Mickelson | Balboa Park | SCGA Junior | Handicap Hints

Stick Envy

HONMA'S NEW OFFERINGS AIM HIGH

By Ken Van Vetchen



COMING SOON TO AMERICAN SHORES, **Honma Golf**. If that's not firing across the synapses, don't feel alone. For more than a half century, this Japanese brand of niche, über-high-end sticks has been riding a wave on the far side of the Pacific, and is just now set to roll on in over here.

For the record, Honma isn't new to the U.S. (or North America, because this is a continental push, not just in the States). What's notable is a full-on marketing effort — headed by former TaylorMade head honcho Mark King — embracing the ultra-premium BERES line and with particular attention paid to the T//World offerings now wielded by Justin Rose, who won the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines GC right after making the switch to Honma. (A third model, BeZEAL, which are game improvement clubs aimed at moderate- to lower-swing-speed players, can be found for sale in the U.S., but the company is still working on the business and launch model for this market.)

Knowing that blue-ribbon brands and "Rodeo Drive" upstarts like PXG crowd the market, this might seem redundant, certainly when some of your products sell for several thousand dollars individually.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

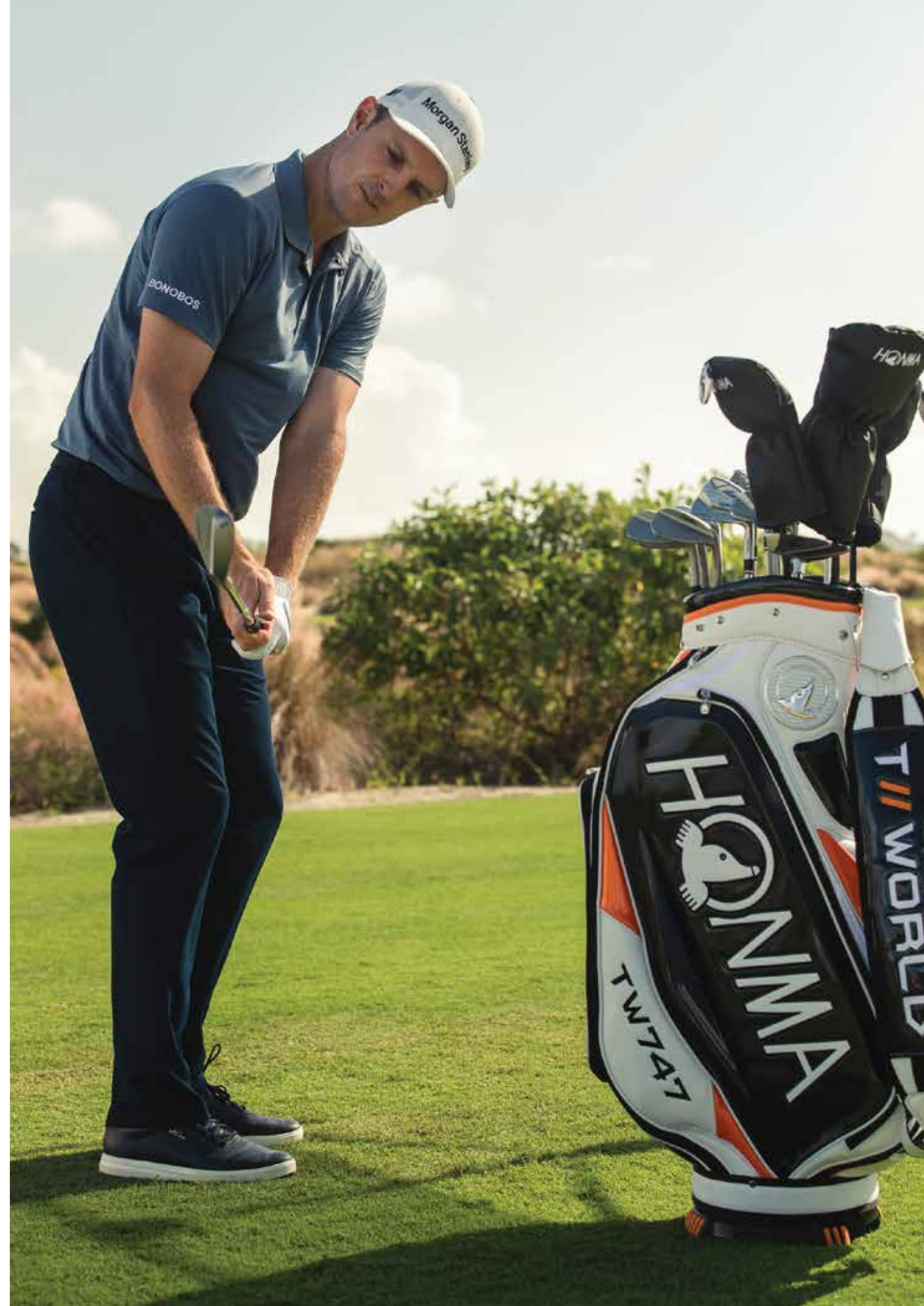
"Honma gives the North American golf consumer something different than that which the large U.S.-based equipment companies provide," wrote John Kawaja, Honma's chief marketing officer. "Our legendary craftsmanship creates beautiful golf clubs that perform incredibly well.

We make 'super premium' products that combine craftsmanship, attention to detail and the highest-quality materials for clubs that perform for a wide range of golfers. For better players we make 'premium performance' products that deliver exceptional look, feel and performance."

On this side of Big Blue, the player-oriented T//World includes three iron models: TW 747p, a cavity-back cast that doesn't look like a boat anchor; the forged-cavity TW 747v for the mid-teen to accomplished crowd; and the Rose-inspired TW 747 blade. Prices range from \$150 to \$175 per stick, depending on model and shaft. Honma makes its own shafts, in graphite and a fusion in carbon and metal fiber, and clubs can be had with commercial offerings. Hybrids, fairway woods and drivers are in play, too (\$249, \$299 and \$599, respectively.)

Eating (much) higher on the hog, BERES models bear 2- through 5-star designations, varying with build detail and materials, and a full bag of the latter can run more than \$50,000, so they are as much symbols of honor as mere weapons of par, which comes when your gamers are finished in platinum and 24-karat gold.

"Honma is legendary in the Asian





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"We're more of a niche. There's a challenge in all of that. But we don't really have a pitch, we let the clubs do the talking. I just hand them the clubs and you can see it in their eyes. It's a unique brand, there's more flash, it's a statement."

market, and specifically in Japan," explained Chris McGinley, vice president of product. "It is a personal and a brand statement, the BERES line. When given as a gift, it is a sign of immense respect. When played, it is a sign of prestige. That is who Honma has been."

According to McGinley, American and Canadian sales efforts will be strategically targeted, using a referral network of pros and ambassadors, and eschewing massive numbers of storefronts in favor of "key locations in key retailers, 'Honma hubs' in specific metropolitan areas and golf markets."

And coming to Carlsbad this summer, Honma House.

"Think of Honma House as a more refined TPI (Titleist Performance Institute) experience," McGinley added. "It won't be

a research and fitness facility, it will be a 'brand experience center,' a place to get thoroughly fitted to Honma products, experience Honma, buy accessories. It will be 'boutique' [compared to other club companies' fitting centers]."

If you want to kick the tires right now, stop by Roger Dunn Golf Shops' Santa Ana mother ship, which is home to the first in a planned series of Honma fitting studios. Jay Whang, Honma product specialist at this facility, is eager to show off the wares: "We know golfers are brand loyal and very brand aware. Most golfers probably haven't heard of us. We're more of a niche. There's a challenge in all of that. But we don't really have a pitch, we let the clubs do the talking. I just hand them the clubs and you can see it in their eyes. It's a unique brand, there's more flash, it's a statement." ■

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SWING TIP

DISTRACTION PRACTICE

Oftentimes, a golfer will be faced with an awkward lie while chipping around the greens, whether it be a sprinkler head or a loose piece of turf. To combat that psychological migration from normalcy, **Dr. Alison Curdt, PGA Director of Instruction, Wood Ranch GC**, suggests you prepare for those uneasy chip shots by practicing with similar distractions using common elements found in a golf bag.

- 1 Take clubs, alignment rods, head covers, tees, etc. and scatter them in a 5-foot radius, making sure to spread the objects evenly.
- 2 Drop a golf ball in the middle of the "distraction area" and take a stance where your feet are not on top of any objects.
- 3 Concentrate on making clean, crisp contact and avoid touching any of the objects.

Repeat these steps, making sure to force yourself into awkward lies and ball positioning. This stimulating and challenging environment will desensitize your nerves as you prepare to take to the course.



Access more SCGA Swing Tips at scga.org/swing-tips

PHOTO BY BRAD KADOW

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THE EQUIPMENT NERD

A NEW CROP OF DRIVERS ARE DESIGNED TO IMPRESS

By **Scott Kramer**

Maybe you sliced some tee shots. Or suddenly realized that your buddies are regularly bombing their drives past you now. Either way, it's apparent you and your current driver are headed for Splitsville. What to replace it with? We have a few suggestions.

1: TAYLORMADE M5

This driver is all about being fast, straight and long. Its "speed injected" ultra-thin titanium Twist Face helps you attain all three by maximizing ball speed and reducing sidespin. You can also tune the driver to one of 21,000 ball flight and launch settings to work best with your swing, by sliding two 10-gram weights along a track on the sole and adjusting loft. A revised, more flexible Hammerhead slot behind the face works in conjunction with it, to produce a larger sweet spot and preserve ball speed on off-center hits. \$550



3: TITLEIST TS2

This 460cc, shiny black model is built to help you pick up ball velocity and distance. Its "Speed Chassis" consists of an ultra-thin titanium cast crown that causes in discretionary weight to be shifted low and deep in the clubhead; a thin-and-fast clubface; streamlined aerodynamic shaping that significantly reduces drag so that you can boost clubhead speed for more distance; and optimized weight distribution that creates clubhead speed and stability. It has a fixed CG and high MOI, so it's ultra-forgiving. Score lines are laser-engraved on the face, to help frame the ball at address. \$499



5: HONMA TW747 460

With a nice, conservative appearance at address, this driver looks even better once you realize what it can do for your ball flight. It's constructed to generate plenty of ball speed at a high trajectory with low spin — a recipe for long shots and generous carry distance. You can adjust the center of gravity to your liking, as well as the lie angle. Officials claim the ribbed carbon crown is the world's thinnest and lightest. Internal fangs in four places right behind the face enhance rigidity around the perimeter and increase impact elasticity over the face for distance. \$599



2: PING G410 PLUS

When PING engineers designed this multi-material driver, they wanted it to be simple for you to adjust. Mission accomplished. An easy-to-use movable weight on the extreme rear of the head — with three clearly marked settings for draw, neutral and fade — lets you customize CG location and directional control, without sacrificing MOI or ball speed. That amounts to roughly a 20-yard left-to-right span. You can also adjust loft to eight positions via the hosel, for plus or minus 1.5 degrees of loft. This driver is geared for all skill levels. \$540



4: COBRA KING F9 SPEEDBACK

With sports car-style looks, this driver features an aerodynamic design that helps increase clubhead speed through impact. The combination of a low center of gravity, soft clubface-side edges around the crown, tall skirt, and low-and-deep titanium weights helps tee shots get airborne with ease. The carbon fiber crown wraps around the edges, saving discretionary weight that the manufacturer uses elsewhere to gain even more speed. You can adjust the included 2- and 14-gram weights to alter ball flight. And the loft is adjustable as well. \$449



6: CALLAWAY EPIC FLASH

The new Flash Face technology in the forged titanium clubface helps you maximize ball speed for more distance. Its underside has topography of varying thicknesses that bolsters impact and optimizes ball flight. You will see a notable power boost — especially when you make solid contact. The driver's Jailbreak technology allows the face to take on a larger impact load to promote ball speed and boost distance. Adjustable weighting lets you shape draws, fades or a straighter flight. \$530





More Than OK in BC

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S COURSES ARE SPECTACULAR,
AND THAT'S ONLY THE BEGINNING

By **George Fuller**

NICKLAUS NORTH HOLE 12

What would you get if you combined Napa Valley, the Rocky Mountains and Seattle, and added great golf courses throughout British Columbia (BC). The westernmost province in Canada has aspects of all those destinations and more. There are the wines of Okanagan Valley, the four-season charms of Whistler, the scenic Kootenay mountains, the cozy towns of Vancouver Island and the excitement of Vancouver.

As far as golf, SCORE Golf, Canada's leading national golf magazine, ranks 17 BC golf courses among Canada's Top 100, and 12 of them are available for public play.

Golf Digest named Whistler "Canada's number one golf destination," touting in particular **Big Sky GC** (Bob Cupp), **Nicklaus North GC** (Jack Nicklaus) and **Fairmont Chateau Whistler GC** (Robert Trent Jones II). Add in the top-drawer accommodations at the **Fairmont Chateau Whistler** — the International Golf Tour Operator's North American Golf Resort of the Year for 2018 — and unique resort experiences like

Scandinave Spa and a peak-to-peak gondola ride (of course Whistler is also a renowned ski destination in winter), and you've got the makings of a great British Columbia golf vacation.

On the drive from Vancouver to Whistler, we suggest you add a round at **Furry Creek GC** to experience BC's most scenic golf hole, No. 14, located right on the shore of Howe Sound.

Hop across the Strait of Georgia to the provincial capital of Victoria and you'll find **The Westin Bear Mountain Golf Resort & Spa**, offering 36 holes of awe-

some Nicklaus-designed golf, including the Mountain Course — one of the most fun and scenic you'll ever play. Add in a visit to Victoria's charming Inner Harbour or the Butchart Gardens to round out your Victoria golf vacation.

There's also the option of tackling the **Vancouver Island Golf Trail**, a collection of six courses complemented by small towns and great food and drink. FYI, Vancouver Island is renowned as a microbrewery haven.

In the eastern part of the province, you'll find what is af-

fectionately called the "Napa of the North," BC's Thompson Okanagan region, home to **Predator Ridge Golf Resort**, where two golf courses rank high in SCORE Golf's Top 100. There are dozens of wineries in the Okanagan region. **Talking Rock** has recently ranked No. 1 on the British Columbia Golf Charts as well, and it's well worth a stay at **Quaaout Lodge and Spa** for a unique indigenous experience.

Among BC's best-kept secrets are the golf experiences in the Kootenay Rockies, where you will find **Wildstone** from SCORE Golf's Top 100 list, and another must-play at **Trickle Creek**. Best stop for lunch? Pedal & Tap on Kimberley's Platzl. An hour further north is Copper Point — again one of British Columbia's best. Here, you can pair hot springs with golf swings in a glorious mountain setting. ■

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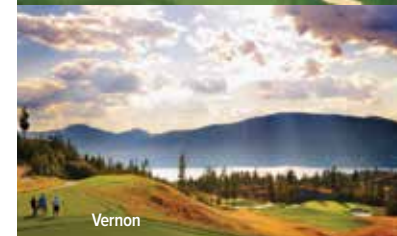
Whistler



Kamloops



Shuswap



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Kelowna



Kootenay Rockies



Northern BC

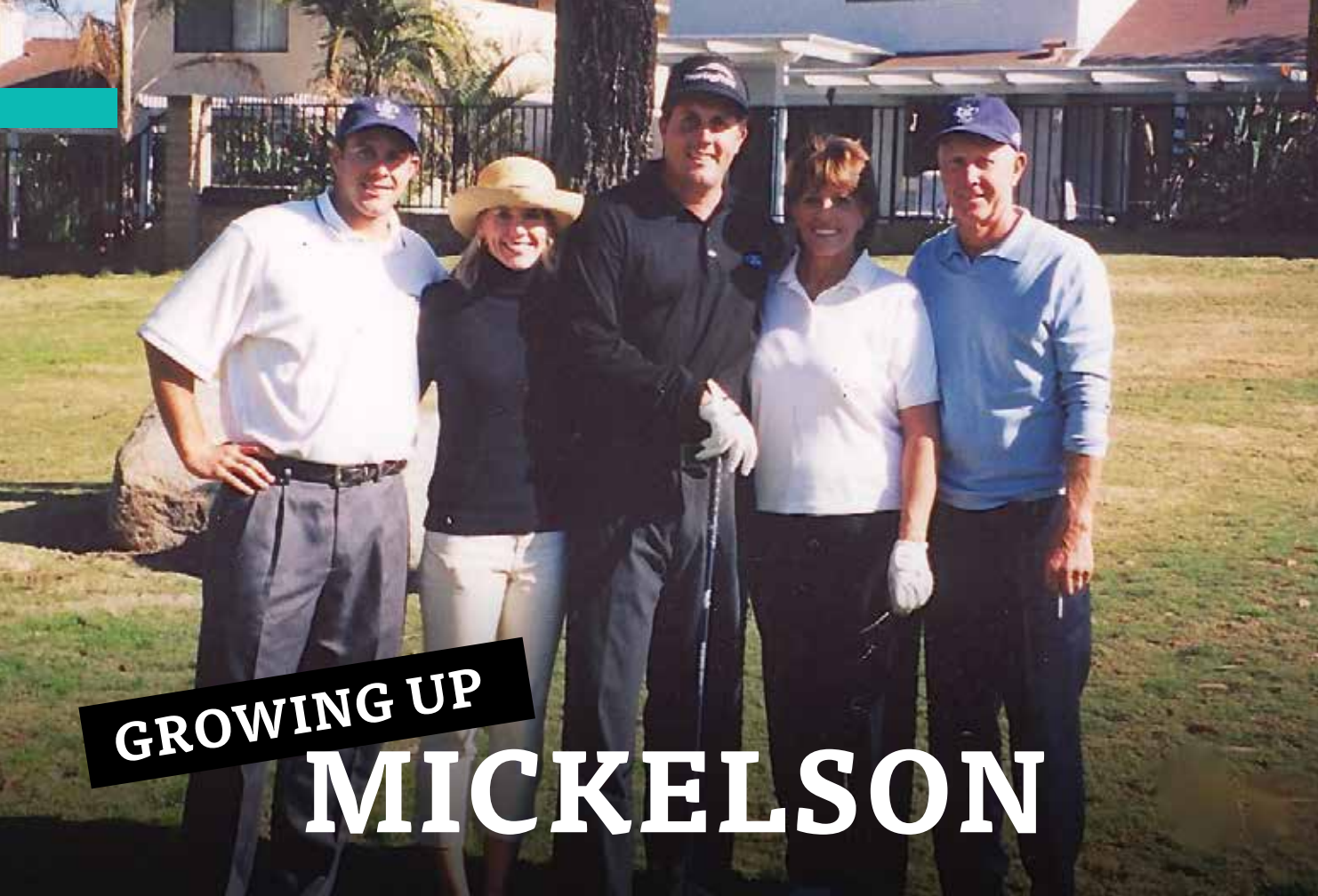


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GROWING UP MICKELSON

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By **Tina Mickelson**,
PGA, Santaluz Club and
Callaway Ambassador



With both Mother's Day and Father's Day upon us and golf season in full swing, I can't help but reflect on my appreciation for the things that have shaped our family the most: our parents and the game of golf.

People have always asked me what it was like to grow up in the Mickelson family, which usually meant, "What was it like to grow up with Phil for a brother?" But sometimes it also meant things like: What was it like to have a Naval pilot for a father?

Was it cool to have such a close Italian family? (Spoiler alert: not always!)

What comes to mind when thinking about our early years are things like: family dinners, a competitive nature, parents who supported us to be our best (as opposed to *pushing* us to be our best), and having reasonably strict rules that, truth be told, were necessary.

Family dinners usually consisted of Phil giving us a shot-by-shot synopsis of his entire round of golf that day while I played

with my peas and rolled my eyes. Back then, if I had known that he would grow up to have commentators clamoring for him to give them a shot-by-shot recount of his round then, well, then nothing. I was eight years old. I still wouldn't have cared. But I might have rolled my eyes less. Our youngest brother, Tim, was eight years younger than me, so during this time he was the cute, cuddly and awesomely perfect baby who simply sat at the table and made us laugh.

One of our biggest epiphanies came during one family dinner in particular. Phil and I were talking about our "great" shots from the day's round when my dad interrupted our chest-puffing and asked about our bad shots. We just thought that was hilarious, but he interrupted our cackling and explained that he was curious to hear our analysis of the bad shots. He wanted us to explain the corrections we made and why, appearing to be even more proud of us as we talked about our "failures."

Before we knew it, our focus had totally

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shifted and we realized that if you play it safe so that you never fail, you are limited in your learning. Failing is not something to be ashamed of, but something to be proud of when you get up and make adjustments. For an eight-year-old, that was mind-blowing.

GROWING UP playing junior golf in San Diego, I had a lot of friends whose parents would push them so hard they burned out before college. They forced their kids to practice for hours a day, got upset if they played poorly, etc. In my 10-year-old mind, this was surely child abuse. If one of my friends didn't play well, I pictured a cold dungeon, being forced to hit balls beyond midnight, with nostril-flaring parents yelling at every mis-hit or shank. In a child's mind, things seem bigger and scarier than they really are. There's a reason athletes with overbearing parents burn out at a young age. But the goal of our parents was to instill passion. "Find something you love, and we'll support you," was the deal. And they did.

Every time our dad would go to the golf course he would ask if anyone wanted to join him. If we wanted to go, that was great. But if we did not, that was OK too. I now have a true appreciation for just how patient my dad was when I look back at the many times I said, "I want to go!"

In reality, I would wear my gymnastics leotard and flip down the fairways. Sure, I would hit a 7-iron here and there, but the split leaps and back handsprings were my true reason for being there. He really meant it when he said, "I just want you guys to have fun on the golf course."

He knew that if we loved the game and had a passion for it, we would put in the hard work to get better. He was right.

Parents are as strict as they need to be, right? Well, I partly blame our parents for some of the shenanigans we got in trouble for because a lot of it was a result of the passion they helped instill in us.

And since Phil isn't here to defend himself, I'll use his mishaps to illustrate what I mean.

He was five years old, begging my parents to drive him to the golf course. The answer was a hard no, so he did the only logical thing he could think of: he had a meltdown. Everyone knows that the quickest way for a five-year-old to get what he or she wants is to show attitude.

Next, he grabbed his suitcase full of golf balls, his pee-wee clubs and his stuffed dog, Flopsy, and proceeded to "run away to go live at the golf course." Now, at five, he didn't exactly know how to get to the golf course, so he walked. And walked. And walked. Until a neighbor called my mom to inform her that Phil had passed by her house three times in the past 20 minutes and seemed a bit lost. My mom picked him up, and the scene (and punishment) you are probably picturing in your head is pretty much exactly what happened.

ANOTHER TIME, years later, we were hosting Thanksgiving and us kids had plenty of chores to do. I remember hearing Phil ask my mom to take him to the golf course. I thought he was crazy, but I didn't realize just how crazy he really was until he was nowhere to be found. Come to find out, he paid the neighbor (the one with a newly acquired driver's license) to take him. After all, Mom



CLOSE-KNIT CLAN: THE MICKELSON SIBLINGS, PHIL (FAR LEFT), TINA AND TIM ... IN A GOLF CART AS USUAL!

didn't specifically say he couldn't go. When you are a teenager, semantics can be your best friend.

Anyway, both parents drove out to Stardust CC, our home away from home. They jumped in a golf cart and made a beeline for Phil's group, which was, of course, about as far from the clubhouse as you could get. When he saw them coming, he casually put his clubs in his bag, told his group they were now a threesome, and walked toward the cart like it was the Green Mile. Again, I can safely guarantee that the scene and punishment you are envisioning in your head are pretty accurate.

But there is one thing Phil said to my parents in the car on the way home that did actually give them pause. And we all remember it to this day:

"If I am going to be the best in the world, I have to work harder and longer than anyone else. There are kids practicing today, right NOW, and if I'm not practicing, then other people are improving while I am not."




That is the kind of work ethic that was instilled by our parents by not pushing but instead supporting. Maybe not necessarily on Thanksgiving when we were about to have 20 people over to the house, but every other moment from then on.

I am thankful for these memories that are due in part to the game of golf and wish all of you mothers and fathers out there the very same magic in your own families. ■



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THE PRIDE OF SAN DIEGO

BALBOA PARK GOLF COURSE CELEBRATES ITS CENTENNIAL

By **Tod Leonard**



SLAMMIN' SAM SNEAD AND HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP JOE LOUIS CHILL DURING A ROUND AT BALBOA PARK GC.

In the months following the end of World War I, the people of San Diego were ready to relax and recreate again. The city, in turn, was set to deliver.

It was March 1919, and San Diego's first municipal golf course and the fourth overall in the county — a nine-hole, 2,700-yard layout of dirt fairways and oiled sand greens — was nearing completion on the edge of Balboa Park, just up the hill from downtown.

Designed by a local golf club professional, Frank Szarfinzky, the layout was known as the Golden Hill Golf Links, and it was built, according to an account in the *San Diego Evening Tribune*, at a cost of \$1,845.81.

The city had a problem, though. It was about half of that total short — \$907.81 to be exact — because it overestimated the initial demand for public golf subscriptions. Citizens were offered a \$5 subscription — war tax included — that would be good for a year of play, yet fewer than 200 bought in at that jaw-dropping steal of a price.

The warning went out: Join now or pay \$10 for the year. That, or resign yourself to digging into your pockets for 25 cents per round. A full century later, it is all rather laughable, of course.

Consider: In 2011, the golf division of San Diego's Parks and Recreation Department completed a renovation of the Balboa Park GC's irrigation system at a cost of \$4 million. And maybe 81 cents?

On April 5, 1919, the opening day of the course, there was nothing to water because the ground was scraped clean of everything but a few stray weeds. Well, almost. For years, the layout that would become Balboa Park was known, affectionately or otherwise, as the "rock pile" because of the stones that sometimes sent golf balls ricocheting into the nearby canyons.

Calling the new course "splendid" otherwise, *Evening Tribune* writer Hough D'Yudu wrote of his first round there: "Turf is not to be expected; there's mighty little of it among California links, but it is

reasonable to expect a roll in the direction a golfer hits his ball."

Those in the city were beating their chest that the new course was the finest on California's coast, though they likely hadn't been up north to see Pebble Beach, which opened in the same year.

San Diego golfers eventually turned out in great numbers, clogging the new course to the extent that, by the end of 1919, the city already had plans for nine more holes. Those opened less than a year later, creating a par-72 championship course at just over 6,000 yards.

It would be another 11 years until the city hired architect SCGA Hall of Famer William P. Bell to produce a nine-hole grass layout over much of the same land. That followed the commissioning of Bell — for \$1,000 — to design another grass 18 that opened in 1933, thus completing the 27-hole facility that exists today, though many alterations have been made through the years.

A clubhouse of Spanish architecture was built for \$300,000, thanks to a Depression-era unemployment relief fund. It still houses the diner Tobey's, founded by Chester Tobey, who was first awarded the food concession in 1941.

IN AN ASTONISHING AMOUNT of play by today's standards, handwritten city ledgers from the 1950s show that in the fiscal years of 1953 and '54, more than 200,000 rounds were played on the nine- and 18-hole courses combined.

"One of the sportiest municipal courses anywhere," concluded 11-time major winner Walter Hagen after playing Balboa.

Other famous golfers who have been instrumental in Balboa's history include Tiger Woods, Ernie Els and SCGA Hall of Famer Amy Alcott, all of whom won Junior World titles there. Phil Mickelson and his family have been regular players at the course for decades.

None of them came close to the spectacular 1943 round of Sam Snead, who



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OTHER FAMOUS GOLFERS WHO HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN BALBOA'S HISTORY INCLUDE TIGER WOODS, ERNIE ELS AND AND SCGA HALL OF FAMER AMY ALCOTT, ALL OF WHOM WON JUNIOR WORLD TITLES THERE.



saw as much time on golf courses as ships when he served in the Navy in San Diego. According to a firsthand account by Snead's frequent playing partner Art King, in a 1983 *San Diego Union* story, Snead was frustrated by losing \$16 to King in a morning round and challenged him to a rematch in the afternoon. Snead, who still is the record holder for PGA TOUR wins with 82, scorched the front nine with an 8-under 28 that included two eagles, and he made eight birdies total in setting a course record of 12-under 60 that hasn't been matched in the 76 years since.

BEFORE THE NEW sprinkler system — funded by proceeds from the 2008 U.S. Open at nearby Torrey Pines — was installed, Balboa Park fell into a period of rough conditions. Rounds plummeted from 140,000 for the 27 holes in 2006 to 88,000 by 2011. The better irrigation

significantly turned the courses' fortunes, and in fiscal year 2018 there were 104,000 rounds played at Balboa, the most in the past four years.

"It's been a dramatic turnaround," said Balboa Park men's club president Jeff Middlebrook of the conditions and the enthusiasm for the course. He noted that there are now 250 men's club members, up from half of that in 2008.

Residents holding a San Diego city golf card can walk the 18-hole course for \$32 on weekdays/\$40 weekends, while visitors are \$40/\$50. A half rental of an electric cart is \$15.

"The course is a hidden gem," Middlebrook said.

Hidden in plain sight, that is. It's five miles from San Diego's Lindbergh Field and in the flight path of most incoming planes, greeting visitors before they ever touch the ground. ■

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DONOR SPOTLIGHT:
PHIL FRENGS

By **Hailey Tucker**

Back in his youth, Phil Frengs wasn't the passionate golfer that he is now. In fact, it seemed unlikely that he would even take up the sport. Growing up in San Mateo, Frengs was introduced to the game by the most unlikely of sources while on his daily paper route as a wide-eyed 12-year-old — a retired Air Force veteran. Upon hearing the youngster wasn't a golfer, the friendly neighbor invited Frengs to join him at an upcoming golf clinic he was hosting. They bonded and Frengs was graciously gifted his first set of clubs. Fast-forward a few years, and Frengs is now one of SCGA Junior Golf Foundation's most dedicated supporters.

"After my life and experiences playing golf, I know that giving back to the game and to young people is the right thing to do," Frengs said.

Frengs was initially introduced to the Foundation by becoming a member of the scholarship committee — supporting the pursuit of higher education is something he feels especially strong about — but then he became a board member and, ultimately, president.

"Early on I recognized that as we grew,



our financial requirements would continue to grow and we needed a stable source of income to fulfill the promise of our scholarship to our students," Frengs said.

And thus was born the COPi Cup.

While he was trying to come up with ways to reach his goal of sustained income, a golf tournament was one of the first ideas and it stuck. The COPi Cup is an annual golf tournament hosted by Frengs at Pebble Beach and Spyglass Hill, where the main goal is to raise money for the scholarship program.

Over its seven-year history, the COPi Cup has increased its fundraising each year, with the 2019 total topping \$220,000, bringing the all-time total money raised to more than \$866,000 (Frengs plans to top \$1 million next year.) In addition to all the scholarships these funds have supported, it has created the COPi Cup Scholarship, an award given annually to a junior golfer who best exemplifies the characteristics that the COPi Cup stands for: competition, camaraderie and charity.

"The event is fantastic and the fact that it's grown every year is a testament to our participants," Frengs said. "It's heartwarming to see that many people participating in a cause that is so dear to my heart."

As someone who pulled himself up by the bootstraps and bettered his life, Frengs has realized that supporting a young person's education can make all the difference. The 2015 COPi Cup Scholar is Samantha Rocha. Set to graduate from Occidental College in May with a biology major and as a member of the golf team, Rocha says the scholarship has changed her life.

"Because of the COPi Cup Scholarship, I'll be able to graduate from college debt-free," Rocha said.

When Rocha was applying to colleges, she knew she wanted to attend Oxy. They were the ones recruiting

her to play golf and she had already visited the campus and loved it. The estimated cost of attendance was unsettling though, because at the time the Rochas were living on one income. After seeing his daughter miss out on the signing process, Alfredo, Samantha's father, decided that they would make it work one way or another. And then the scholarship came.

"A huge part of the burden would have fallen to Sam to cover the cost of college," Alfredo said. "But when we found out about the scholarship, I can't even tell you how excited and appreciative we were."

All SCGA Junior scholarships — including the COPi Cup Scholarship — are renewable, meaning that instead of a one-time gift, juniors can earn their scholarship all four years of college.

Making that impact is what keeps Frengs coming back. He loves golf, he loves supporting future generations and he loves being charitable, so SCGA Junior Golf Foundation is a perfect match. But he doesn't stop there. Frengs is also a supporter of the UCLA women's golf team, helping organize a charity tournament for their benefit every year. Through his company, Legistics, he also



SAMANTHA ROCHA

“
AFTER MY LIFE
AND EXPERIENCES
PLAYING GOLF,
I KNOW THAT
GIVING BACK TO
THE GAME AND TO
YOUNG PEOPLE IS
THE RIGHT THING
TO DO.”

— PHIL FRENGS

sponsors a race-car team, and started a foundation, Racing to End Alzheimer's, where family members can place the name of their loved ones battling the disease on the car and the proceeds are donated to Fund the Care at UCLA's Cognitive Health Clinic and Fund the Cure at the Nantz National Alzheimer Center at Houston Methodist Hospital.

"Phil has been such a dedicated supporter of ours. He has not only changed the trajectory of our scholarship program, but our entire Foundation," SCGA Junior Golf Foundation Executive Director Kevin Gigax said. "We're extremely lucky to have someone as supportive and enthusiastic about our cause as Phil."

Frengs and the SCGA Junior Golf Foundation know that this game can truly change a life. It opens doors both on and off the course, especially for youth who may not otherwise have access to the game. Taking an interest in a young person's future can make all the difference. And Frengs knows that firsthand. After all, that's what happened to him on that old San Mateo Times route. ■

For more information on Frengs' foundation, visit r2endalz.org

HANDICAP HINTS YOUR POTENTIAL ABILITY

WHY YOU DON'T
ALWAYS PLAY TO
YOUR HANDICAP

By **Kevin O'Connor**
Managing Director,
Member Services



The word “potential” feels upbeat in so many ways. We all have potential in relation to many things, including golf. Some consider their golf potential to be the brilliantly played, once-in-a-blue-moon, well-struck shot; while others think of their lowest score for a round. The USGA Handicap System™ has a slightly different vision in mind.

The standard measure of a golfer’s “potential ability” is the USGA Handicap Index®, which is a decimal number issued at each handicap revision. A Handicap Index is then converted to a Course Handicap™ to account for the course and tees being played that day. Some technical jargon sneaks in when we are told that this is the number of strokes needed to play down to the level of play for a scratch golfer, which happens to be the USGA Course Rating™.

Back to reality. Many golfers express concern about not playing to their handicap with any frequency. Maybe we aren’t all in tune that the goal is to subtract the Course Handicap from the score for the round and equaling or beating the USGA Course Rating. Maybe the focus is on par. More likely, it is just a general frustration that the handicap is too low and success doesn’t seem within grasp.

This is where the word potential sneaks back into the vernacular. The system is not built so that a golfer will play to his handicap with frequency because it is a measure of one’s “potential ability.” The USGA indicates that statistics suggest that a golfer should play to his handicap 20-25 percent of the time. Does that make anyone feel better?

For numerous reasons, including maximizing the possibility of equitable competition for a variety of formats, a golfer’s demonstrated ability is used. First of all, in the case of a full scoring record with 20 scores, only the 10 best handicap differentials (scores converted

to a value that considers the USGA Course Rating and Slope Rating so that they can be accurately compared) are used in the calculations.

If the best 50 percent of anything is used, one is not going to attain this level regularly. Additionally, there are a few other items that drive down the likelihood of playing to our handicap regularly: Equitable Stroke Control, which results in a maximum hole score to make handicaps more representative of a player’s demonstrated ability, and a percentage of 96, which is identified as a bonus for excellence to give incentive for a golfer to improve, etc.

Call it what you want (rigged!?), but a system that maximizes equitable competition and tries to reflect potential ability is one that results in golfers not playing to their handicaps very often. So, join the legions of frustrated golfers who believe that they should play to their handicap more often, yet remember that people like professional baseball players win awards for getting a base hit approximately one out of three times.

We all have potential; it is not our average and it is not necessarily our best. Just celebrate those rare occurrences when you play to your handicap. ■

P.S. With a World Handicap System coming in 2020, it is pretty much a guarantee that demonstrated ability will be at the forefront of that system. A collective heavy sigh is in order as we aspire to try to play to our handicap.

ILLUSTRATION BY KEVIN GILBERT

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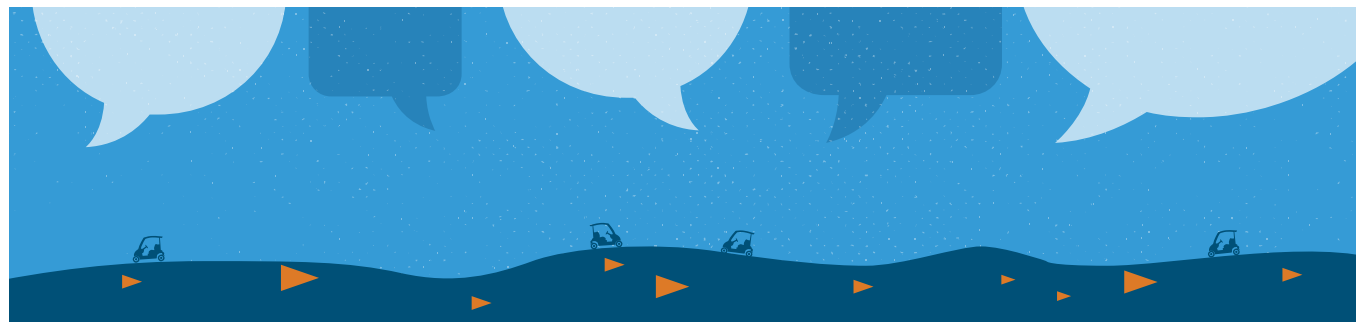


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IN THE CLUBHOUSE

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KNOW THE RULES

Rules Mailbag

By *The Rules Crew*

WE'RE A FEW MONTHS into the adoption of golf's new rules so, naturally, we've been fielding some inquiries from our members. In this issue of FORE, we opened the floor to you and you responded with a plethora of questions. We picked a handful, and had our in-house experts explain.

Q: If a playing partner of mine decides to play a shot onto the green while my ball is "at rest," and their shot is headed towards colliding with my ball, do I have to mark it as I am moving it or can I eyeball the spot upon replacement?
— John G., Coronado

Rules Crew: Yes, you would need to mark your ball before picking it up so you know where to put the ball back. Otherwise, you will incur a one-shot penalty.

Q: This past weekend, a player in our tournament marked his ball on the green. Being inside his competitor, he tapped down his marker and moved out of the way. When it came time for him to putt out, his marker was gone. He has a magnetic marker and it stuck to his putter as he tapped it down, then he walked away with it on the bottom of his putter. He replaced his marker to an estimated spot and took a 2-stroke penalty for playing a ball from the wrong place. Was this the correct ruling?
— Brian C., Valencia

RC: No! This is not a penalty to the player as he proceeded under Rule 13.1d(1) by replacing the marker in the correct spot. This hopefully was caught before he

turned in his scorecard, if not, he must keep the extra two.

Q: I have two questions regarding balls that travel out-of-bounds: (1) What if you hit a tee shot OB and cannot find your ball? Do you take a drop at the estimated location you went OB, with a 2-stroke penalty, i.e., hitting 4 after the drop? (2) Contrarily, what if you hit a tee shot out-of-bounds and you're able to find your ball?
— Susan C., Santee

RC: There has been a lot of confusion with this, but the rule in regards to OB has not changed. A player would have to go back to where they last played under penalty of stroke and distance (1 stroke, Rule 18.1). However, a club or committee can institute a local rule (under penalty of 2 strokes) as an alternative to stroke and distance for a lost ball or a ball out-of-bounds (Model Local Rule E-5 which can be found in the Official Guide to the Rules of Golf or can be found on the USGA Rules Hub). This option allows the player to drop in a large area between the point where the ball is estimated to have come to rest or gone out-of-bounds and the edge of the fairway of the hole being played that is not nearer the hole.

Q: If my ball comes to rest on a branch that fell in the fairway, can I move it? If my ball moves while I'm removing the branch, can I replace my ball without a stroke penalty?
— Tim C., Yucaipa

RC: Yes, you can move the loose impediment, but if the ball moves as a result of that, you have to replace the ball under penalty of one stroke. This applies everywhere on the golf course except the putting green, where there would be no penalty.

Q: At our club, we have bunkers with large, thick grass lips. Sometimes the ball will disappear into the lip. Usually, the ball is in the grass and it's not touching the ground (dirt). Is it considered an embedded ball?
— Ashley A., Palos Verdes Estates

RC: If you determine that your ball is below the level of the ground while it is in its own pitch mark, then the ball is in fact embedded. (See diagram below.)

Q: A player putts to the hole and the ball does not fully descend into the cup. The flagstick is stopping the ball from falling into the cup. The player lifts the flagstick, causing the ball to fall into the cup. Is a penalty assessed?
— Jon C., Studio City

RC: Rule 13.2c will guide us here. If any part of the ball is in the hole below the surface of the putting green, the ball is treated as holed even if the entire ball is not below the surface.

Q: I accidentally double hit a chip shot and the ball went into the hole! I was so excited, but my friend said I was penalized for hitting the ball more than once. Is this true?
— Carly A., Bakersfield

RC: Well, your friend did not read the new Rules as this is not true anymore! Under the old rules, the stroke would have counted with one penalty stroke added. Now, only the stroke counts and there is no penalty under Rule 10.1a since this was an accidental act.



For further information on the Rules modernization project, visit scga.org/rules-hub

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2.



3.



Starting in push-up position, with your core drawn in tight, there are three positions you will be performing:

- 1 Bring your right knee straight toward your chest.
- 2 With your right knee still tight to your chest, turn your knee to the left across your chest. At this point, make sure your rear end doesn't drop and you are not bending your elbows.
- 3 Lastly, kick your leg straight back behind you, while maintaining that same core and shoulder stability.

This is one rep on your right side. Try to complete 8–10 in a row without losing your posture. This exercise is great for core activation and stability in a rotary move. It is also great for shoulder stability, as well as creating more separation in your upper and lower body.

...



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PHOTOS BY JON ENCARNACION



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19TH HOLE

Ernie's at PGA WEST

IN WITH THE
IN CROWD

By **Matt McKay**

CALLING ERNIE'S A 19TH HOLE is a bit like calling Mt. Rushmore a carving. Sure, it is. But it's a pretty impressive one.

When one thinks of the typical 19th hole, it's easy to imagine a space with a comfy bar, a few tables and chairs upon which to add scores and settle bets, and a couple of flat-screen TVs. Ernie's has all these things, but its similarities with traditional 19th holes ends there.

Ernie's is situated at what's known as the PGA WEST Tournament Clubhouse in La Quinta, serving the Nicklaus Tournament Course, and the world-famous PGA WEST Stadium Course. In fact, save for the cart barn, a small real estate office and the locker rooms, Ernie's and the clubhouse's pro shop occupy a great majority of the facility's space.

Because it serves the PGA WEST community and the two upscale golf courses, the atmosphere in the clubhouse — and consequently Ernie's — is decidedly upscale, and simultaneously desert casual.

Yes, it caters to the public, but the "public" that tends to come around are golf connoisseurs, golf members or community members. Knowing its audience, Ernie's offers relaxed, desert-style sophistication, an appropriate way to cap off an extraordinary round of golf — or just another extraordinary day living in the Coachella Valley.

Ernie's features a granite-topped bar surrounded by high-top tables and inviting dining booths, all situated to take advantage of the sprawling view of the ninth and 18th holes of the Nicklaus Tournament Course through the wall of glass in back of the restaurant.

COME ONE, COME ALL:
ERNIE'S COMBINES
GOLF COURSE VIEWS,
TASTY FOOD AND DRINK
AND A DESERT-STYLE
SOPHISTICATION.

PHOTOS BY JON ENCARNACION

Beyond the glass is Ernie's Patio, offering an even closer view of the course. At night, on the patio, the blazing fire pits seem almost medieval, and the stars seem as close as the course.

The restaurant naturally transitions from a stylishly traditional 19th hole during the day to a quasi-steak house at night, and more than one foursome has decided to turn a couple of post-round beverages into a full-blown dinner. More often than not, golfers are the main customers during breakfast, lunch and early dinner, according to food and beverage director Flavio Ramirez, and the restaurant is set up to accommodate their needs. Among the most basic — the space offers seven flat-screen televisions, including two larger sets to handle the big events (read: golf tournaments), and the bar offers eight

beers on tap, including three local brews.

"When the afternoon turns into evening, there's a lot of beer flowing, quite a few martinis coming out, and it's a good combination of golfers coming off the course and people wanting to have a good time, either sitting around the bar or in the restaurant," Ramirez said. "The residents and members definitely come out at night; that's probably the majority of our covers at night. And of course, residents don't have to actually be members of PGA WEST to enjoy Ernie's. We're open to the public. So we get a good combination of residents and members, and just the regular public who are here for golf."

Ernie's executive chef Frank Shimazu, who's overseen the kitchen for the last five years, said the menu is configured accordingly. Breakfast items are designed to fortify golfers for the day ahead, the lunch menu offers traditional items such as burgers and sandwiches, and the evening menu features appetizers for post-round or pre-dinner, along with a complete range of dinner items.

Shimazu said some items are ever-popular, such as the fish and chips, tempura, and chicken pot pie. But if he had to select a signature item on the menu, Shimazu said it would be the Kobe beef burger or Kobe beef sliders.

"When I first got here, the Kobe beef items were on the menu, and they've made

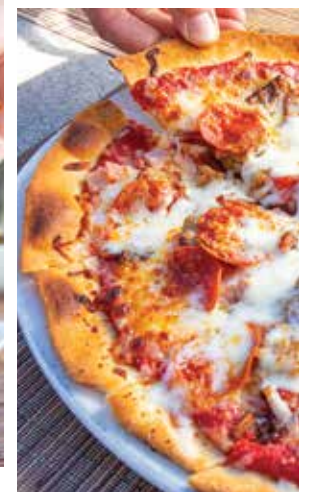
every menu since then. So that says a lot," Shimazu said. "They're definitely one of our best sellers during the daytime, and at night they sell great."

Ramirez knows there are some players who tee it up at the Stadium or Nicklaus courses and, upon concluding their round, immediately shoulder their bag and hoof it to the parking lot, forgoing the temptations and delights of Ernie's. But by skipping après-golf at Ernie's, Ramirez said those golfers haven't really maximized their PGA WEST experience.

"With some of the stuff that Chef has put together on the menu, and all of our best sellers, our signature Kobe burger ... I would say to them, yeah, they actually experienced Alcatraz, they experienced the Stadium Course, which is great, or the Nicklaus course, it's wonderful," Ramirez said. "But if they didn't stop by after and have a La Quinta IPA with the signature Kobe Burger, and take a look at what Ernie's is all about, they're missing out." ■



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CALIFORNIA'S
COACHELLA
VALLEY: AS UNIQUE
AS IT IS CENTRAL
TO THE GAME'S
HEALTH

By **Craig Kessler**
Director of Governmental Affairs

Sui generis — Latin for “a class unto itself.” *Desert* — there are lots of them in California, but only one when the subject is golf. Put them together and you have the Coachella Valley, the place where everything is different from everywhere else.

There is nowhere else where the golf economy is the chief driver of the local economy, nowhere else where so much of the region's water is dedicated to maintaining golf courses, nowhere else where such a small percentage of the population supports such a high concentration of golf courses, nowhere else where Mother Nature provides so little water from the sky, nowhere else where it takes so much irrigation to sustain turf, and nowhere else where the fortunes of the game affect the fortunes of so many.

In short, the greatest concentration of golf courses is located in one of the hemisphere's harshest deserts in a state beset by recurring droughts, a diminishing

snowpack, a contracting golf industry, and rapidly rising water, energy and labor costs.

Despite all of that, the Coachella Valley is home to only 3.9 percent fewer golf holes in 2019 than it was when the nation's markets were in free fall in 2008; water is still as plentiful and affordable as ever. Not exactly the story in the rest of California, where there are palpable pockets of decline and the price of water continues to escalate at many multiples of the Consumer Price Index; that is, when it's available.

WHAT GIVES?

The story of golf in the Coachella Valley parallels the story of golf in the United States,

except more so. From 1946 through 2005 there were more golf courses in the nation on December 31 of each and every year than there had been on January 1. Through wars, recessions, political crises, gas lines, stagflations and a whole host of dislocations, the game grew — faster during flush times to be sure, but it grew no matter what happened.

From 1944, when Tom O'Donnell organized O'Donnell GC as the Coachella Valley's first golf club, through 2005, the growth was even more explosive in the desert — from one to 126.

An economist might call that a situation screaming for a market correction. And when markets that haven't corrected for six decades start to correct, the correction can be steep. That hasn't been the case on the national level, where the correction has been more of a long one than a steep one. But in the Coachella Valley, the correction has been almost imperceptible. Yesterday's explosive growth has been replaced by stasis, and golf clubs and their companion HOAs have had to reconfigure some of their internal dynamics. But the kinds of closures and repurposes seen in places like North San Diego County and the Inland Empire have been absent.

An anomaly? Shouldn't the greatest concentration of golf in the nation be more affected by a market correction than areas with a much lower supply to population ratio?

All things being equal, the answer would be yes. But not all things are equal when it comes to the desert golf market. The truth is that those in the golf business understand that golf's fortunes have never been higher among two key demographics that practically define the desert golf market: persons between the ages of 55 and 74 and the affluent.

While golf has suffered among those under a certain age, the hard fact is that there are more golfers in the 55 to 74 age bracket today than there were in 2005 — considerably more according to most studies. And while golf has suffered among

those in the middle quintiles of the income population, it has continued to grow among those in the top 20 percent.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE?

Golf may consume only 0.73 percent of the potable water consumed in the State of California, but it uses 24 percent of the water consumed in the Coachella Valley. Given the need to bring the state's aquifers into balance and reduce overall water consumption, shouldn't that statistic be cause for alarm?

Again, all things being equal, the answer would be a resounding yes. But also again, not all things are equal in the Coachella Valley, which sports one of the deepest and richest aquifers in the world and has access to a very generous Colorado River allocation per the terms of various federal compacts. The access and cost squeeze that dominates all discussion of golf's sustainability virtually everywhere else in California just doesn't exist in the Coachella Valley.

However, there are two things already baked into the desert's cake guaranteed to inject a bit of what ails the rest of the state sometime in the 2020s: the full flowering of the regulatory scheme mandated by the 2014 Groundwater Sustainability Act, and reductions in Colorado River allocations made necessary by a drying Colorado River Basin that is already badly over-allocated.

The Coachella Valley golf community will continue to be a class unto itself no matter how much of what ails the rest of the state seeps into its environs, that much is certain. But as the rest of the state's ailments do creep in and today's 55- to 74-year-olds are replaced by a generation of 55- to 74-year-olds who don't play golf in the same numbers, what is not yet certain is whether the Coachella Valley golf community can use the unique advantages it now enjoys to translate today's stasis into a platform for tomorrow's growth. ■

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AROUND THE SOUTHLAND



ZOE CAMPOS

SoCal Women Make History at Augusta National Women's Amateur

This year, history at Augusta National was written before The Masters, as all eyes in the golf world turned to the first women's tournament played on the hallowed grounds. The inaugural Augusta National Women's Amateur captivated the golf world, and rightfully so, as the event was one for the books.

There were 25 countries represented in the field, but no region was more strongly represented than Southern California, which boasted seven women in the field, four of whom made the cut.

Leading the pack was 16-year-old **Zoe Campos**, who was one of the youngest players in the field, but didn't shy away from the bright lights. Campos was tied with eventual champion **Jennifer Kupcho** for the lead at the end of the first round before dropping back to finish in a tie for fifth place. A UCLA commit, Campos was also the runner-up in last summer's SCGA Women's Amateur Championship.



HALEY MOORE



ANDREA LEE

Just behind Campos was the University of Arizona's **Haley Moore** who tied for seventh, just 1 stroke behind Campos.

"I am blessed and grateful to be given this opportunity to play the sport that I love at Augusta National," Moore said. "I have cherished every moment from this week, and this is a big step up for women's golf. It just amazed me how many young girls were out there today watching us. My favorite moment of the tournament was hitting a shot to two feet on the par-3 16th with a lot of

people watching. It was so awesome to hear them roar."

Rounding out the Southern California women who made the cut were **Rose Zhang** (who tied for 17th) and two-time SCGA Women's Amateur Champion and current Stanford student **Andrea Lee** (who tied for 24th).

USC sophomore and SCGA Junior scholar **Alyaa Abdulghany**, Stanford commit **Brooke Seay** and Northwestern's **Stephanie Lau** were the three local women who competed during the first two days at Champions Retreat GC, only to fall just short of making the cut and playing the final day at Augusta National.

The Augusta National Women's Amateur was the highest-rated TV broadcast of a women's golf event since the 2016 U.S. Women's Open, and the highest-rated amateur golf event since the men's 2003 U.S. Amateur final round, according to *Golfweek*.

The event featured some of the top amateurs in the world, with 72 women competing over the course of two days at Champions Retreat GC, with the top 30 players advancing. Lee was one of 11 players competing for the final 10 spots after the second round in a sudden-death playoff. All participants played a practice round at Augusta, with the top 30 players competing in the final round.

10TH ANNUAL GOLF-A-THON

JUNE 8 | DON KNABE GC



■ Do you have what it takes to play 100 holes of golf — all in the name of supporting junior golf? Sign up for the **10th Annual Golf-A-Thon**, and you'll find out. Participants raise money for the Foundation by asking for pledges based on the projected number of holes played. Enjoy a day of community and golf while giving back to the game.

Play Alongside Top Junior Golfers

JULY 22 | COTO DE CAZA GRC

■ The **SCGA Junior Foundation Cup** on July 22, at Coto de Caza GRC, offers the unique opportunity to play alongside the Southland's top junior golfers. Each group of three golfers will be paired with a single-digit handicap junior in a tournament benefiting the Foundation. The event will also feature an auction with the opportunity to take home prizes that include rounds of golf at some of the most exclusive clubs in Southern California.



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AROUND THE SOUTHLAND

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On behalf of our partner, the SCPGA, we're asking for volunteers to dedicate their time in conducting local qualifiers. The juniors rely on the help of volunteers to make these competitions

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AROUND THE SOUTHLAND

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THE PODIUM

A MORAL PENALTY STROKE

THE PGA TOUR NEEDED TO STEP IN AND MAKE A BOLD STATEMENT ON THE SAUDI INTERNATIONAL



By Bill Dwyre

While all the screaming and hollering was going on from the beer-bloated stands of the 16th hole at the Waste Management Phoenix Open the first few days in February, there were lots of grinding teeth behind the scenes for those who manage the sport.

Actually, the “grinding teeth” is an assumption. If the powers that be who run pro golf in this country weren’t grinding their teeth, pacing and sweating a lot, they ought to be ashamed.

To be clear, this isn’t about the frat-boy show in the Phoenix suburb. Sure, they drink a lot of beer. Sure, they turn out in numbers usually reserved for NFL games. And sure, they test the boundaries of good taste and golf etiquette by booing the players, who are people used to being treated with kid gloves and overdone reverence.

No, the heavy cloud hanging over PGA TOUR officials, led by commissioner Jay Monahan, was forming on the other side of the world — in Saudi Arabia, which was playing host to its first-ever major tour event, a European Tour offering called the Saudi International. Sadly, in the U.S., while some columnists weighed in on the issue, much of the golf-spectating and fan world missed what was going on amidst all that noise in Arizona.

Namely, what was going on was that a gathering of top U.S. TOUR players — including the top three in the world plus a contingent that represented 12 major titles — were helping the Saudis put lipstick on a pig by playing in its golf event. It was held in King Abdullah Economic City and played on the Royal Greens G&CC. The name conjures up wealth. The country flaunts it.

According to our own CIA, Saudi Arabia’s leaders gave orders for thugs to

corner a *Washington Post* columnist in their embassy in Turkey on Oct. 2 of last year, killed him, butchered him, and denied it all. Jamal Khashoggi was a U.S. citizen who had written things that allegedly made the Saudi Crown Prince angry. So, he allegedly acted. In the U.S., you just call up the editor and threaten a lawsuit.

Against that background, and increasing international pressure to expose the Saudis for who and what they are, golfers named Justin Rose, Dustin Johnson, Patrick Reed, Henrik Stenson, Lee Westwood, Brooks Koepka, Bryson DeChambeau, Sergio Garcia and Ernie Els, among others, showed up to play golf.

They had a choice. They could have said no. By saying yes, they implied that Saudi Arabia was an OK place, that their presence was as normal as the place they were playing. Think of it as a sort of symbolic whitewash. More colorfully put was the characterization on The Golf Channel by commentator Brandel Chamblee.

“By their participation,” Chamblee said, “the players are ventriloquists for the abhorrent, reprehensible Saudi regime.”

If you think Chamblee was overstating, take a look at the champions of understatement — or non-statement — the big guys who run the PGA TOUR. They didn’t stop it. Monahan made some statement about the players being “independent contractors” and about his main concern being for “their safety.”

We can happily report here that nobody was dismembered.

The Saudis purchased this American public-relations high-five by paying huge appearance fees, reportedly totaling \$3.1 million, or just \$400,000 less than the total purse. The PGA TOUR doesn’t allow

appearance money, and correctly so. The European Tour does. There were reports that Tiger Woods had been offered \$3.5 million, the same size as the purse, to show up and play. To his credit, Tiger said no. So did Paul Casey, which is where the story found its most traction.

Casey, who stayed that extra day for the Monday playoff he lost to Phil Mickelson at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, wasn’t preachy or sanctimonious. When asked about it, Casey merely said he had decided to “take a pass on this one.” Casey is an ambassador for UNICEF (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund). His golf bag carries the UNICEF insignia. He practiced what he preached.

It is hard to tell players to turn down great gobs of cash, even though all these guys already have great gobs of cash. It is also hard to not want to sit down somebody as bright and learned as Justin Rose and explain how naive he sounds when he rolls out the old “sports and politics don’t mix” routine — tell Colin Kaepernick that — and says, “I’m not a politician. I’m a golfer.”

How about, “I’m a golfer and a human being.”

It is not hard to tell PGA TOUR officials that they screwed up, that they should have drawn a line in the sand and told these guys, in light of current world circumstances, that they can’t go. Independent contractors or not, the students can’t run the school and the paperboys can’t run the paper.

It was First Lady Nancy Reagan who best crystallized the simplicity of decision-making in the 1980s, when she started a war on drug usage with the slogan, “Just Say No.”

You can look it up, Jay Monahan. ■