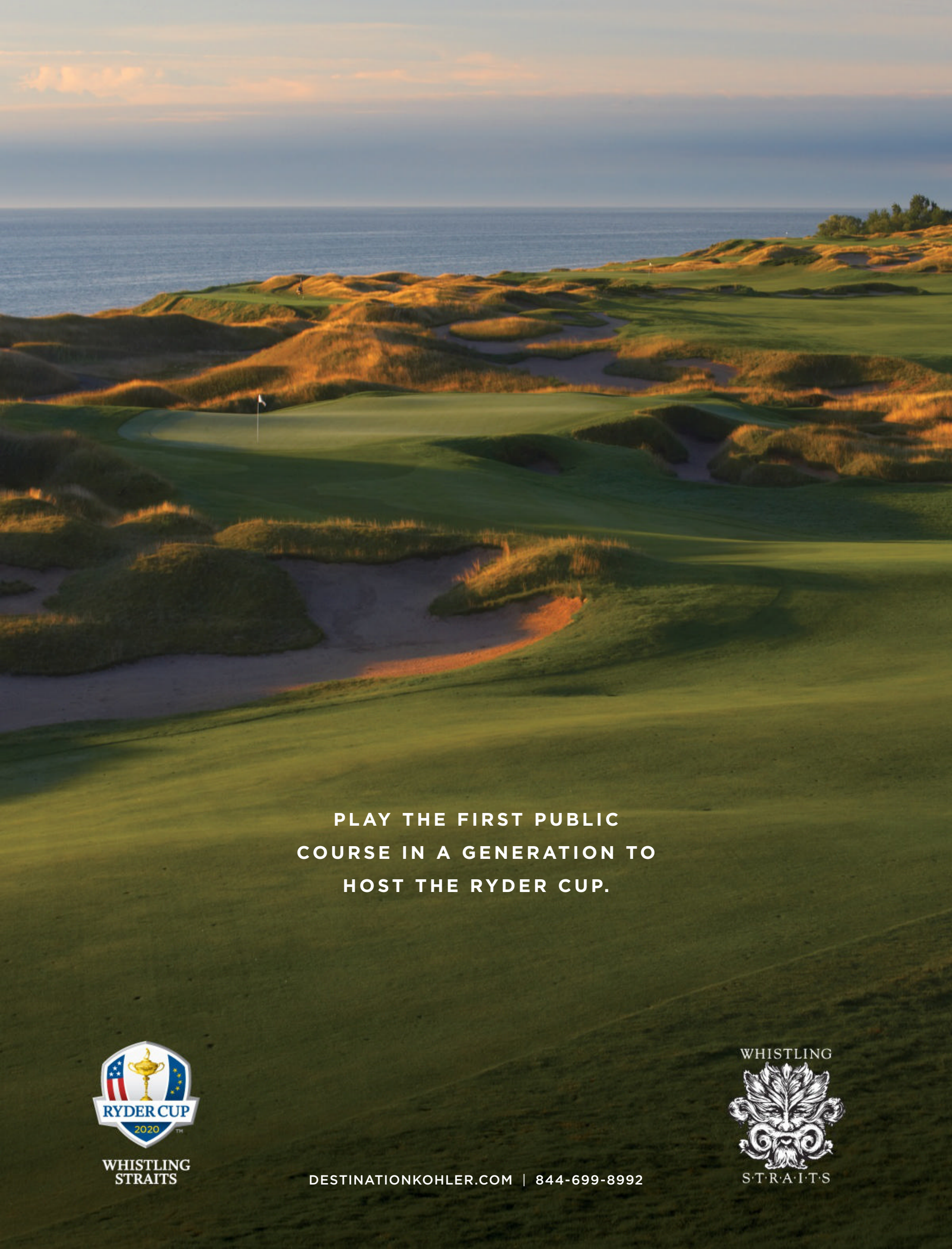

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A Return to Swearing

BY MAX ADLER

THE MASTERS marks the true start of golf season, particularly for those of us in the north. Just as the days grow perceptibly longer right after Christmas, images of Augusta let us see enough green and sun in our own back yards. I don't know what goes through your head in those first early-season rounds, but here's what goes through mine.

Not much. Pale forearms and shins confuse me as my own. I try to recall useful swing thoughts, but my head is as muddy as my lie. I can gather just enough dumb faith to pull the club back and watch the ball squirt off to places bad and worse.

"Sh__!"

In mid- or late-season form, even if I'm hitting it poorly, my commentary is more articulate. Mostly internal though sometimes aloud for the benefit of playing partners, after each shot there materializes within me a statement regarding approval, near-term strategic implication, mechanical diagnosis and/or a measure of *just how much* I hate myself.

Sometimes the dialogue runs all the way to the next shot. I don't always play with flair, but I can talk it.

Yes, in those spring rounds I can hear the wind whistling through my ears because I am Golf Dumb. The mystery of the game is renewed, but I can't formulate the questions. So with something like animal instinct, I bellow short expletives. Cows and pigs must experience similar waves of nonverbalized incredulity and disappointment.

Holding my finish at "w____," one lucid thought that does occur is, I have a fairly clean mouth in the off-season. Family dinners with my young kids and professional meetings with this editorial staff don't provide much opportunity for "potty talk," which maybe isn't all for the best. There's a ton of scientific research—*Swearing Is Good for You* by Emma Byrne and *What the F* by Benjamin Bergen are two such books—that get into the power of swearing to help us tolerate pain, create social trust and more. The historical evolution of cussing across cultures is fascinating. Just ask Nicolas Cage.

Most of us have encountered the golfer who can use the f-word as a noun, verb, gerund, adjective and adverb in one sentence without a reference to copulation. Swear words are plastic, and so their shock is a complex equation of not only what is said, but how, where, by whom and who hears it. Know thy audience. I have said no shortage of gross things in my life, but I cringe to think of times I have summoned the Lord's name, even if just to grant Him a middle initial, in the presence of a devout golf partner. I have called myself the r-word around a golfer who has a family member with special needs, and for that I'm ashamed.

About as bad as it gets (though it can always be worse) was Justin Thomas at the Sentry Tournament of Champions in January. Broadcast to millions before being scrubbed from the Internet, it was not a bundle of sticks that cost him a clothing endorsement. References to sex and body functions are one thing, but there's a line that's crossed when swears become slurs, regardless of intent.

Greg Fitzgerald, the head pro at The Institute in San Francisco, who is 46 and gay, was in Palm Springs, Calif., that weekend helping run a tournament called the Rainbow Rumble. Drawing golfers age 18 to 80 across the spectrum of LGBTQ, this joyous event took a turn at Thomas' hot mic.

"About half the people were angry; about half saw this as a positive learning opportunity for the world because Justin Thomas is a good person," says Fitzgerald, who knows this because he met Thomas in his rookie year. "That that word can still be in his vocabulary shows our society is in a transitional period. We're evolving. There's a new kind of straight man who's competitive, macho, but also educated and watches his words."

It's only in recent years that Fitzgerald has been fully out and relieved of the tortuous stress of a double life. Since boyhood, he has found in golf a peace like we all seek. "When we're playing, most of us are so into our own s___," Fitzgerald says. "People just need to be aware that what they say could ruin someone else's game, ruin their time."

As much as this game drives me nucking futs, this year I vow to be more mindful about my swearing.

Max

MAX@GOLFDIGEST.COM

Illustration by BloodBros.

MATT KUCHAR
PRO GOLFER

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TeeSheet

APRIL 2021 ISSUE 03

▸ **HISTORY SWINGS** With this Thursday tee shot in 1975, Lee Elder became the first Black man to compete in the Masters. **Photograph by Leonard Kamsler**

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Mostly Sunny

As he prepares for another historic first at the Masters—this time as an honorary starter—Lee Elder reflects on his extraordinary life.

BY TOD LEONARD

COVER PHOTO BY JENSEN LARSON; HUBLOT BIG BANG UNICO GOLF WATCH, $31,500; ADIDAS PRIMEKNIT POLO, $90.

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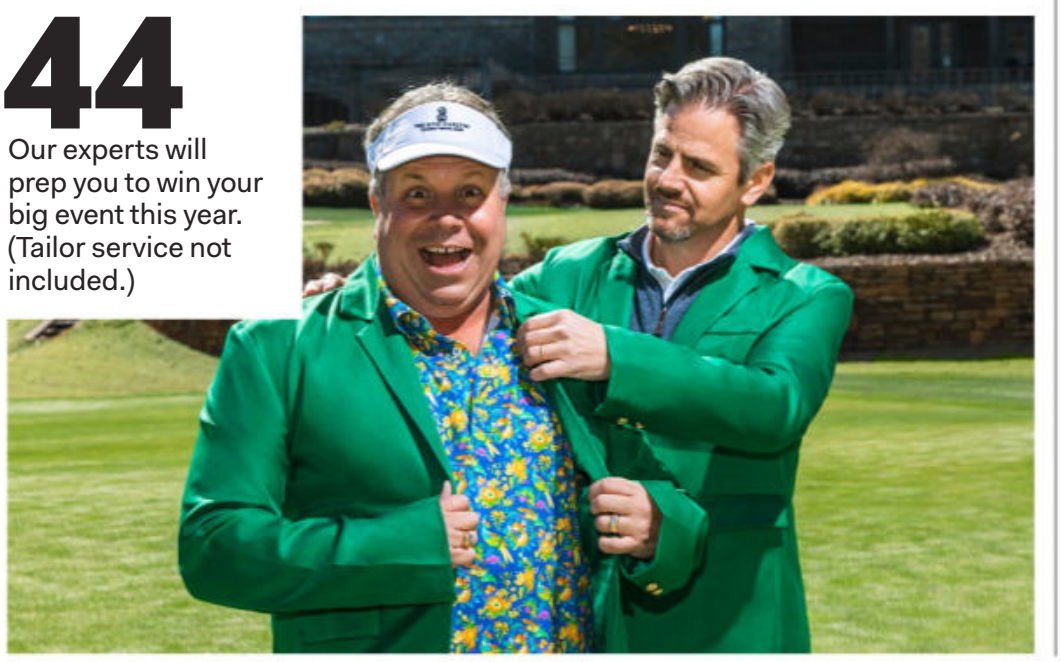
Our experts will prep you to win your big event this year. (Tailor service not included.)



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Undercover Caddie

Your player just won a major? Let the good times roll

THE RELATIONSHIP between a player and caddie is intricate, thrilling, messy, all over the emotional spectrum. It's basically marriage without sex. So winning a major is, well, as close as we get to having fun in the bedroom. ▸ A lot of caddies grew up as players. If you've held a club in your hand, at some point you've dreamed of putting on the green jacket or raising the claret jug. Though we're no longer the ones hitting the shots, those dreams remain. So when it comes to fruition, forget the money or the competition high; success is a validation of everything we've done to get to this moment. That is an experience you cannot buy. ▸ OK, we don't forget about the money. That's a pretty damn big part of this. The cut from the winner's purse is a nice six-figure payday that takes care of the mortgage for the foreseeable future. It also gets you 100 World Golf Ranking points, which should get you into the World Golf Championship events for two years. That's guaranteed good money. Last place at the WGC-Match Play, for instance, is $50,000 to the player. If your guy plays in three of the WGC events and doesn't mail it in, that's another $40,000 you can bank on. Provided the major wasn't a one-off—as in you have a few top 10s to go with that trophy—you're playing in the Tour Championship at East Lake, and as long as your player isn't a jackass, you're getting a piece of the FedEx Cup bonus pie.

The off-the-course dough is nice, too. Some of the engagements that come my way from connections I make at the pro-ams are amazing. Most are country-club outings or high school stags, which is an easy grand and a hell of a time. I've been asked to talk for universities, businesses and teams, with a number of sport psychologists reaching out to glean what they can about player-caddie synergy. Small confession: I once had a chat with a Canadian professor who wanted to know about the

'We still know where we are on the pecking order.'

"mind-set of a champion." Halfway through I realized he thought I was a player. I should have told him, but I once got food poisoning at the Canadian Open, so I considered it retribution. These gigs might not seem glamorous, but they pay well, and the pay adds up.

After winning a major, the player and caddie have a new schedule that brings perks in two ways. You're in every major, the Tournament of Champions, the aforementioned WGCs. If it matters, you're there. Better yet, now that your player is enshrined in that major glory, he's likely to take more time off than in years past—maybe three or four events off his calendar. That means more vacation for me.

A major win also brings a newfound respect from fellow caddies. They know you've been a part of something incredible, something they want to be a part of. How much respect you get depends on the relationship with your player. If a caddie takes over for a player who was already good, you give him a nod and a pat on the back. If a caddie takes a younger player or someone lost in the desert to the promised land, you kneel at that man's feet. One of our own who saw a big jump in esteem was Brennan Little, who won the Masters with Mike Weir and the U.S. Open with Gary Woodland, two different events with two vastly different players.

A final bonus is job security. Clearly things are humming with you and your guy, and the major likely brings another two years of goodwill. Should things go bad, well, that's OK, too, because you don't see many caddies with a major on their résumé looking for work for long.

It's not all strawberries and wine. When your player wins a major, that means more attention, more leeches trying to get in on the action. That can muddle your relationship with your player. There's also pressure to replicate that success. Personally, I love that feeling; I'm a competitive guy. But I've seen it break other caddies who let their guard down, thinking they had it made only to realize they were just getting started.

We still know where we are on the pecking order. I found that out over dinner with my guy and his apparel sponsor. We had been seated for 30 minutes, but it was a big group. I went to the bathroom. When I came back, I had to wait for another table to move a seat in. As I stood, an apparel exec gave me his drink order. Now anytime my player hits a bad shot, he'll mumble in my direction, "Hey, I could use a whiskey sour. Thanks." —WITH JOEL BEALL

JOEL@GOLFDIGEST.COM

Illustration by John Ritter

When you're ready for a golf getaway, South Carolina is ready with pleasant weather and a rich range of golf experiences. Tee off amid scenic marshlands or see how your game holds up amid the rolling hills of the Midlands and picturesque valleys of the Upstate.

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Harbour Town Golf Links

Caledonia Golf & Fish Club

Hickory Knob State Resort Park Golf Course

Cherokee Valley Golf Club

Sungjae Im

More than anything, I don't want to lose

I REMEMBER LOVING GOLF since I was little, growing up in South Korea, winning little games, how fun golf was. But more than anything, I hated losing. My parents played, and by age 4, I would mimic their swings with objects around the house. When I was 9, I was good enough to enter my first tournament. I had never broken 90 to that point, but that day I shot 77. I remember being super focused and nervous at the same time. The way those two feelings came together, it almost felt spiritual, and it resulted in a concentration I had never experienced before. After feeling that, I knew I could be a good player. I knew I wanted to play golf professionally. I never really thought about being anything else.

I played occasionally with my parents, but mostly with my coach and his friends. I kept improving and was named to the South Korean National team when I was 16. I received an exemption into one of the Japan Tour events, so I was able to play my first pro event there. I came back, gave up my national team spot and turned professional. I was 17.

That first season in Japan, it was a miracle that I kept my card. Mentally, I wasn't prepared for the pressure and the number of tournaments. I realized I had gone through that season without having any confidence in how I play golf. The next season, I chose to believe in my style of play—steadiness, consistency—and it worked. I finished in the top 15 on the money list, and that was enough to exempt me into the second stage of Q school.

I qualified for the 2018 Web.com [now Korn Ferry] Tour season, and it couldn't have started off better. The first tournament, I won, and the second tournament, I was runner-up. In just the first two events, I had secured my PGA Tour card. I set a new goal to try to be the money winner for the season—which would mean I could play all the events on the PGA Tour, except the majors. I achieved that as well.

I felt ready for the PGA Tour. Being able to practice with players I've admired was exciting and overwhelming. Tiger was the person I always wanted to see up close, see his swing, his ball flight. I was speechless the first time I saw him. He has such a great imagination, and he can hit any shot he wants. He plays with so much confidence. He has his own glow around him.

A few events into the 2019 season, I lost in a playoff at the Sanderson Farms Championship. I thought I had won before the tournament was over. I just lost my focus at the end. Sebastian Munoz drained a difficult putt to force a playoff, and I wasn't mentally prepared for that. When I had my next chance to win, at the Honda Classic, I didn't want to make that mistake again. This time I was sharp and focused until the end, mentally prepared for a playoff against Tommy Fleetwood. Luckily, we didn't have to go to a playoff, but I was ready for it had it come to that.

Unfortunately, I had to learn that lesson again at my first Masters, in 2020. My goal going in was to make it to the weekend. I had gained some necessary confidence by finishing 22nd at the U.S. Open at Winged Foot and was happy to make the weekend at Augusta. Playing in the final group with Dustin Johnson was thrilling.

I started off strong and got the lead down to one shot. There was a moment when I thought, *I could win the Masters today*. Immediately after that thought I made a couple of mistakes, and Dustin ran away with it. I was humbly reminded that you have to stay focused. You can't be greedy or try to predict what's going to happen. Once you think that, things will go the other way. It was hard learning that lesson again, but I'm 22. I know I'll have to keep learning. I'm still very proud of myself for finishing T-2.

I'm careful about the goals I set. I don't want to get ahead of myself—I've seen what can happen when I do that. But when I look at this season, I can't ignore that it's an Olympic year. As it sits right now, I will most likely make the team, but you never know until the end. It would be such an honor to represent my country, and so tremendous to win a medal, that it's honestly hard to even talk about.

Setting goals and playing tournaments isn't as simple as it was when I was 9. Back then it was mostly about balancing the nerves and focus. Now I have expectations, and I have to keep my confidence up. I try to balance those things by staying as humble as I can with the opportunities I have. But one thing has not changed: I still hate to lose.

—WITH KEELY LEVINS

Interviewed with help from Sungjae Im's translator and agent, Danny Oh

Photograph by Andrew Hetherington

SUNGJAE IM

PGA TOUR

AGE 22

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WHERE IT'S BEEN—AND WHERE IT'S GOING

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The correct answer? Bob Parsons, founder and CEO, PXG.

BOB PARSONS, FOUNDER AND CEO, PXG

PXG burst on the scene six years ago with sleek, high-performance clubs at eye-popping prices. Ever since, the company's been dancing to the beat of its own drum. Parsons, the bold and charismatic front man, proclaims, "Nobody Makes Golf Clubs the Way We Do. Period." In fact, the Marine Corps Vietnam War Veteran and GoDaddy.com founder often speaks of PXG being an experiential brand rather than a transactional one.

Which explains the company's distribution model — Direct-To-Consumer (DTC) — from the get-go. "Our only measure of success is performance, and the best way we know to ensure top performance for an individual is through a personalized, high-touch experience," Parsons said. As a result, PXG designs —and sells—only custom-built golf clubs (never pre-assembled, 'off-the-rack').

Specifically, PXG sells equipment through its website,

"PXG CLUBS ARE AMAZING AND EXPENSIVE. BUT WE WANT EVERYONE TO EXPERIENCE OUR KILLER PATENTED TECHNOLOGY."

by phone, and in-person via seven company-owned brick-and-mortar stores and at thousands of golf courses and academies served by full-time PXG Mobile Fitting Specialists. In addition, the sticks are available at high-end fitting shops (such as Club Champion and Cool Clubs).

However, consumers won't find the gear in off-course, big box stores. "Quite simply, we are not in that business," Parsons said. "We don't develop equipment to meet certain price points required by retailers and we don't prescribe to pre-set product release cycles. When a product is ready, we release it."

That's all well and good. Still, critics point out PXG clubs are cost prohibitive for many players. "It's no secret, PXG clubs are amazing and expensive. But we want everyone to experience our killer patented technology," he said. "So, we challenged our engineers to find a new way to deliver obscenely good performance at an unexpected price."

They delivered. Last month, the company unveiled its long-awaited 2021 0211 line of woods and irons at more affordable prices. Introductory DTC pricing for the driver is $249 ($359 MSRP at retail stores), while a set of eight irons runs $872 with steel or graphite shafts ($1,432 MSRP). Despite the lower price, 0211 clubs feature many of PXG's top-of-the-line technologies. The woods boast internal vibration-dampening discs along the sole, called "Honeycomb TPE Inserts," to improve sound and feel. There's also a hybrid-crown construction to save mass and stiffen the crown. Plus, a weight port in the sole that can be used to dial in swing weight and trajectory. The irons sport the company's proprietary "DualCOR System," originally developed for PXG's flagship GEN3 Irons. The dual-polymer core helps maximize ball speed, increase forgiveness on off-center impact, and create a pleasing sound and feel while supporting the ultra-thin clubface.

PXG's ability to serve more golfers with the competitively-priced 0211s doesn't mean the company is abandoning its base. Debuting next month, the prized flagship line, GEN4, will take its place at the high end of the market (Driver: $549; Set of eight irons: $2,792). Meanwhile, the company's legacy product, including its Proto Golf Clubs and GEN3 Irons will be offered at a compelling new mid-level price. With the new pricing strategy, PXG, for the first time, will have a product portfolio to suit players with vastly different budgets.

WITH THE NEW PRICING STRATEGY, PXG, FOR THE FIRST TIME, WILL HAVE A PRODUCT PORTFOLIO TO SUIT PLAYERS WITH VASTLY DIFFERENT BUDGETS.

In short, PXG is positioned better than at any time in its brief history. With a rich, deep product line that targets more golfers, the future appears bright for the maverick brand.

Play Fearless

How Collin Morikawa quiets his mind

BY RICK SESSINGHAUS

LAST JULY, Collin Morikawa wasn't feeling as confident as he normally does about his game. When I met him at Muirfield Village for the Workday Charity Open, he was coming off his first missed cut as a professional. Of course, we never expected him to make every single cut, but it was certainly a bit of a shock after he had made 22 in a row to start life on the PGA Tour. The week before, he had finished T-64 at the RBC Heritage. Those were the two worst finishes of his career to that point, and they happened in back-to-back weeks.

You can't swing freely if you're thinking defensively.

But he was not in the correct headspace to play his best. Besides the swing work we do, a big part of my coaching involves trying to get Collin in the right mental place to perform at his peak. In sports psychology terms, we call this the flow state—loosely defined as being wholly immersed in an activity with a sense of heightened focus.

The opposite of flow is fear, and the majority of amateur golfers play in a state of fear. When you play in a state of fear, your focus is not on what's in front of you—which is hitting the correct shot for the situation—it's on all the bad things that could happen. Instead of seeing a wide fairway with ample room for your fade, you see the out-of-bounds fence 50 yards to the right. Instead of remembering that perfect 8-iron you hit to kick-in range last week, you remember the one you duffed into the water last month. Think of this as playing defense rather than offense. It's nearly impossible to swing freely when you are playing defense.

This happens even to professionals, who are not immune from negative thoughts when they are struggling. Before the Workday, Collin was not comfortable with his ball-striking or putting. Worrying about mechanics prevents Collin, a feel-first creative player, from having the confidence he needs to play offensively and reach his flow state, so we set out to address his mechanical concerns with the goal of finding simple thoughts to focus on and turn his outlook around.

Collin primarily plays a cut, and he sometimes fights a tendency to over-cut the ball. It's usually an issue with his takeaway. To get back on track, we have him do a simple drill: He puts a golf glove under his left armpit and tries to keep it there throughout the backswing. It helps his arms stay connected to his body—when they get too far out, his path goes too far outside-to-in, leading to a wipey fade. During a range session on Wednesday before the Workday, he hit 10 or 12 balls doing this drill, and he loved the ball flight he was seeing. So we decided that, as part of his pre-shot routine that week, Collin would tuck his left sleeve under his armpit to remind himself of the glove drill.

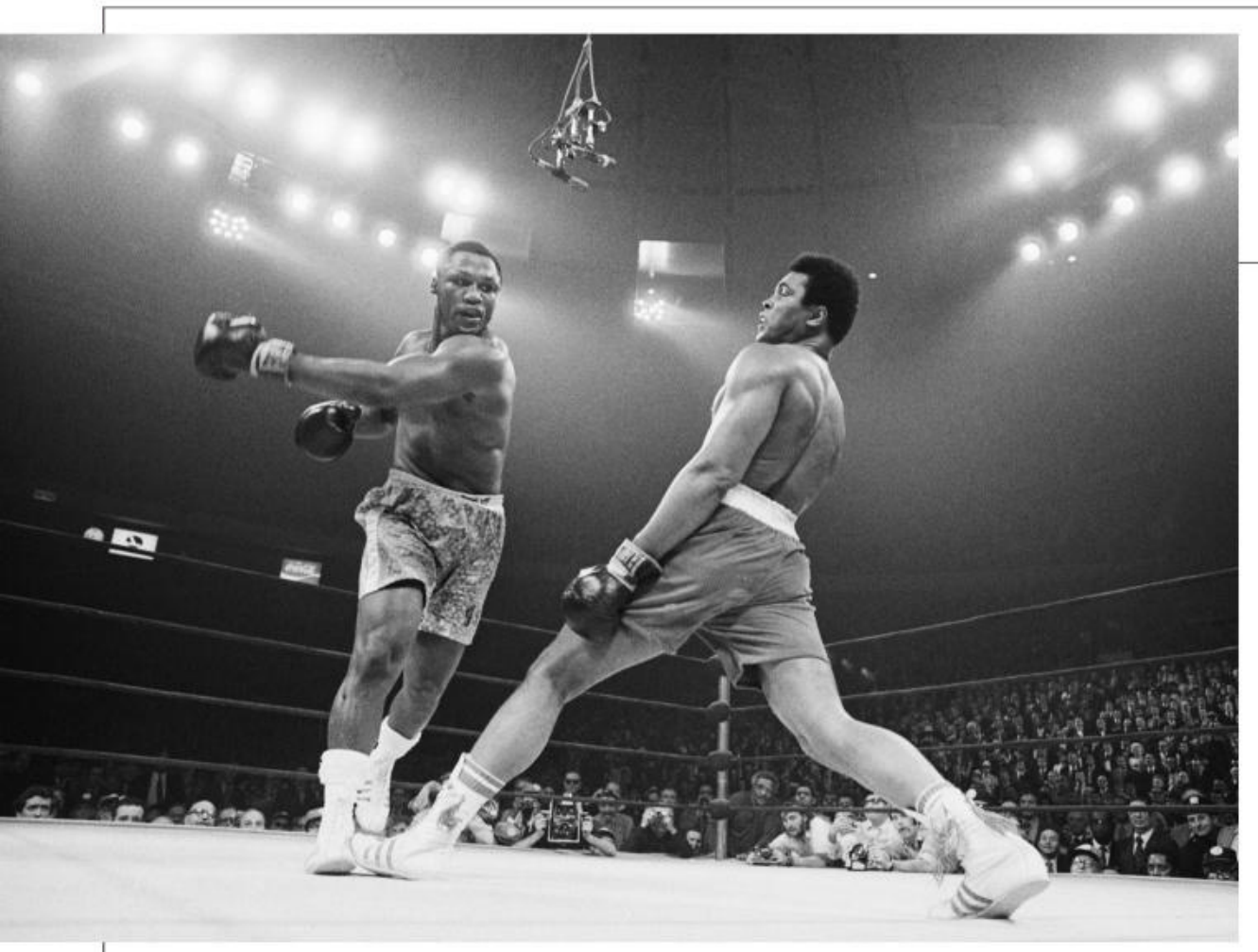
With putting, both his caddie, J.J. Jakovac, and I believed that Collin was spending too much time over the ball. It wasn't that he was having negative thoughts; he was just thinking too much—and that prevents him from being clear-headed and target-focused. We encouraged him to pull the trigger a bit quicker.

That was it—one tweak to his pre-shot routine and one tweak to his pre-putt routine, and Collin's negative thoughts dissipated. When we wrapped up our work on Wednesday, Collin said, "I'm excited for tomorrow." That's about as positive as it gets, and as a mental-game coach, there is nothing I like to hear more. Now confident in his mechanics and armed with clear, simple keys to focus on, Collin was freed up to attack the golf course with his creative flair. His mind-set that week was devoid of fear: to make as many birdies as possible. He got back to his flow state, made 24 birdies and two eagles over the four days, and beat Justin Thomas in a playoff for his second victory on the PGA Tour.

Collin wouldn't have been able to win that week without addressing the swing issue. He also wouldn't have been able to win without the mental shift that occurred on that practice range Wednesday afternoon. The lesson? Even if you are feeling down about your game, you are never far away from a quick turnaround. The key is finding a simple thought to anchor to—one that allows you to think positively and swing offensively. Then, all that's left to do is go make some birdies. —WITH DANIEL RAPAPORT

RICK SESSINGHAUS is the longtime swing coach for Collin Morikawa.

Illustration by Santino Calvo



▶ **SLIPPING THE PUNCH OF POLITICS**
Muhammad Ali dodges one from Joe Frazier.

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Playing Without Politics

Let's keep it civil this golf season

BY JERRY TARDE

GOLF AS REFUGE—my favorite subject. Now the challenge isn't a pandemic, but politics. As we return to our courses this spring, I'm concerned that the divisiveness in the country might spill over into golf. Do we simply check our politics at the clubhouse door and avoid all conversation about the news, or does the civility among golfing friends make us more open to seeing the good in those who hold an opposing point of view?

My ulterior motive is to find the best priest and rabbi joke that makes the point. So I went to Marc Gellman, the Long Island rabbi who—like most old golfers I know—retired to Florida, where there are no income taxes but plenty of tee times.

"Politics is ridiculous," he says to me. "Friendships are more precious than family because you get to choose your friends, but be realistic: Not everybody at the club is your friend."

Channeling "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," politics comes from the Greek word *politiká*, meaning affairs of the cities. Don't we play golf to escape those affairs? The nature of a golf club might be to associate with kindred spirits, but the kindredness is golf—not money or religion or political philosophy. Years ago I joined a place where the club president congratulated me by saying, "You're lucky you got in. You're the kind of guy who might invite Bill Clinton to the member-guest." I don't even know Bill Clinton, except I heard he put out feelers to join another club I belong to and, well, he never got in. The closest I've ever gotten to being political on the golf course was not letting George H.W. Bush, Dan Quayle and Nick Brady play through, but there was a group right in front of us.

How do you keep politics from ruining the golf? The rabbi says there are two answers, and the first is from a Muslim. He calls it the Lesson of Muhammad Ali—you slip the punch.

"Ali was not the hardest hitter, but he had the fastest twitch muscles of any heavyweight fighter," Gellman says. "Slipping" is a technique in which the boxer moves his head to either side so that the opponent's punch slips past. It was the basis of Ali's genius. (Only later in his career when he lost his speed did Ali resort to rope-a-doping—not a good technique at the golf club.) "When a golfer starts talking about politics, you slip the punch," says Gellman. "You say, 'How about those Mets?' Or, 'You should see this new wedge I got.' They'll get the message."

The second approach can be summed up in a single word: Lie. Gellman says it comes from the rabbinical teaching: "You must always say the bride is beautiful." Feel free to revise as "the groom is handsome." Lying is the only morally good thing to do in many instances. The Ten Commandments say nothing about lying. Bearing false witness is in there, but that's meant to address perjury in court. Lying is OK.

Gellman gives an example. A rabbi who shall remain nameless wants to join a club in, say, Boca Raton. His sponsor is a close friend of 40 years and a Trump hater. After a round they have a drink back at the house, and the sponsor announces, "I cannot keep as a friend anybody who voted for Trump." The rabbi takes a moment pondering his choices and replies, "I don't ever share my politics, conservative as I am, but even I could not vote for Trump." The moment passes and the lying rabbi becomes a member of the club.

Back to the priest and rabbi joke. Here it is: Pat and Maury have played golf together every Friday for 25 years. One week Maury says to Pat, "You and I talk B.S., golf, sports all the time, but we avoid our religions. Let me ask you seriously, Father, do you believe that Jesus did all those miracles, like the loaves and fishes?" Pat says, "Rabbi, I'm glad you brought it up. I've been meaning to ask if you really believe Moses parted the Red Sea?"

After a pause, Maury replies: "Pat, that was Moses."

Can golf be part of the solution? *Meh*, I don't think so.

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Jim Nantz

Reliving the loneliest Masters through my journal

FOR OVER 30 YEARS, I've been a journal keeper. Each night, I recount the day's events in a faux leather-bound executive planner. It contains all kinds of minutiae, such as details of a Dec. 10, 2005, visit to Byron Nelson at his ranch in Roanoke, Texas. On that day I noted, "Peggy served Byron's favorite lunch: A half a hot dog with pickle chips." I don't know where that might fit in a future memoir, but there it is. ▸ The 2020 Masters was unique in many ways. I could tell the story in a narrative form but thought my journal entries would be just as revealing. So here are some of my notes starting on the Friday before the Masters.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6

5 a.m. (Pacific Time). Zoom call with Dallas Cowboys' coach Mike McCarthy in the lead-up to the Cowboys-Steelers clash on Sunday.

7:30 a.m. Drove my youngest children, Finley and Jameson, to school in Monterey, Calif.

12 p.m. Departed the airport in Monterey to Dallas. American Airlines, nonstop.

5 p.m. Arrived in Dallas and drove straight to the Westin Hotel in Irving. Took COVID test upon arrival. Checked in to room 1440.

6 p.m. Walked to neighboring Blue Fish restaurant. Take out.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

2 p.m. The test came back negative. For recess, drove over to TPC Craig Ranch, site of the AT&T Byron Nelson. Want to be prepared for May broadcast at this new venue. Toured the course with Ronnie O'Brien, director of golf. Separate carts. Took a little over 90 minutes.

4:30 p.m. Zoom call with Mike Tomlin and Ben Roethlisberger from the Steelers, then a production call with CBS crew.

6:30 p.m. Another walk. Another takeout meal from Blue Fish. I love Texas.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8

9 a.m. This trip, which includes the Masters, was scheduled for 10 days. But with 20 weeks on the road mostly quarantining in my hotel to this point, loneliness is kicking in early. I'm missing my family and can't fathom the idea

Photograph of Abraham Ancer putting out on 18 by Ben Walton

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7 p.m.: Ducked out and went to TBonz for a takeout steak.

of another week without seeing them. Change travel plans. Decided to fly home to Pebble Beach immediately after Cowboys-Steelers.

3:25 p.m. Called the national doubleheader with Tony Romo. Game was a thriller. Steelers staged fourth-quarter comeback to win, 24-19. They're 8-0.

7:20 p.m. Departed Dallas. Arrived in Monterey at 9:30 p.m., home by 9:45 p.m. It will mean seven additional hours of flying time for just one day at home, but it's one of the best travel audibles I've ever called.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9

7:30 a.m. Drove kids to school. Took one-hour walk with my wife, Courtney, along 17 Mile Drive. Rode bikes and visited Pebble Beach horse stables with family in the afternoon.

5 p.m. Dinner with family outdoors at the relocated (temporarily) Tap Room at Pebble Beach. Wonderful. Chatted with players competing in the California Senior Amateur. All expressed surprise I was at Pebble Beach and not in Augusta.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

8:15 a.m. Flew to Augusta. Flight time is four hours, 42 minutes.

5 p.m. On way to hotel in North Augusta, S.C., got curbside takeout from TBonz Steakhouse. Took the COVID test at hotel. Can't leave hotel until test comes back negative tomorrow.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11

10 a.m. While awaiting test results, did three podcasts: Sports Illustrated's Jimmy Traina, followed by Shane Bacon, then Murph and Mac—my guys from KNBR in San Francisco.

11 a.m. Test results negative. Always a sigh of relief. I'm on for the Masters!

12:20 p.m. Arrived at CBS compound at Augusta National in time for 12:30 p.m. production meeting led by Lance Barrow, our coordinating producer. It's his last Masters. A legendary career.

6 p.m. Left Augusta National and drove up Washington Road beyond I-20. Hit the drive-through window at Chick-fil-A for dinner at hotel.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12

6:30 a.m. Arrived at CBS compound. Walked immediately over to the first tee to watch honorary starters Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player hit their tee shots at 7:02 a.m. My honorary-starter attendance streak remains unbroken since my first year in 1986.

7:15 a.m. On my way back to the compound, I stopped at the 10th tee and watched Sandy Lyle, Jimmy Walker and amateur Yuxin Lin tee off. Made small talk with golf writers Scott Michaux and Adam Schupak. Then I walked back to No. 1 and watched the opening drives of Andrew Landry, Larry Mize and Lukas Michel, the U.S. Mid-Amateur champion.

8:30 a.m. We're in a weather delay. It's pouring. Did a live report from Butler Cabin for "CBS This Morning."

1 p.m. Called the action for the ESPN broadcast, which went until 5:30 p.m. First round suspended because of darkness. When the telecast ended, I ran into Fred Couples, his girlfriend, Suzanne Hannemann, and Fred's coach, Paul Marchand. We're all old friends, and seeing them during these lonely times made my day.

7:30 p.m. Back to ANGC for the late-night CBS highlights show with Ian Baker-Finch. Hit Chick-fil-A again on way back to hotel.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13

7:30 a.m. The first round resumes, and I rejoin Scott Van Pelt and Curtis Strange and the ESPN team to call the action until 10:30 a.m.

1 p.m. Call the second round until play again is called because of darkness at 5:30 p.m.

7 p.m. Ducked out and went to TBonz for a takeout steak. Normally it's the hangout spot for caddies, players and patrons, and I can see it's still hopping inside. I'm aching to go in and join the party, but COVID protocol says "no." Had a nice visit with the owner and my friend Mark Cumins in the parking lot.

7:30 p.m. Enjoyed the meal back at Butler Cabin, then did the late-night update for CBS. Back at hotel at 9 for a good night's rest.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14

7:30 a.m. ESPN broadcast goes until 10:30 a.m. We then spend 30 minutes rehearsing for Sunday's green-jacket ceremony. CBS producer Tyler Jahn plays the role of the 2020 Masters champion. We guess and call Tyler "Dustin Johnson" throughout the rehearsal.

11:30 a.m. In August, I began collaborating with one of our brilliant creative minds, Gareth Hughes, for our opening tease that featured Kevin Hall, the 2004 Big 10 champion who has been deaf since childhood. Today, I lay down the voice track. Kevin, using sign language and through an interpreter, delivered an animated, moving piece that made for a remarkable TV moment. The theme: This Masters might not look or sound the same, but it's still the Masters.

1 p.m. Third-round coverage begins and runs until 5:30, later than planned. Dustin Johnson explodes with a 65 and finishes the day with a four-shot lead.

7 p.m. Back at the hotel I spend three hours with Tommy Spencer, CBS' longtime editorial consultant, masked and sitting at opposite ends of a long table. Extra planning for the Sunday broadcast.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15

8:30 a.m. Arrived at the CBS compound. The tournament is fully back on its regular schedule.

10 a.m. The final-round broadcast begins. Dustin Johnson shoots 268, a tournament-record 20 under par, to win by five. While I was on the air, I turned around to see Tiger Woods had arrived for the green-jacket ceremony at Butler Cabin early. He watched the feed of the final stretch while sitting just behind me. During the green-jacket ceremony, D.J. gets choked up talking about sharing the victory ride with brother Austin.

4:30 p.m. Board flight back to Monterey and home at Pebble Beach before 7 Pacific. Courtney, Finley and Jameson are at the airport waiting to greet me. I take a moment to savor the good fortune of being at another Masters, for being safe and most of all, for being together.

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2021 MASTERS PREVIEW

Five months after he ate up Augusta, Dustin Johnson, golf's Zen master, is hungry for more

come & get it

By DANIEL RAPAPORT

Photographs by
JENSEN LARSON PHOTOGRAPHY

You see Dustin Johnson coming from a mile away. His shoulders slice through the air, rhythmically bobbing side to side, almost a shimmy. The arms flop with blissful disregard while his head stays completely still in a bubble of tranquility. The word "walk" doesn't do it justice; it's more aerodynamic. "Strut" comes to mind, but that word implies performance, and DJ does not care who is watching.

He is an imposing figure—all of 6-foot-4, sinewy and lithe, full beard, pinch of dip. When the golf world is blessed with such an athlete, there's a compulsive desire to place him in another sport. *He looks like an NFL linebacker. Got a torso like a swimmer.* Johnson, however, has the perfect body for golf. These extraordinary physical gifts are a huge reason why he is No. 1 in the world, the reigning Masters champion and the game's alpha male. Yet, as Johnson glides into his late 30s, it has become clear that what goes on between his ears—or, more importantly, what does not—might be his greatest strength. "His attitude is the best in the game," says his coach, Claude Harmon III. "Other than Jack and Tiger, you can make an argument that he has the best mind in the history of golf."

'SLY LIKE A FOX'

The conventional wisdom on Dustin Johnson, 36, goes something like this: He doesn't say much, so he must not be very intelligent. When asked at last year's Masters about his favorite Augusta National tradition, Johnson deadpanned: "the sandwiches." Not the green jacket, not the honorary starters, but the sandwiches. Was that the best he could come up with, or did he know what he was doing? In a zeitgeist when so many smart people seem eager to prove how smart they are, the challenge is to decouple those two qualities—to avoid mistaking silence for vacuousness. Yes, it's true that Johnson doesn't share much with the media. No, that is not by accident.

"We say that D.J. is sly like a fox," says Butch Harmon, who began working with Johnson in 2009 before handing off that responsibility to his son in recent years. "If you listen to his interviews, he doesn't give you much—a lot of yes or no answers. That's done on purpose so that he doesn't have to do a lot of interviews. He's smart that way."

The Harmons are not the only ones in awe of D.J.'s vibe. After playing with Johnson for the first two rounds of the 2020 Masters, which Johnson would go on to win by five, Rory McIlroy described D.J.'s approach as, "See ball, hit ball. See putt, hole putt, go to the next." It was a heartfelt compliment, perhaps with a hint of envy. Some players stand on the first tee at Augusta National and see trees left, a bunker right and future headlines racing through their heads. Johnson sees a welcoming canvas for his power fade—nothing more. "I try not to overcomplicate stuff—shots," Johnson says. "Obviously, I've played enough golf; I understand the game very well."

Therein lies Johnson's genius—a preternatural ability to remove narrative from the equation and focus on what he can control. Perhaps the adage "golf is a thinking man's game" needs an update given new insights into the brain and what peak mental performance looks like.

"I have spent my life teaching people to not think, as crazy as that sounds," says Dr. Bob Rotella, the legendary sport psychologist. "Too many thoughts, especially in golf, can be paralyzing. Dustin has a wonderful ability to be very interested in what he's doing but to underreact to everything. He never panics. Nothing seems to bother him."

Athletes pay people like Dr. Rotella to help them quiet their minds in the most pressure-packed moments—to hone the process rather than the outcome. The process is within one's control, the outcome not so much. It's possible to play well and shoot a bad score, but few golfers are able to reconcile that paradox. D.J. is one of the lucky few.

"When he hits one in the water or out-of-bounds," says Claude, "I'll ask him afterward if he wants to go hit balls, and he'll say, 'Nah, not really, I'm good. Didn't really hit it that bad today.' He'll shoot over par and say, 'I made one bad swing today. But I also made a lot of good swings.' Most players, they're all caught up in their score, in the bad things. Dustin is able to remove that from his thinking."

Johnson does not get advice from a sport psychologist, yet he might be the best embodiment of what they preach. He does not read self-help books. Nor does he read much at all, especially not since sons Tatum, 6, and River, 3, were born. He does not practice mindfulness—at least not consciously. "I probably do my own kind of meditation, without even knowing," he says. "I've never really thought about what I do. I just do it. I'm pretty good at doing that."

This Zen appears to be a D.J. thing rather than a Johnson thing—at least according to his younger brother, Austin, who has been Dustin's caddie since 2013. "I don't know where it comes from," Austin says, "because I didn't catch


TaylorMade

on to whatever he caught on to. He's been that way for as long as I can remember, in life and in golf."

Most caddies double as on-course psychologists, or at least sounding boards for when their players want to vent. An integral part of the job is knowing when to step in with words of encouragement and when to give your player a kick in the butt. Austin's job—looping for a man who named his boat Just Chillin'—is a little simpler in that way.

"Very rarely, if ever, do I have to say stuff like that," Austin says. "We're talking once or twice a year. He does more of that for me than I do for him."

D.J. has a wonderful ability to underreact to everything. He never panics.

'I'M JUST SENDING IT, BRO'

The Zen has been there since Johnson was a kid, but becoming an all-timer requires more than a good golf swing and a chill aura. There is raw talent, and then there is refined greatness. Johnson's jaw-dropping potential was clear as soon as he arrived on tour as a soul-patched 23-year-old out of Coastal Carolina—the swing speed, the touch around the greens and the why-not attitude. But the tour has a knack for exposing players' shortcomings, and Johnson's was volatility. He played a draw on almost every shot, which led to a violent left miss in pressure moments, and his "strategy"—if you could call it that—bordered on reckless.

"He was a free-wheeler," says Butch Harmon. "As he used to say, on every hole, 'I'm just sending it, bro.' He didn't take anything into consideration other than being totally aggressive on every shot."

At the 2010 PGA Championship at Whistling Straits, Butch and Johnson butted heads in a telling back and forth. Johnson was starting his week on 10, a drivable par 4 with a devilish green. Harmon knew Johnson could drive the putting surface and knew damn sure he would want to, but he pleaded with his then-26-year-old student to lay up and attack from the fairway because driving the green would almost certainly result in a three-putt.

Bro, I'm sending it, and I'm driving the green.

"Sure enough, he drives it on the front and three-putts," Butch says. "That was D.J. back then."

Johnson would miss a playoff that week after being penalized for grounding his club in a bunker on the 72nd hole. He was so impossibly talented that he could compete, and win, despite himself. Johnson won six tournaments in his first five years on tour and had great chances to win multiple majors: at Whistling Straits; earlier that year at the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach, where he had a three-shot lead heading into Sunday only to implode and shoot 82; and at the 2011 Open Championship, where he push-sliced a 2-iron out-of-bounds to quash his chase of Darren Clarke.

By nearly anyone's standards, it was a phenomenal start to a professional golf career. But Johnson is not anyone, and those close to him sensed he was underachieving. Around that time, in 2013, he started dating Paulina Gretzky, the daughter of a man who did not underachieve.

"What we've given him as a family is the belief that he can be successful every week," says Wayne Gretzky. "What we've given him is a belief that one win a year, for a guy of your ability, is OK—but you can do way better than that."

Something needed to change if Johnson was going to realize his potential, and the mid-2010s proved to be a transformative period that molded Johnson into the polished player he is today. First, Paulina and the Gretzkys came into his life. Then, while she was pregnant with their first son in 2014, he took a leave of absence from the tour to seek professional help for "personal challenges."

"I've obviously been through about every situation you could possibly throw at me," he says. "So there ain't nothin'—it's going to be very hard to rattle me."

After returning in 2015, he had his best chance yet to finally win the big one. After two perfect shots into the par-5 finishing hole at Chambers Bay, Johnson stood over a 12-footer for eagle to win the U.S. Open. Sixty-two surreal seconds later he tapped in for par, and Jordan Spieth had won his second straight major. There was fear, at least from the outside, that Johnson might never recover. He had now had four majors in his grasp and blown all of them. The heartbreak was piling up, and this, a three-putt from 12 feet in front of the world, was the most crushing blow of all. After the defeat, Paulina, Austin, Austin's then-girlfriend/now-wife Samantha and longtime agent David Winkle rode silently as Johnson drove the courtesy SUV back to the rental house. No one knew what to say; the entire team had been punched in the gut. Winkle gave D.J. a love tap on the shoulder to let him know everything was going to be OK. Johnson had had enough of the touchy-feely stuff. He pulled just off the road and turned to his inner circle with a firm message: "Lighten up! Guys, it's just golf."

The next day, Johnson flew to the Gretzky summer home at Coeur d'Alene in Idaho. He teed it up with Wayne and crew 21 days in a row and did not speak of that three-putt once. Nothing that Johnson could do would change what happened—so why give it an ounce of thought?

"That'd be like me losing Game 7, then going the next two weeks and playing pickup hockey with my buddies every day," Gretzky says. "It's unheard of. I knew he would get over Chambers because he just loves the game that much."

The turning point came that December, when Johnson was testing new TaylorMade woods on the range of Sherwood Country Club in Southern California. He and Butch had been working to develop a fade off the tee, but Johnson wasn't yet comfortable taking it from the range to the course. But when he couldn't keep his drives on the planet ahead of a round one day with his old hook, he decided he would give it a try. "Think I shot 61 or something," he says. "I'm like, *All right*." Next day, Johnson hit a cut every swing. Shot 62. The next day he faded every one again and shot another 62 or 61. Three days in a row. "I was like, *All right, I'm playing a fade.*" It was literally that simple.

For most tour players, a significant change would be

“When he’s on, he’s the closest thing to Tiger Woods we’ve seen.”

—BUTCH HARMON

considered only after extensive launch-monitor testing, a coach’s input, an equipment tweak and a review from both houses of Congress. As such, perhaps no anecdote better illustrates the delightfully uncluttered nature of D.J.’s mind than this switch. He was 31, squarely in his prime, the No. 8 player in the world, the winner of nine PGA Tour events—and all that came with the draw he had played his entire life. Then, one day on the range before a casual round with the boys, with nary a launch monitor nor an instructor in sight, he decided he would switch to a cut. He has been a fader ever since. It was that simple.

FULFILLING A DREAM

Using a fade that limited his misses but didn’t cost him yards (he has been in the top 10 in driving distance every year he has been on tour), course-management discipline and a precise wedge game, Johnson made the leap from ultra-talented underachiever to one of the best players of his generation. The major breakthrough came one year after the Chambers calamity, at the 2016 U.S. Open at Oakmont, where he handled a messy final-round rules situation (and an eventual one-shot penalty) with characteristic aplomb. Again: Can’t control it, so why worry?

“I liken him to a cornerback in the NFL,” Butch says. “Gets beat plenty of times, but always straps it up and goes to the next play.”

The wins piled up during the next three years. Johnson reached No. 1 in the world for the first time in Febrary 2017 at age 32, something of a late bloomer in an age of 20-something phenoms. The one-win-a-year cadence hastened to three or four a year. The funny thing about winning a lot, though, is that people start to care only about the results in the four majors. Despite more close calls—a blown 54-hole lead at the 2018 U.S. Open, runner-up finishes at the 2019 Masters and the 2019 PGA Championship—Johnson had yet to add a second major to his growing trophy mantle. That was the narrative: extraordinary talent, great player, wins a lot, only one major. The couch shrinks had their theories: He tries too hard on Sundays, or he doesn’t try hard enough. Plays too aggressive, or not aggressive enough. Can’t close. The man himself, for what it’s worth, never cared a lick.

“I care about what my friends and family think about me, I do,” Johnson says. “But people I don’t know—I don’t form an opinion about someone I don’t know because I don’t know them. Why do they think they have the right to have an opinion on me when they don’t know me? You can ask anyone who knows me—their opinion about me is going to be a lot different than what random people think.

“One thing I don’t care about is what the media says. I couldn’t care less. Truly.”

The major-curse talk peaked after the 2020 PGA Championship at TPC Harding Park, where Johnson played his way into another 54-hole major lead. Remarkably, this came less than a month after shooting 80-80 at the Memorial and pulling out of the 3M Championship after a first-round 78. “Golf is about having a long memory of the good things and a short memory of the bad,” Rotella says. “Dustin truly understands that.”

This time, at least, Johnson couldn’t blame himself for another major disappointment, shooting 68 that day at Harding Park only to be leapfrogged by a 64 from Collin Morikawa, 23, who was playing just his second major.

More scar tissue? Please. Two weeks later, Johnson shot a second-round 60 and a four-day total of 30 under par to win The Northern Trust. That field featured the top 25 players in the world, and the runner-up finished 11 strokes back. Yes, the near misses are part of Johnson’s legacy, but so are weeks like those when he makes this most complicated game look astonishingly easy.

“Golf IQ-wise, he’s a genius,” Butch says. “You combine that with the physical—when he’s on, he’s the closest thing to Tiger Woods we’ve seen. If he’s on and everybody else is on, he’s going to win. The only difference is, Tiger Woods was on for 20 years.”

Two weeks after his Northern Trust tour de force, Johnson won his first FedEx Cup title and entered the one-off November Masters as a clear favorite. Taking advantage of a gentler Augusta National, he played the first three rounds in 16 under par to earn his fifth 54-hole lead at major. He had gone 0-4 previously, but this time he had his biggest lead yet: four shots, setting the scene for a collapse or a coronation. When he chunked a chip into a bunker on the second hole, the Twitter fingers sprang into action. It was happening again. Surely nightmares of majors past were tormenting his thoughts. How could they not be?

“The only thing I was thinking, *I can’t believe I just chunked that chip.* And that was it. Honestly, I knew I was playing well.” He played his last 13 holes in five under to shoot 68 and finish at 20 under—breaking the 72-hole tournament scoring record (held by Jordan Spieth and Tiger Woods) by two. “He was very aware that winning the Masters was an opportunity for him to change the narrative, which in life, you rarely get an opportunity to do,” Claude says. “You’re put in a hole, and you can’t get out of it. He knew if he won that, the narrative changes.”

Maybe that’s why Johnson succumbed to emotion on the 18th green. It was a jarring scene, like seeing your dad cry for the first time—you didn’t know he was capable of it. But if there ever were a time to activate the tear ducts, this was it—a victory in the biggest golf tournament in the world, an hour’s drive from where he grew up across the South Carolina border, and after so many close calls. Maybe he was thinking of all that as he struggled to find words—of Pebble and Whistling and Harding, of his maturation, of his children and his legacy. Or maybe it wasn’t that complicated.

“As a kid, dreaming about winning the Masters—to do it, I thought that was pretty f_____ cool.”

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DUSTIN JOHNSON

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DUSTIN JOHNSON HAS BEEN among the PGA Tour's elite since his first full season in 2008. A victory in every year of his career is testament to that. But closer inspection of his game reveals that D.J. has gotten better in recent years—a lot better—because of his ability to fade the ball, a consensus of experts say.

"Dustin can make the ball do whatever he wants, but the reality is, he almost exclusively plays a fade," says his coach, Claude Harmon III, citing Johnson's perennial top-10 presence in the PGA Tour's strokes gained/tee-to-green stat as evidence that shaping the ball left to right has helped him win majors and become the top player in the world.

Adds Johnson, "I used to draw it all the time, but about six years ago, I had a stretch where I couldn't keep the ball on the planet. So one day I said, I'm only playing a cut today—and I shot 61. Next day, hit a cut, shot 62. Next day I shoot another 61 or 62. I was like, OK, I'm always playing a fade. I found that my misses got tighter and I wasn't losing any distance."

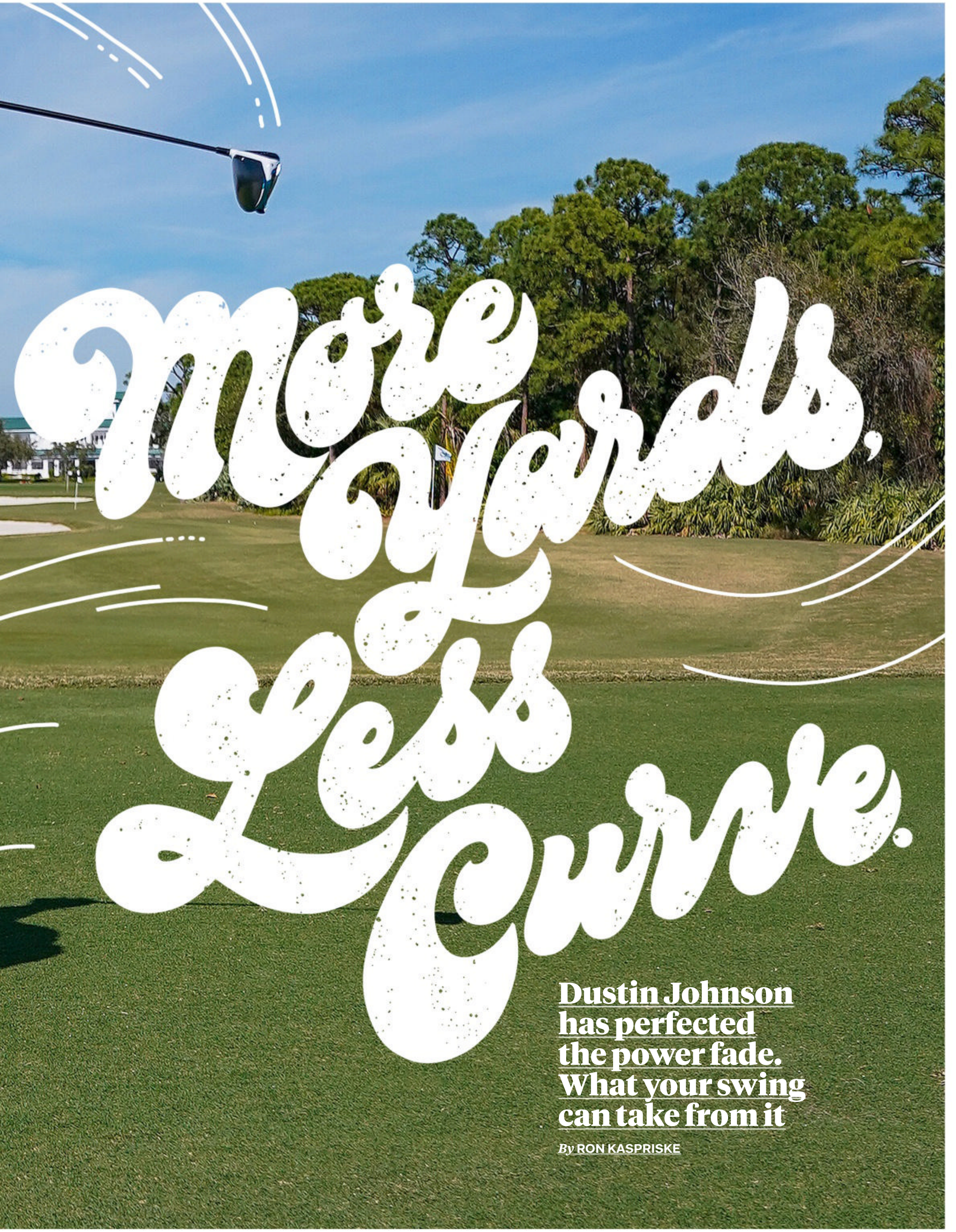
Setting distance gains aside for a moment, what if you could turn a weak slice into a reliable fade? What if your misses were just off the fairway instead of in deep rough? What if you could borrow from Johnson's swing? How much better would you be?

"If slicers copied a handful of things Dustin does, their ball-striking would improve a lot," says instructor David Leadbetter. "Dustin is a gifted athlete, he could probably bowl a 200 left-handed. You might not think copying his swing is realistic, but there are many facets of it that aren't too difficult to employ. And the reality is, the closer you can get to copying those things, the closer you will get to controlling your ball flight."

We asked Harmon, Leadbetter and fellow instructor Jim McLean to identify parts of Johnson's swing that would turn a slice into a reliable fade for the average player. There are several, they said, and if you copy them, you'll get more than just better accuracy.

"If your ball curves less, it's probably going to travel farther up the fairway," McLean says. "Combined with contact closer to the center of the clubface, that means more distance without swinging harder."

Turn the page to learn more.



More Yards, Less Curve.

Dustin Johnson has perfected the power fade. What your swing can take from it

By RON KASPRISKE

CHECK THE ALIGNMENT OF YOUR FEET *AND* YOUR SHOULDERS

It's sometimes indiscernible, but Johnson typically sets up aligned slightly left—or open— in relation to the target line (*right*). That alters his swing just enough to keep the clubface a little open in relation to his swing path at impact, and that's what makes the ball fade. Unfortunately, an open face also can produce a wicked slice if you don't adjust your stance. "It's fine to have the feet a bit open, but you need closed shoulders to cool off that severe, out-to-in swing path that's causing a slice," Harmon says. "The average right-handed slicer swings on a path 10 degrees left of the target line. D.J. swings 5 degrees left. If you could cut your left swing path in half, you'd be OK."

GET OFF TO A WIDE START

Most slicers limit body rotation as they take the club back, which narrows the arc of their swing. Johnson turns away from the target with his arms and body moving in unison (*left*), which keeps his swing arc wide—poised to deliver a more powerful and reliable downswing. "This is something any golfer can copy," McLean says. "His body motion in the takeaway is perfect." If his swing arc were to narrow, like it does in an amateur swing, he would have to regain its original width during the downswing or he'd mis-hit it. He also wouldn't be able to consistently generate good power without staying wide, McLean says.

MAKE SURE YOUR LEAD WRIST DOESN'T CUP

Slicers get to the top of the backswing with a cupped lead wrist, causing the clubface to open. Johnson's clubface is shut at the top (*left*), meaning he doesn't have to alter anything about it in the downswing to avoid a slice. "Note his bowed left wrist—that's key to his power fade because it's what keeps his clubface from opening," Leadbetter says. "Hitting the ball with a square or shut clubface is going to feel really solid, especially to slicers who are used to hitting the ball with a glancing blow. And when the closed clubface at impact makes them miss the fairway to the left instead of to the right, they'll then intuitively start improving their swing path to straighten out their ball flight."

MOVE MORE VERTICALLY INTO THE BALL

Johnson's right shoulder drops as it rotates toward the target and his right elbow tucks into his side in the downswing (*below*). "If you look at a slicer's swing, the right shoulder is moving out, not down, and the elbow is away from the body," Leadbetter says. The closer you come to copying the look of Johnson's downswing, the more you will limit the outside-in swing path that's causing the big slice. You'll also keep the club in position to accelerate through the impact zone. "Slicers are often decelerating as they approach the ball, which is a real distance killer," Leadbetter says.

DON'T TRY TO CURVE IT, JUST HIT IT HARDER

"Your goal should be less about how much the ball is curving and more about how solidly you hit it," Harmon says. "D.J. compresses the ball and produces a lot of ball speed, but his ball curves a lot more than you'd think—and that's OK if you pick a specific start line left of the target so the ball ends up where you want it." You might not be able to hit it as hard as Johnson (*below*), but any improvement in solidness of contact will start to transform a weak slice into a power fade, Harmon says.

FULLY EXTEND YOUR ARMS AND CLUB THROUGH IMPACT

"You need full extension through the ball. That's a difference maker for power," McLean says. The radius typically narrows in a slicer's swing, resulting in the classic chicken-wing look of the lead arm around impact. If you have maximum extension through the hitting area (*below*), your drives will straighten, and you'll pick up yardage at your current swing speed, McLean says. To get a feel for extension, hold a club upside down and swing it, trying to make a swooshing noise as it passes over the ground. Re-create that noise when you hit shots, and you're swinging more like D.J.

What's in My Bag

Dustin Johnson

AGE 36
LIVES
Jupiter, Fla.
STORY
Winner of 24 PGA Tour events, including the 2020 Masters and the 2016 U.S. Open.
FAST LEARNER
Johnson was mostly self-taught in his younger days, watching the swings of other golfers at Weed Hill Driving Range in Columbia, S.C., and then applying what he saw to his game. His father, Scott, was a club pro, and took Johnson to the range when he was 6.

"He had a swing with rhythm and tempo, and he could hit the fool out of the ball," facility teaching pro Jimmy Koosa told Golf Digest in 2015.

—WITH E. MICHAEL JOHNSON

CLUB	YARDS*
DRIVER	310
3-WOOD	285
7-WOOD	260
3-IRON	245
4-IRON	235
5-IRON	220
6-IRON	205
7-IRON	190
8-IRON	175
9-IRON	160
PW	145
54° WEDGE	125
60° WEDGE	105

* CARRY DISTANCE

DRIVER

SPECS TaylorMade SIM2, 10.5°, Fujikura Ventus Black proto 6X shaft, 45.75 inches.

▸ **I sometimes switch drivers for no other reason than a change of pace, but the new SIM2 will be my gamer. It takes me time to make a change because I like to see a lot of loft, but the head needs to sit square. If I don't see enough loft, I instinctively hang back to try and get the ball up in the air.**

FAIRWAY WOODS

SPECS TaylorMade SIM Max, 16°, Project X HZRDUS Black 95 shaft; TaylorMade SIM Max, 20°, Project X HZRDUS Smoke Black 100 shaft.

▸ **My 3-wood and 7-wood each go a specific distance. I want my 3-wood to consistently go in that 285-yard range. The 7-wood gives me a little more ammunition to bring one in high and soft on the greens from about 260 yards out.**

IRONS

SPECS TaylorMade P730 (3-PW), True Temper Dynamic Gold X100 shafts, soft stepped, Golf Pride Tour Velvet 58R grips.

▸ **The workability of a blade is what I like in these. A cavity-back is usually harder to move. I tend to hit them low and to the right because the blade length is longer, and that throws my release off. I hit my blade irons higher and straighter.**

WEDGES

SPECS TaylorMade Milled Grind 2 (54°, 60°), KBS Tour 120S Black shafts.

▸ **The rust might have you think I keep wedges a long time, but I actually change my 60-degree every few events. The soles are milled so that they stay consistent from wedge to wedge. I can switch in the middle of a tournament, and it doesn't bother me.**

PUTTER

SPECS TaylorMade Itsy Bitsy Spider, 35.75 inches, 2.5° loft, SuperStroke Traxion Pistol GT 1.0 grip.

▸ **I'll tinker a little, but I don't really like to change putters. I might put mine in a time out for a couple of rounds, but I've putted with the same black Spider for the past five or six years. It works well with my stroke.**

THE BIG SWITCH
▸ I like the new TaylorMade TP5x and how it feels coming off the putter. I start testing around the green then work down the bag toward the longer clubs to test the spin rates.

I LOVE MY 60S
▸ Quarters that are from the 1960s are about the only thing I always have in the bag that's a little different. I keep any quarter I find from the 1960s. They're a good reminder of the scores I'm trying to get to.

SIGNATURE STICKS
▸ Making sure my alignment at address is correct is so important. I have these two alignment sticks with me all the time to help me with that. These also happen to have my name on them.


SIM2
TITANIUM
SIM
MAX
TaylorMade
10.5
13
3
15
7
DJ PROTO
5
6
7
8
9
PW
52
60

2021
MASTERS
PREVIEW

WIN YOUR GREEN JACKET

FOLLOW OUR 3-WEEK, GET-READY PLAN TO LEARN HOW TO PRACTICE, PLAY AND PEAK FOR YOUR BIGGEST EVENT OF THE YEAR

By MICHAEL BREED AND DR. ARA SUPPIAH WITH PETER MORRICE

Opening photograph by ANDREW HETHERINGTON

WEEK 1

RANGE ONLY, SWING BASICS, HOOKS + SLICES, WHAT TO EAT

IRON PLAY
CHECK YOUR CONTACT

For starters, we have to make sure you're hitting the ball solidly, which means controlling the low point of the swing. What's the low point? It's where the clubhead hits the ground, and with every club except the driver, that point should come just past the ball.

The key is the trail arm (the right arm for righties). On the downswing, the trail arm is straightening (*right*), but you don't want it to fully extend until after the strike. If it straightens before impact, the low point moves back, and you hit the ball fat or thin. That's why so many amateurs struggle to make consistent contact.

This week, practice hitting iron shots focusing on your trail arm staying bent and then straightening past the ball. You're going to love hitting it flush.

DR. ARA SAYS

NUTRITION Keep your energy up

It's so important to find out what you can eat to stay energized without spiking your blood sugar. Check the nutrition label on snacks you like. Do the math. Add up the protein, fiber and fat content. If that sum is more than the total carbohydrates, it's a good snack.

DRIVING

MAKE A BIGGER TURN

When you're hitting driver, you need to make a big motion. Most people think about turning the lead shoulder to make a full backswing, but I want you to try something different: Focus on rotating your trail shoulder behind your head (*above*). Turning the trail shoulder pulls the whole upper body into action.

Grab two alignment sticks, place one on your target line and hold the other across your shoulders, with each hand on the opposite shoulder. Practice turning back by pushing your trail shoulder behind you with your lead hand. I bet you can turn 90 degrees in relation to the stick on the ground. Do that, and you've got all the power you need. Hit drivers on the range with one thought: *trail shoulder back*.

DR. ARA SAYS

HYDRATION
Calculate your intake

Studies show if you're 2 percent dehydrated, your athletic performance drops 10 percent! First, weigh yourself, and then create a plan to drink half of your weight (in ounces) of water every day. Make it a habit: Set an alarm, even mark "water holes" on your scorecard, like Nos. 3, 7, 12 and 16.

BALL FLIGHT

EXPERIMENT WITH CURVES

One of the basic skills in golf is curving the ball—on command. If you practice hitting big curves, you'll start to understand how to tone them down. Most importantly, you'll figure out which shape is more natural and controllable for you. So head back to the practice tee to hit some more drivers.

Curve starts with the clubface. To hit draws, take your grip with your trail hand coming onto the club from a low angle by your trail leg (*above, left*). This will seat the grip more in the palm, which promotes a closed clubface—and a draw. Practice hitting tee shots with this type of grip, and notice that the more you set your trail hand on the underside of the grip, the more draw you put on the ball.

To hit fades, bring your trail hand onto the grip from a high position, with your arm extended in front of you (*above, right*). This will put the grip more in the fingers, which promotes an open face—and a fade. Hit some tee shots and, again, experiment with the trail-hand position. You'll see that putting it more on top of the grip creates more fade.

Early on, I want you to create some big curves. Don't worry that you're hitting wild tee shots. The point is to understand how to make the ball turn. Next week we'll work on control.

PROTEIN BAR BY JOE HARRISON, WATER BOTTLE BY VECTORS POINT: FROM THE NOUN PROJECT

Instruction photographs by J.D. Cuban and Walter Iooss, Jr.

WEEK 2

RANGE AND COURSE, BALL CONTROL, WEDGE PLAY, HOW TO BREATHE

ACCURACY

DIAL IN THE CURVE

We talked about creating curve by adjusting the trail hand. Now we've got to mold that into predictable shots. The key here is understanding that the direction you swing the club through impact—left or right—has a huge effect on how open or closed the face is when it hits the ball.

Let's start with the draw. We know that setting the trail hand more under the grip produces a draw, but now combine that with swing path. Set an alignment stick on your target line but angle it out to the "push" side (right side for righties). Align your body to the stick and swing through in that direction. The ball should start right and curve left. Notice the more you swing to the right, the more the ball draws.

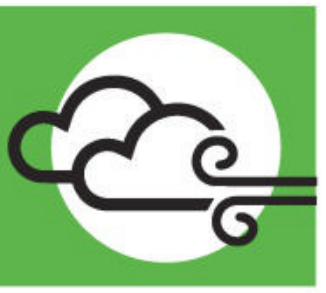
Now switch to the fade. Place the alignment stick on the "pull" side and line up your body to the stick. Remember, you're setting your trail hand more on top of the grip—the fade grip. Hit some drives, and you'll see the ball starts left and curves right. And the more left you swing, the more the ball fades.

One of these ball flights is going to feel better to you. Try to really connect with one shape and start building your confidence in using it.

DR. ARA SAYS

BREATHING Wait for the exhale

I'm a huge fan of intentional breathing for relaxation. But keep in mind, it's the exhale that matters. A great way to practice this is to breathe through a straw. You'll see it takes a long time to fully breathe out. That long exhale is what dissipates the stress.



CLOUDS AND GUSTS OF WIND BY AKHMAD TAUFIQ FROM THE NOUN PROJECT

WEDGES

DEVELOP YOUR OWN TWO-SWING SYSTEM

The challenge with wedge play is, you can't just plug in a club and make a full swing like you do from longer distances. You need to be able to cover a multitude of distances, and do it systematically so you're not improvising all the time. Sound familiar?

Let's assume you have three wedges. With two swings for each one, you'd have six shots inside 100 yards—that's a good start. If your range is well marked, great, otherwise shoot distances with a range finder or drop a headcover every 10 yards to create a yardage grid.

Here's how to develop two swings. Stick a tee in the ground even with the ball you're hitting and another one two feet closer to the target. Take your longest wedge and hit some shots turning your lead shoulder back until it points at the first tee. Record how far the shots go. Then hit shots turning your shoulder to the forward tee. Record distances. Do this with two more wedges, and it's like having six of them in your bag.

DR. ARA SAYS

ENERGY SNACKS Get up or calm down

Some people need an occasional pick-me-up, and others need to take the edge off. For the first type, I suggest caffeine gum or gummies. For the second, CBD works great—again, gum or gummies. Decide which type you are, try a few options, then stock your golf bag.

JELLY BEAR BY ATOM FROM THE NOUN PROJECT

ON COURSE

TEST YOUR PROGRESS

In Week 1, we didn't venture off the range, but now I'd like you to start playing a few holes after your practice sessions (*left*). The point of these excursions is to field-test the things you've been working on: contact, curve, wedge distances. Then, focus your practice on what you see.

On the last day of this week, play a full 18 holes. Keep score and putt everything out; no extra shots or free drops. Make it mean something, and don't let yourself off the hook easily. Use Dr. Ara's breathing technique when you face a challenging situation. The point is, get a good read on what you trust and what you don't when you're feeling some butterflies. You've got one more week to shore things up.

WEEK 3

COMPETITIVE PLAY, SHORT GAME, FINAL CHECKS, WHAT TO PACK

GREENSIDE
OWN THE BASIC SHOTS

Around the greens, most golfers need to simplify. Like we said with the wedges, you need a clear system for picking and playing shots so that they feel familiar and reliable. I want you to start with one basic chip shot and once basic pitch shot. You'll learn to adapt them; getting the baselines is the key.

For the chip, pick a wedge or 9-iron, stand very close to the ball, and set the shaft as vertical as you feel comfortable (*right*). The club should favor the toe with the heel slightly off the ground, and your weight should be on your front foot. Take your putting grip and choke down. Now, just use your putting stroke. You'll quickly get used to this easy shot.

For the pitch, I suggest not using your most lofted wedge—go one club up—because more loft just means a longer swing and more variables. Take a wider stance than the chip, play the ball just forward of center, and open the clubface slightly. I want your only swing thought to be: *Turn the chest, back and through*. It's simple, and highly effective.

PUTTING
TRAIN YOUR STROKE WITH THESE THREE DRILLS

For short putts, set up a track with alignment rods that's just wider than your putterhead and points to a hole. Work on swinging your putter through this track to hit square, straight putts.

From mid-range distances, speed and line are equally important. Set up a gate with tees about a foot in front of you on a breaking putt. Practice rolling putts through the gate at the right pace to break into the hole. Repeat on a putt that breaks the opposite way.

From 25 feet and out, speed control is king. Lay down a club 18 inches behind the hole. Hit long putts that either fall in the hole or stop past it but short of the backstop.

DR. ARA SAYS

PRESSURE
Breathe in a box

Here's another anxiety buster. It's called box breathing. Picture a box in front of you. Trace each side of the box with your forefinger and do this: First side: Breathe in for a count of five. Second side: Hold that breath for five. Third side: Breathe out for five. Last side: Hold for five. Do this before a stressful shot—it's instant relaxation.

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DR. ARA SAYS

MEDICINE BAG Don't get caught without

Carry acetaminophen for aches (or a fever); a muscle rub for stiffness (menthol types also help bug bites); bandages for blisters; zinc for the onset of a cold; allergy medication; a nasal inhaler for congestion, and salt tablets for restoring hydration. Pack these, and you're covered.

FINAL PREP

ALLOW YOURSELF SOME CONFIDENCE

The day before your big event, I want you to accomplish two things: Be competitive, and get some final reps in the weakest area of your game.

Set up a morning round with players who like to compete, even do some betting. The idea is to hit shots and roll putts with something on the line. Go through your pre-shot routine on every swing; don't be careless. Use the swing keys you've been working on.

After the round, reflect on what you did well and what you didn't. You've got one final practice session to get comfortable. If you don't have a glaring problem, do a short review of everything we've covered, spending equal time on the range and in the short-game area.

One final message from Dr. Ara: Get a good night's sleep—it's the ultimate competitive edge. We know you're ready to do this, so enjoy the experience and bring back that green jacket!

MEDICAL BY ADRIEN COQUET FROM THE NOUN PROJECT

EPIC

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Golf Digest HOT LIST GOLD 2021

2021
MASTERS
PREVIEW

LUCKY

THOSE WHO HAVE PLAYED *Augusta National* KNOW THEY ARE

RASTARDS

WRITTEN BY *Peter Finch* • ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Jonathan Bartlett*

Trey Coleman's FRIENDS AND FAMILY THOUGHT THE WHOLE THING SEEMED A BIT…STRANGE. "YOU'RE GOING TO BE A CADDIE?" THEY ASKED. "AT AUGUSTA NATIONAL?"

Coleman already had a full-time job at Bank of America in Augusta, Ga., where he was a vice president in commercial lending. But he couldn't shake the thought of looping at Augusta National, which at the time was hiring caddies, so he submitted his application, and it was approved. He would continue working at Bank of America during the week, trading his jacket and tie for a caddie's white jumper on weekends and holidays.

Coleman, then in his 30s, felt a special connection to the club. He had grown up just blocks from Magnolia Lane and had helped operate one of the Masters leader boards as a teenager. "I've always felt that service to others is a higher calling," says the former National Guardsman.

There was one other big draw: He could participate in "caddie day," a once-a-year chance for loopers to tee it up on the 18-hole tournament course and the beloved Par-3 Course. "That," Coleman says, "sealed the deal."

You might be tempted to think of people who get to play Augusta National as lucky bastards, winners of some cosmic sweepstakes that awarded them a golden ticket. But in fact, it's often the result of hard work—or, at the very least, a heaping mix of determination, diplomacy and patience.

There are only a handful of ways to play the home of the Masters, and none of them is easy. Golf Digest described them online last year in an article called "How to Play Augusta National Without Becoming a Member." In addition to working at the club or as a caddie, they include snagging an elusive volunteer job during the Masters tournament. Then they become even more challenging. For example, you could land a job covering the Masters and then win a spot in the media-day lottery the day after the tournament, or you could qualify for the Augusta National Women's Amateur in the spring by being one of the world's 70 or so best women amateurs. Through a spokeswoman, Augusta National declined to comment for this article.

The club has its caddie day as part of "appreciation week" at the end of May, just as the course is getting ready to close for the summer. Scorers, gallery guards and other volunteers earn invitations on Monday through Thursday, with caddies going out on Friday.

Appreciation week is "a lot of fun," says one gallery guard who asked not to be mentioned by name. "I spend the whole day on property. There is a huge buffet, with all the desserts and all the beer you can drink. A lot of the merchandise is 50 percent off."

He describes the atmosphere as "laid back," adding, "Everything about Augusta National—even appreciation week—they're always trying to make better." His first few times out, there were no caddies, and players rode in carts. Rounds were slow. Now they put caddies on each green to help players read their putts. "It speeds up play and makes it more fun," he says.

Most people who get to play Augusta National follow a more conventional path to the first tee: They accept an invitation from a member, directly or indirectly. Still, it seems the experience is rarely ordinary.

For one, it's considered bad form to ask a member for an invitation—or even to drop hints. "Absolutely, 100 percent, I would never do that," says a golf-industry executive who has played the course multiple times. "I have a lot of friends who are members," says an investment manager, "and the rule is that if you ask for an invite, you have to hire a private jet to fly everyone down there. That ends up being a $25,000 or $35,000 trip, so no, I don't do it."

When the invitation comes, it's common to drop everything. "It's the kind of thing where you don't even bother to look at your calendar," says one golfer who played there a few years back. Says Bruce Black, the retired owner of a California valves and fittings company, "I told the friend who invited me, 'All I need is about two hours' notice, and I can get myself together.' "

First-time guests often experience moments of extreme anxiety as the big day approaches. One entertainment executive describes a hastily assembled trip that seemed to be coming together beautifully—until a work crisis struck the day before he was to leave. "I remember looking skyward and saying, *Really? Today?"* he says. "I did not want to make that phone call to cancel. I was thinking that was bad, and the invitation might not come again."

On his first trip, Houston trade-association executive David Wuthrich recalls driving to Augusta from Atlanta and noticing that the octogenarian member who invited him had dozed off in the passenger seat. "I thought, Oh my goodness, is he *dead*? Is this going to be like 'Weekend at Bernie's'?"

Obsessive weather-watching is part of the experience for many. A few years ago Jamie Rehak, a retirement adviser, flew down to Georgia from Buffalo, N.Y., expecting to play. It was December, and the temperature was projected to be in the high 40s and low 50s. "My business associate, who was friends with the member who invited us, said he might cancel if it was too cold—and he did," he says. "I was heartbroken. We had a nice dinner and flew back home."

Happily for Rehak, he got another shot a couple of years later, this time in October. "I woke up that morning thinking, *Good Lord, please don't have someone cancel*," he says. "*No thunderstorms, please*."

He found himself bursting with energy. "I rarely get nervous," Rehak says. "But I'm there in the hotel, ironing my pants to get ready, and I've never ironed anything in my life! We had breakfast at the Waffle House and got to the parking lot across from the Augusta National entrance an hour and half early."

That parking lot is familiar to many guests. Because visitors can't enter the club until the member arrives, they often camp out there and wait for notice. Once the member is on site, guests can make their way across Washington Road and down Magnolia Lane, where a guard will ask for identification and the member's name.

Once guests pass that exam, they drive a short distance to the right, and club employees will come out to greet them and unpack the car. There's no "bag drop" sign or club stand near the curb. Employees take the clubs toward the golf shop and, if the guests are staying overnight, they will take luggage to the guests' rooms.

For some, it takes a while to get comfortable. "The first hour, I kept think-

One group staying in Butler Cabin "took a bunch of pictures sitting in the actual chairs and pretending we were Jim Nantz and the champion."

ing, *I just hope I don't get thrown out*," says one recent visitor. But he admits that's on him because the staff and even the members were universally warm and welcoming. "At some clubs, the members give off an attitude like, 'WTF are you doing here?' " says another visitor. "At Augusta they know what 'guest' means."

David Bannister, past president of the Middle Atlantic Golf Association, likens entering the club to "going to a private home for a dinner party." Guests are expected to dress appropriately, of course: normal golf attire—collared shirts, tucked in, no denim. In the evening, it's jackets and ties for the men.

Everyone seems to have a shared understanding that it's a big deal to be there and that it's OK to geek out a bit. "It's interesting to see the dynamics with the members, who are very excited to have their guests, and the guests who are sharing the same likeminded experience," says one visitor. "The guests sort of acknowledge each other like, 'Hi, I know what you're experiencing and what I'm experiencing, and we're in a club of our own right now, and that's the club of lucky.' There's a lot of nonverbal communication."

If you choose to say something out loud, understand there's a good chance someone will hear you. "One of the little screws in my glasses came out," says Jack Carney, an Oklahoma banker who has played there a few times. "I just mumbled something about it, and next thing I knew somebody was there with a box of little screws, and, of course, one of them fit." Tom Case, a Florida life-insurance agent, remembers a woman at his table mentioning that she liked chicken livers. The next day at lunch, there was a small plate of chicken livers at her place setting.

How's the food? Quite good—steak, fish and the like. "It's a simple, elegant menu," says one guest. Another visitor recalls walking into the dining area one morning and saying, "Can I get something for breakfast?" The staffer on duty replied, "You may have anything you want!" There was no menu.

Members and guests often congregate at a small bar near the dining room before eating. Sometimes groups gather there after their meals, but it's not known as a late-night social hub. Instead, hosts usually take their guests on a tour of the club.

The Champions Locker Room is a popular spot on these tours. It's smaller than many expect, and some are surprised to see that it does not have enough space for every Masters winner to have his own locker; they share lockers. A lot of visitors are struck by the cramped quarters of the Crow's Nest atop the clubhouse, where amateur Masters competitors bunk in four small bedrooms during the tournament.

The wine cellar, said to house one of the world's finest collections, is another highlight. "My first time, we went down into the old wine cellar in the bowels of the place," says one visitor. "It was cold, and only a few people could come in at a time or it would raise the temperature too much. A few people were waiting

to come in while we looked around." There was a lot to see. "It's bananas," the guest continues. "You want a 2005 Screaming Eagle? There might be 10 of them." That's a $3,900 bottle of wine, though mostly what's consumed is just very good wine at reasonable prices.

When he returned in the mid-2010s, the guest got to visit the expansive new cellar. The club brought over some artifacts from the old one, including an old wood shelf marked "D.D.E." (for Dwight Eisenhower, who was a member) and another labeled "Not for sale. Mr. Roberts," meaning club co-founder Clifford Roberts.

After their tours, guests generally retire to their cabins, which are dotted around the property. They are clean and comfortable, with decor that looks a lot like what you see in Butler Cabin during Masters telecasts. One guest lucky enough to stay in Butler Cabin says his group "took a bunch of pictures sitting in the actual chairs and pretending we were Jim Nantz and the champion."

The typical cabin has four bedrooms en suite and a common area where you can watch on television whatever Masters tournament you desire by calling the front desk. Masters memorabilia lines the walls and bookshelves. For many, the cabin becomes a key part of their stay. Though guests may use the club's locker room, for example, they often come back to their cabins to shower after playing the course.

About the course: Big surprise—people love it. "Spectacular" comes up a lot. "Meticulous," too, along with "surprisingly hilly."

Guests often play the Par-3 Course

in the morning, to shake off the dust and maybe settle their nerves. After lunch, they make their way over to the tournament course, where there are no tee times and the vibe is surprisingly relaxed.

The first time Wuthrich played, he launched a 3-wood on No. 1 into the woods left. His caddie told him, "The pros aim there, but that's not really right from the member tees. You need to take it over the trap on the right instead." Wuthrich dropped another ball, and this one went into the bunker. The caddie said, "Hit another." Really? Wuth-rich couldn't believe it. "Here, we hit till we're happy," the caddie said.

Unless everyone in your group is a low-handicap or better player, you'll probably play from the member tees, which are only about 6,400 yards compared with 7,500 from the tournament boxes. "Augusta is not a hard course," says an investment manager who has played it a few times. "Any mid-single-digit-handicapper is going to hit 15 of 18 greens."

The challenge, as anyone who has ever watched the Masters knows, is on the greens. "It's the most undulation you're ever going to putt on," says the volunteer gallery guard who plays during appreciation week. "The caddie says, 'Hit it over here,' and you think, *What?* But you have to commit to what he says, or you might end up off the green."

One guest likened the course to playing Pinehurst No. 2, "where you think backward from the green. You need well-struck shots from the right spot in the fairway, and that requires driving it to the right spot. I was surprised at how small the receptive square footage is on each green and how sharp the fall off is. You can putt or chip if you miss the green, but you have to use a lot of imagination."

With the exception of appreciation days, the course is seldom crowded. Lots of guests describe playing 18 holes with only the slightest awareness that other groups were on the course. Yet dawdling is frowned on, and it's the rare group that stops in for a meal or a snack after playing the front nine.

Reaching Amen Corner is a thrill for most. Bob Greig, a California CPA, found it "a little overwhelming" when coming down the 11th fairway and spotting the par-3 12th in the distance. "It stops you in your tracks," he says. "You've seen it for decades on television and, *Oh my gosh, there it is*. I just stood there for a moment and tried to take it all in."

It's a popular spot for snapping pictures, though some Augusta National guests feel a little funny about taking photos at Amen Corner and elsewhere, fearing they will upset their hosts. Members and guests are prohibited from posting their pictures online or in publications. Jack Nicklaus' PR rep once got a call from the club telling him of the rule after a picture of Nicklaus' guest foursome appeared in this magazine. One recent guest says a caddie in his group very discreetly took some photos and, to his surprise, they arrived by email a few days later.

That's not the only secret move caddies make. Wuthrich was walking up to the eighth tee when his caddie said, "You need to start playing golf." He laughed it off. "Well, I come to realize the caddies are betting on us," Wuthrich says. "How far you'd hit it, closest to the pin, the longest putt. They're betting on everything!"

Trey Coleman, the banker who worked as a weekend looper for a season and a half, confirms that "certain caddies" liked to place prop bets when he was there. But it wasn't everyone, and it wasn't constant. "There was more gambling in the caddie shack," he says. "I used to join them because I loved pitching quarters and playing cards."

Most of all, he loved golf. Getting to play on caddie day in 1997, not long before moving west to continue his career in Silicon Valley, was everything he hoped it would be. "I came to the club that day with a mission," he says. "I wanted to play all day long. I brought my own lunch and literally just went nonstop."

Coleman finally picked up his ball as security guards came out onto the course to shepherd him in. "Son, you were supposed to be gone 20 minutes ago," one of them said.

"My final memory was riding the 15th fairway in a cart," Coleman says. "The sun was setting, and some of the caddies who didn't play golf were at the pond, fishing for grass carp. It was a magical, magical day."

2021
MASTERS
PREVIEW

BY TOD LEONARD

MOSTLY SUNNY

AS HE PREPARES FOR ANOTHER HISTORIC FIRST AT THE MASTERS—THIS TIME AS AN HONORARY STARTER—**LEE ELDER** REFLECTS ON HIS EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
J.D. CUBAN

Lee Elder got some awful news this morning. Hank Aaron died, and it's hitting Elder hard. Aaron was 86. Elder is 86. They grew close over the years as great sportsmen of their era, bonded by achievem ent, history and the death threats they endured as Black men who dared to break barriers previously unchallenged in their professions.

Elder has been looking forward to lunch on this January day. The occasion is to talk about his upcoming trip to Augusta National Golf Club, where for the first time he will join Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player as an honorary starter for the Masters. Elder has thought of little else since Augusta National Chairman Fred Ridley called in November with the invitation to further polish Elder's Masters legacy.

But on this day at the Rancho Bernardo Inn, down the street from where Elder and his wife Sharon rent a home in an upscale San Diego neighborhood, there's a ceiling of dark clouds, and a cold wind blows through a deserted patio. Elder is distracted, solemnly preoccupied with his memories of Aaron.

Some of the parallels of the lives of Elder and Aaron are fairly startling. On April 8, 1974, Aaron became baseball's home-run king by slugging No. 715 at Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium. Thirteen days later, Elder beat Peter Oosterhuis in a playoff at the Monsanto Open in Pensacola, Fla., setting in motion a fascinating and sometimes harrowing march toward the Masters the following April. Nearly a year to the day of Aaron's feat, Elder became the first Black man to compete in the Masters.

For that week in 1975 and the five other occasions Elder played in the Masters, he says Aaron arranged for a car to be waiting at the Atlanta airport for his use. Aaron called Elder regularly to see how he was faring and to help him calm his nerves.

"He was a good man, I tell you," Elder says. "See, a lot of people really feel that I was in the Jackie Robinson era. I knew Jackie, and I followed him quite a bit. We played golf together. But it wasn't like with me and Hank. We could relate more because we came along during the same time in the Civil Rights era."

Usually gregarious, with an easy smile and deep belly laugh, Elder shakes his head and leans on the cane he grips tightly. "It's been a sad day," he says. "You meet someone and become closely associated with them, and then something like this happens. All of a sudden, he dies. It's pretty hard to digest."

Mortality is on Elder's mind these days. He knows he is in the twilight of his life. A decade ago, he had quadruple-bypass heart surgery. He is blind in his left eye, the iris a milky white, from having diabetes for 25 years. Three times a day he must stick himself with a needle filled with insulin. "I cry inside every time he has to do that," says one of Elder's closest friends, Dave Scott, a longtime San Diego television weatherman who serves as a confidant and caretaker for Lee and Sharon, Elder's wife of 26 years. Elder's endearing nickname for Scott: "Mostly Sunny."

At lunch, Scott, gently clutching Elder's elbow, helps him up a short set of stairs because the golfer has an arthritic knee that he says is due for a couple of injections before he arrives at Augusta. For now, he will take any help he can get and uses one of those sit-down electric scooters when Scott takes him shopping at Walmart.

Despite the ailments, Elder says, "You know, I wouldn't want it any other way right now in my life."

When Fred Ridley announced at the pandemic-delayed Masters in November that Elder would be an honorary starter beginning in 2021, the golfer received an outpouring of congratulations from people of all walks, among them Augusta National member and former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, NBA Hall of Famer Julius Erving and actor Chris Tucker.

Nicklaus wrote Elder a letter, the contents of which Elder chooses to keep private, and he was touched. "People say that Jack doesn't write letters to people that much, but when he does, it comes from the heart," Elder says. "I'm so happy he thought that much of me. Along the trail, we had some pretty tough battles."

"It's been a good run for me in the sense that it's been so positive," Elder offers. "When people called, they weren't calling to say this should have been done a long time ago. The conversation was of peacefulness, calm, and thank goodness this happened before it was too late."

Too late. Quietly, and with grace, Elder wondered if he would be recognized for his historical significance to the club. Augusta National reveres its champions, but for most other milestones, the calendar turns with

▸ **MEN OF HONOR** Elder with Arnold Palmer before the 1975 Masters.

▸ **TRAILBLAZER** Elder and caddie during the 1975 Masters.

nary a golf clap. When the 40th anniversary of Elder's first Masters appearance arrived in 2015, Augusta mayor Hardie Davis declared Thursday of tournament week "Robert Lee Elder Day," and Gary Player advocated for a party that took place away from the course. Tucker was among the speakers who lauded Elder and his accomplishments. The recipient of this love was humbled. But weeks earlier, Elder told me in an interview, "I do feel like I would have liked some kind of recognition [by Augusta National]. It's just something that I felt deserving of."

Elder professes his love for Augusta National as an institution. "It's wonderful," he says. "Every other club in America should look to it for how it treats it members." He is devoted to the Masters, having attended nearly every tournament since he was a player. But he also says that the only Augusta National chairmen he knew well were Clifford Roberts, cofounder of the club with Bobby Jones, and Ridley, the current chairman.

Fates and philosophies change depending on who's in charge, and in Ridley, Elder found a supporter who was more than a passing acquaintance. In a bit of serendipity, Elder was invited years ago to play Augusta National by member J. Paul Austin, who was then CEO of Coca-Cola. Austin, who died in 1985, also invited then-tour player Deane Beman—the future commissioner of the PGA Tour—and the 1975 U.S. Amateur champion to fill out that foursome. That man was Fred Ridley, who would become president of the United States Golf Association before becoming chairman of ANGC in 2017.

More than four decades later, it was Ridley who placed the call to Elder in early November 2020 to ask if he would consider being an honorary starter.

"He could hardly get the conversation out of his mouth," Elder recalls, laughing, "before I said, 'Mr. Chairman, I'd be more than happy to do anything to be associated with Augusta National.' There were a whole lot of people they could have selected, and I'm sure there are people saying there are people more deserving than Lee Elder. But Fred is a wonderful, wonderful person, and he was the right person to do this."

ELDER HAS RECEIVED AN OUTPOURING OF CONGRATULATIONS FROM PEOPLE OF ALL WALKS.

There were conversations among his business friends in Augusta, Elder says, that he should have replaced Arnold Palmer as an honorary starter after Palmer's death before the 2017 Masters. But Elder says he believes Augusta National members were moved to action when Golf Digest editor-in-chief Jerry Tarde made the case for Elder's inclusion in a column in July. "That was the steppingstone," Elder says.

When Elder walks onto Augusta National's first tee the morning of April 8, 2021, he will be greeted by Ridley, and he will shake hands with and tip his cap to two men in Nicklaus, now 81, and Player, 85, who have led very different lives from his own. Palmer, Nicklaus and Player formed the "Big Three," and they all built empires on their brands. Elder never had the same stature or public relations platform, and he had to deal with some financial setbacks early in his career. In 17 full seasons on the PGA Tour and with four wins, Elder earned $1,020,514, or less than a current tour player receives for a single victory.

Elder never wallowed in his misfortune. Before his first Masters appearance, which came 11 months after his win in Pensacola, Elder was a popular "get" on the banquet circuit. It widened his waistline and didn't do much for his golf—he made only $26,810 on tour in 1975—but he found his groove with a homespun, relatable way of telling inspirational stories, and he realized he could make as much money in front of a microphone as grinding over four-footers.

Not quite done with playing, Elder tore up the senior circuit for a period in the mid-1980s, winning seven times in two years. He got his eighth win in 1988, and by 1990 he was finished with professional golf. In the 31 years since, Lee and Sharon Elder have traveled the world, often without having a home of their own for years at a time. They booked as many appearances at pro-ams and celebrity events as the demand allowed and often stayed in hotels or homes of friends and organizers. The pandemic has grounded them in California since March 2020. "I tell people I don't have a lot of money, but I have a lot of love," Elder says, laughing.

The Elders have done it their way, and many in golf might look askance at how they have hustled to make ends meet and have a better life. Their existence is so different from that of many of his playing peers, Elder says, that he is more comfortable hanging out with Scott than, say, Gary Player, who has been one of his closest friends and most ardent supporters. "Gary's in a little bit different category," Elder says. "We've been invited to come visit him, but I'm the type of person who wants to be around people who are real. I'm

LEFT: BETTMAN/GETTY IMAGES • TOP: AUGUSTA NATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES

▸ **CLOSE FRIENDS** "I just love him like a dad," Dave Scott says of Elder.

not saying he has phony people around him, but I don't think that's an area that would be suitable for Sharon and me."

The Elders met Scott, who has worked for 29 years at one television station with the envious task of being a San Diego weather forecaster, at the inaugural charity golf event organized by late NFL great Junior Seau. With a Scottish father who introduced him to golf early, Scott became a top-level junior player, and in college he was enthralled by the notion of a Black man playing in the Masters.

Scott, 64, recognized early in his life that he had an affinity for people of color, becoming aware of their challenges and the prejudices they faced while he lived for a time in Hawaii as a kid. He took up jazz trombone as a youngster and later was the only white member of a band that played clubs in downtown San Diego. Scott married, had three children with and later divorced Luana Harris, the sister of Pro Football Hall of Famer Franco Harris.

Scott says the connection he had with Elder was instant. "I just love him like a dad," he says. "To me, Lee is an honor in my life."

For years, Scott played a couple of rounds a week with Elder, many of them at La Costa. "Did you get the Fritos?" Elder would ask when Scott arrived.

DESPITE THE AILMENTS, ELDER SAYS, 'YOU KNOW, **I WOULDN'T WANT IT** ANY OTHER WAY RIGHT **NOW IN MY LIFE.'**

"He loves Fritos as much as he loves golf," Scott says, rolling his eyes. Lunch after golf is almost always the same—tuna sandwich and clam chowder. Now, the two get out to play about once a month at the Rancho Bernardo Inn, and Elder might hit only a few balls. "But he loves how peaceful it is out there," Scott says.

Scott was among the first people Elder told about getting the invitation to be an honorary starter at the Masters. "You're not going to believe this, Mostly Sunny!" he said over the phone. Scott could sense Elder's joy and his relief.

During the cable-television broadcast of the Masters' opening shots on Thursday, millions of people for the first time will see Lee Elder swing a golf club—not anything like he did in his prime, but it doesn't matter. In following Jock Hutchison, Fred McLeod, Gene Sarazen, Sam Snead, Byron Nelson, Palmer, Nicklaus and Player, Elder joins an elite and distinguished class of players that Augusta National implores us, in its polite Southern manner, to respect and remember. It is validation like no other in golf.

Two years ago, Scott traveled to Pebble Beach when Elder received the Bob Jones Award, the highest honor the USGA bestows. At that point, they both figured that would be the pinnacle, and Elder was wholly satisfied with that. But then the Augusta opportunity arrived, and it somehow feels bigger, as if Elder is being reintroduced not just to the golf world, but the whole world.

"This is more amazing because it's the Masters, it's Augusta National and what the club has overcome with its own issues," Scott says. "To see Lee finally get this honor, to know he's alive and will walk up on that tee . . . people of color all around the world are going to celebrate this. And I hope I'm there so he can look up at me and say, 'I made it, Mostly Sunny.' "

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2021 MASTERS PREVIEW

CHANGE

THE AIR

AUGUSTA NATIONAL'S ONGOING QUEST TO BE

IS IN

THE PERFECT COURSE

By DEREK DUNCAN

When Augusta National purchased several acres behind its 13th tee from neighboring Augusta Country Club in 2017, there was little mystery as to why. The tantalizing par 5, playing 510 yards, has been relegated to a drive and short-iron approach and no longer puts Masters contestants in those heart-in-the-throat second-shot scenarios it was meant to. Extending the tee at the 13th, something projected to happen any year, is the logical way to reestablish the hole's integrity.

Such a substantial alteration to one of golf's most famous holes, potentially lengthening it as much as 80 yards, might seem like a drastic move. But drastic moves are in character with Augusta National's heritage, and it would be just the latest impactful adaptation the club has made during the past 40 years—and particularly in the past 20—to counter the increases in power, proficiency and distance in the professional game.

The most fundamental architectural modifications of the original Alister MacKenzie and Bobby Jones design were completed by the 1950s (including the relocation and reconstruction of greens, the simplification of bunker forms and the building of a new 16th hole).

Subsequent changes have focused on three objectives: preventing the course from being overwhelmed by modern tour pros and equipment; enhancing the live and televised spectator experience; and maximizing improvements in agronomics and maintenance. To these ends, Augusta National has added more than 500 yards to the course since 1999 (for a total of 7,475), planted trees to narrow fairways, reshaped mounds and hollows around greens and introduced a second cut of rough. The fact that these revisions haven't produced drastic

scoring fluctuations is probably proof that they have been effective—scoring averages per decade, beginning in the 1980s, are 73.97, 73.40, 73.89 and 73.22.

The revisions since 1999 also demonstrate a philosophical nimbleness: To preserve certain historical continuities, Augusta National has sacrificed others. The narrowing of select holes through tree planting places a premium on straight driving that is at odds with the shot-shaping that defined play at the Masters since the beginning. Much of the adventuresome spirit, exploited by players like Arnold Palmer and Seve Ballesteros, has been lost in making the course more durable against the modern game.

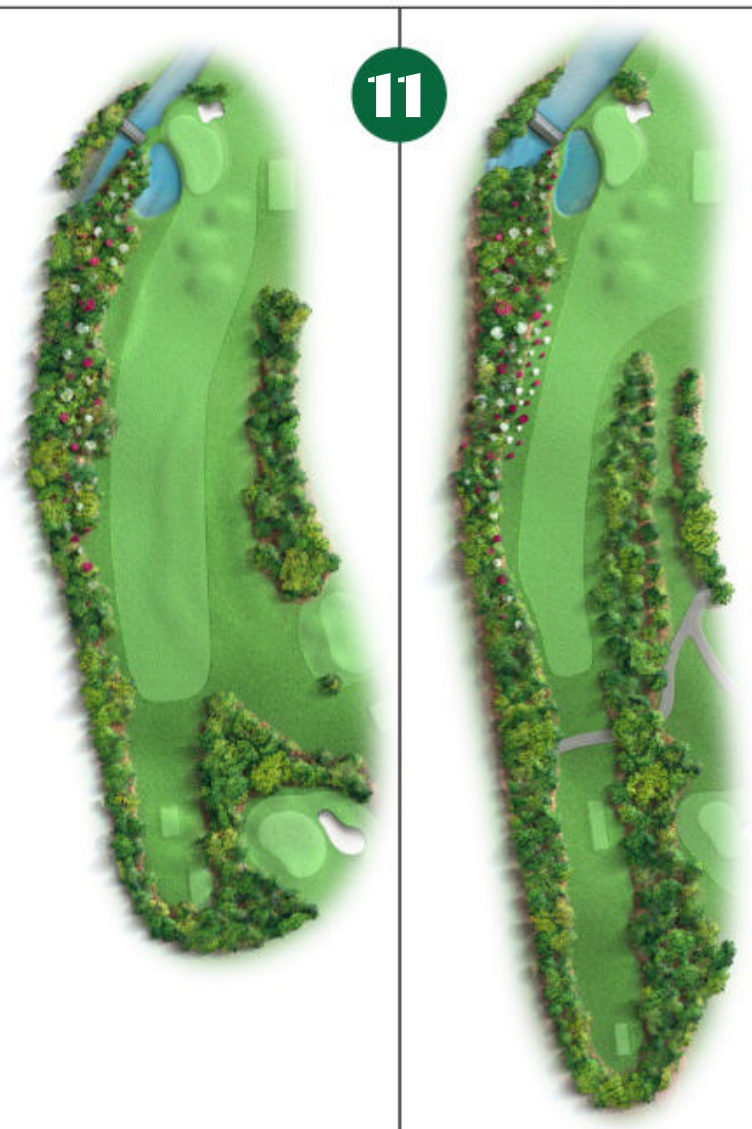
Historians love to illustrate—and lament—all the ways Augusta National has deviated from the design MacKenzie called "The World's Wonder Inland Golf Course." But the following changes enacted over the past several decades have had an equally profound effect on the course's character and playability.

THE PAR-4 SEVENTH

If Alister MacKenzie returned today, he would not recognize the seventh. The hole he designed was actually gone by 1938 when architect Perry Maxwell moved the green back to an elevated ridge and built deep bunkers into the front face. But for the next 50-plus years it played (along with the third) as the only other short par 4, a 360-yard reprieve after the battlefields of four, five and six. That was largely abandoned in 2002 when the seventh was lengthened to 410 yards and truly obviated before 2006 when the tees were pushed to 450 yards. With nearly 100 yards in extra distance and pines lining the landing area, it's the most claustrophobic driving hole on the course.

If the tournament committee wanted a harder par, they got it: In the 17 Masters between 1983 and its lengthening, more than 800 birdies were carded; in the past 15 tournaments, as a 450-yard hole, there have been 500.

> THE 11TH HAS EVOLVED INTO ONE OF THE HARDEST HOLES ON THE COURSE.

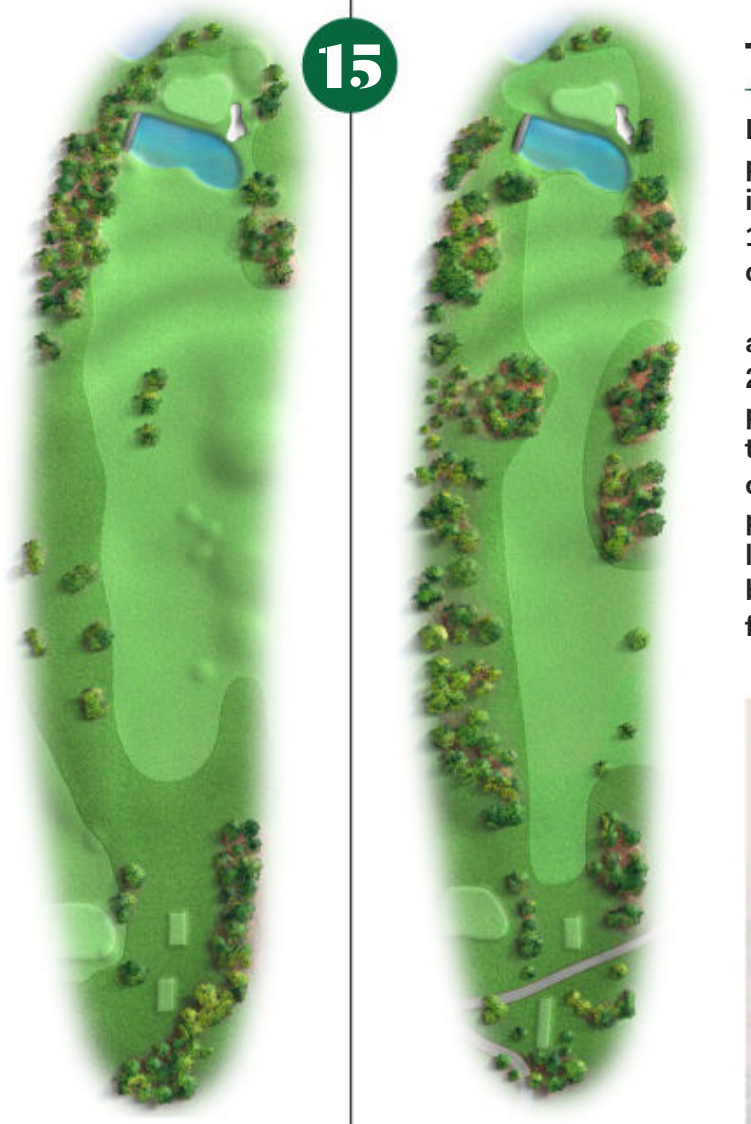


THE PAR-4 11TH

Even after Robert Trent Jones made major modifications to the 11th in 1950, shifting the tee 40 yards back and to the left of the 10th green and damming a stream to create the current greenside pond, it remained a challenging but not particularly formidable hole statistically. The green was raised and refortified several times during the 1990s, but players could still aggressively drive the ball over the crest of the hill into attack position from a garden spot that was nearly 100 yards wide between the trees.

After the 2001 Masters, when Phil Mickelson had just 94 yards remaining for his second shot, the club embarked on a lengthening mission with architect Tom Fazio. They stretched the 11th to 490 yards (from 455), and during the next five years boosted it again to 505 yards and installed pines that closed off the right half of the hole, creating a more pronounced left-to-right drive.

The narrowing, by nudging drives off the right side, eliminated the previous range of approach angles and forced the line of play more directly along the edge of the pond. The 11th went from being a tough par 4 to regularly being the most card-destroying—in 11 of the past 18 Masters it has been Augusta National's hardest hole (and never out of the top three) with a stroke average of 4.36. It was always said Amen Corner begins with the second shot on 11. Now it begins with the drive.



THE PAR-5 15TH

Like the 11th, the 15th was once a bomber's paradise. Though a stand of pines always prevented players who hit down the left from going for the green in two, they could navigate nearly as far right as they wanted, even into the 17th fairway, and potentially have a shot. Big hitters knew they could catapult drives off a series of mounds on the right side of the fairway for extra yards.

Before the 1999 Masters, nearly 20 pines were planted in the right rough, and the mounds were removed. As those trees have grown during the past 20 years, they have formed a barrier that, bracketed by the now fully mature pines on the left, creates a narrow gateway to the green. These and other tweaks, including slope adjustments around the green, have had little effect on scoring (eagles occur at roughly the same rate as in the 1990s), but the players are hitting into the green from about the same places on the same line. The 15th remains exciting as an inflection point in the tournament drama, but it's a less multi-dimensional hole than it was when incoming shots came from an array of distances and directions.

PHOTOGRAPHS: DOM FURORE (13TH), BEN WALTON (15TH); ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS O'RILEY

THE CONVERSION TO BENTGRASS GREENS

One of the most critical alterations made in the past 40 years might not be noticeable to the eye. In 1980, the club converted its greens to Penncross bent, replacing the old strain of Bermuda (which was overseeded with rye) that was becoming impossible to make play fast. The intended effects became evident as players marveled at the quickness of the greens, and only one winner the rest of the decade finished in double figures under par (Ben Crenshaw in 1984, at 11 under) compared to five of the previous six champions.

As the grass matured, the staff could achieve a new standard of speed and uniformity, to the point that the greens were sometimes too fast because of the severe contours. If conditions were hot and dry, the greens became rock hard, and it was not unusual for putts to coast entirely off the surfaces. If they were softened by rain, approach shots might spin backward off the greens.

As a result, green surfaces with the most pronounced transitions, including four, six, eight, nine, 14 and 18, had to be rebuilt to reduce the slopes. The green contours continue to be massaged and updated with improved strains of bent, but the exacting Augusta greens we now know trace back to that first 1980 conversion. G

Visit GolfDiget.com and search "complete changes to Augusta National" to see our interactive guide.

BEST SEAT IN THE HOUSE

A new memoir by Jack Nicklaus II shares lessons he learned from his father

As parents, we are often living lives filled with distractions, emotional challenges, and professional and personal disruptions. No matter what you face, take every opportunity you are given to listen to your children. My dad did that so well—even when his career was at its peak and he was traveling so much—and his actions toward me taught me to listen to my own children.

▸ GOLDEN BOY Jack Nicklaus with Jack II, age 14, at the 1976 U.S. Open (*left*) and at home in Florida in 1966 (*previous pages*).

> When I finally finished, there was a short silence. . . . Then Dad said, 'Jackie, would you like to know how your father did today?'

On Father's Day in 1980, Jack Nicklaus was doing what he loved most—being a dad. And I—18 at the time—was being selfish. I had just completed my second round in a Palm Beach County Junior Golf Association tournament at Osprey Point Golf Course in Boca Raton, Fla., a few miles from our home in North Palm Beach. I was at the scorer's table that late Sunday afternoon signing my scorecard when somebody yelled over to me that my dad was on the telephone.

I was a little frustrated about the timing of the call because the tournament was still being played. At that moment, this junior golf tournament was the most important thing going on in the world. I had just graduated from high school and accepted a golf scholarship to play at the University of North Carolina. I picked up the telephone receiver. Dad asked me how I played.

Well, I hadn't scored very well, but I described my entire round, hole by hole, shot by shot, whether I lifted my head during a swing, misread a putt—whether it went left instead of straight, or if the ball slowed against the grain.

Literally, I went on for 20 minutes.

Dad patiently and intently listened. He responded with questions about why I thought I might have made certain mistakes as I rehashed my 18 holes. When I told him I was having problems with my chipping, he promised we would work on it when we both got home. He was so interested, generous and genuinely wanted to hear about all of it. When I finally finished, there was a short silence. I was about to thank Dad for calling me and say goodbye.

Then Dad said, "Jackie, would you like to know how your dad did today?"

A little embarrassed, I quickly said, "Well, yes, how did you do today?"

"Well, I just won the U.S. Open." That was Dad.

The Golden Bear had just set a new tournament scoring record to win his fourth U.S. Open title, at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J., and he was on the telephone, some 1,200 miles away, asking me how my round went at a junior golf tournament.

HOMEWORK WITH DAD

After I committed myself to pursuing a career in golf, Dad worked with me to improve my game. He advised me on how to become a better putter, how to be better around the greens with my short game, how to be prepared and how to act like a champion. What he couldn't help me with were my greatest challenges because he didn't understand them. Pressure and anxiety weren't part of his makeup on the golf course. But they were part of mine. Golf is an individualistic sport. Golfers are responsible for what happens to them during a tournament.

Dad just went out and did it!

When I graduated from the University of North Carolina and turned professional, I started sessions with Dr. Bob Rotella. Bob was the well known director of sport psychology for 20 years at the University of Virginia. He focused on the mental aspects of golf, and his lengthy client list included Hall of Fame golfers like Tom Kite and Nick Price, in addition to more modern stars like Rory McIlroy and Padraig Harrington.

Bob once gave me a homework assignment, and it might seem odd, but it was 10 questions to ask Dad. One of the questions I recall was how Dad concentrated on the course when there was so much going on around him. In fact, most of the questions focused on concentration and how Dad consistently performed at such a high level over the course of his career. Dad's concentration showed in his performances at the elite level. For instance, Dad holds the record for most under-par rounds in the PGA Championship (53) and the record for the most rounds in the 60s in the PGA Championship

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THERE'S NOTHING LIKE OUR BEST

▸ **RIDING SHOTGUN**
Jack II was on the bag for Jack at the 1986 Masters and in 1987 (*left*).

> Dad won't admit it, but he was clearly messing with my head. He knew I was whipping him!

(41). He played in 156 consecutive majors (1957 U.S. Open to the 1998 U.S. Open).

I asked Dad the questions, but he never answered them. Dad is rather old school and was reluctant to embrace the benefits of working with a sport psychologist. He wasn't convinced that Bob could help me. "If I have to concentrate, I just do it," Dad said. "If I need to shout, I just do it."

Dad you aren't really helping me!

To which he shrugged his shoulders and said, "That's the best answer I can give you."

What I learned in that moment is that like many elite athletes, Dad couldn't explain to me what he did that made him special. We all know how few greats actually become great coaches because often what they do, how they think, isn't transferable knowledge. What I proved was that it wasn't transferable genetically. That was the last time I tried to get Dad to help me with Bob's homework questions.

Golf has always been considered the thinking man's game. There's much more to golf than striking the ball. Dad's concentration routine enabled him to fixate on his shots and what he wanted to accomplish. Dad's focus on the task at hand is legendary and is credited as a major part of his success, especially in the majors, where he became very difficult to beat. At the majors, Dad led outright or shared the lead after three rounds 12 times in his career and went on to win 10 of those tournaments.

Although Dad wouldn't help me with the homework questions, the exercise led to several really impactful conversations—conversations that went far beyond golf. He shared with me the idea that I would be better at any and everything I would do in life if I would stay locked in on the moment, not worrying about what happened previously or what would happen next. It is almost cliché to say you have to focus only on the things you can control. But I didn't have to hear Dad say the cliché. I could watch him live it out. This is a lesson he has worked for 40 years to teach me.

And one I will work for the next 40 years to teach my children.

IN THE ARENA

I was still playing professionally and in my early 20s when I was partnered with Dad for a round at the Memorial Tournament. I'm not sure what year it was, but Dad had finished on the cut line, and an uneven number of players in the field advanced. Because the round featured twosomes, Dad needed a playing partner, and he asked me. Even though I was only playing alongside my father and was not competing in the tournament, I was honored but nervous because I had never played in front of galleries that large and under a spotlight that bright.

Because Dad and I were the first twosome off the tee, we served as the pacesetters for the golfers behind us. We had to play relatively fast to ensure a good flow behind us. I got off to a nice start. We got to the sixth hole, and I was two under par. Dad, on the other hand, was two over par.

I was probably too nervous to say anything to Dad, but I knew I was playing well. As we walked off the sixth green, I will never forget, Dad said, "You know what? We are not out here to shoot a score. We are out here to be pacesetters. Come on, let's hurry up, let's get moving."

Now I was even more nervous. Sure, I was just playing golf with Dad, but my dad was Jack Nicklaus. This was his arena. And he wanted us to pick up the pace.

On the seventh tee, I hit a duck hook into the woods. I bogeyed the hole while Dad birdied it. Now, I am one under par, and Dad is one over par. I bogeyed the next hole to fall to even; Dad parred to remain one over. Then I double-bogeyed No. 9, and Dad birdied. In the span of three holes, I went from a four-stroke lead over Dad to a two-stroke deficit. All this happened after Dad told me to hurry up! I bet you can see where this going. But wait, it actually gets better.

As we walked to the 10th tee, Dad put his arm around me and said, as serious as he could be: "You know what? All these people out here, they

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> By living lives in service of each other, Mom and Dad were incredible role models for us, the five kids.

really came to watch a show. Why don't we give them a show? Let's just slow down and enjoy this."

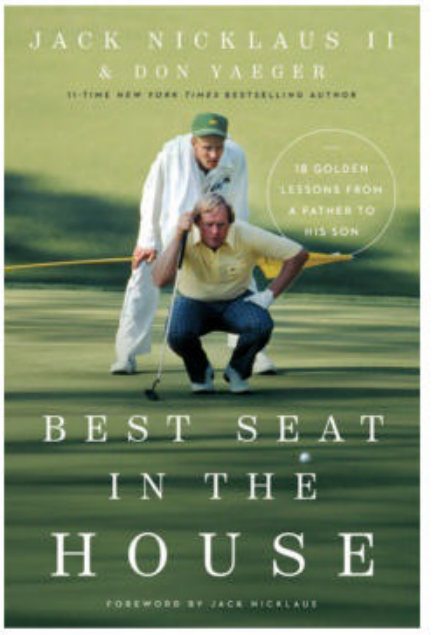
Dad won't admit it, but he was clearly messing with my head. He knew I was whipping him! He knew he wasn't playing well, so he wanted to play fast. That disrupted any rhythm or confidence I might have had. But then when he started to play well, it was time to slow down. And that messed with my head even further. Dad beat me by a couple of shots, but that was still a big moment for me. He has always been Dad—and always will be Dad regardless how he's doing—but that's another example of how he put his blinders on when there's an opportunity to compete.

GIVE AND TAKE

Many believe marriage is a 50-50 proposition.

My parents, who will celebrate their 61st wedding anniversary in July 2021, have calculated their own equation for a long marriage. Mom and Dad believe a successful relationship is 95 percent "give" to 5 percent "take" both ways.

That might not sound possible, but they have proven otherwise. Two key elements are required to make this work: (1) Neither party can keep a scorecard of places where they've given "in" to the other for purposes of comparison. (2) Both have to be committed to the 95 percent give, 5 percent take model. This can also sound quite complicated. How could both of them give 95 percent?



It took writing this book for me to realize that my parents began every discussion about family plans with each of them thinking first of the other. By doing that, they found a relationship rubric that didn't just allow both of them to live fulfilled lives. It allowed them to raise five pretty successful children. As I have sat down with my parents to discuss their success, they've shared how the model has changed over time. But it always began with empathy for the other before their individual needs.

Even though Dad knew his craft as a professional golfer would keep him on the road often, his greatest responsibility was to return home as fast as possible. He vowed never to be away from home longer than two weeks at a time. (I know that might sound crazy to some, but in his profession it's not uncommon to be gone many weeks at a time.) Other than a 17-day trip to South Africa for a series of exhibitions with Gary Player, I don't think Dad ever missed that mark when I was young. That's amazing.

Through the entirety of his marvelous achievements, despite the phone calls from presidents, visits with kings and the adulation from crowds, Dad made being a husband the most important piece of his life. Being a dad was second. When Dad returned home, he didn't talk golf. His focus was on us. Dad saw golfers on the PGA Tour who had no family life outside of golf and often wondered how they did it.

By being so in sync and living lives in service of each other, Mom and Dad weren't just a great team. They were incredible role models for us, the five kids. Now they are relationship role models to 22 grandchildren and even to many friends in the community.

Dad is always quick to credit Mom for all of her support, but he's barely through any sentence about her without Mom interjecting how grateful she was for the hard work he did to provide for us.

Dad was the disciplinarian when he was home, but Mom managed the children and the household while he traveled the globe to play golf. Don't think for a second Mom didn't discipline us when Dad was gone.

There were words I uttered as a kid that today wouldn't raise an eyebrow. They might be words kids hear or see on the Internet or television every hour of the day. If I said God's name in vain, Mom marched me into the bathroom where I had to take a bite from the bar of Dial soap. Call me a slow learner, but Mom washed my mouth out with soap several times. If you haven't had the experience, it tasted awful! If we did something wrong, Mom took care of it immediately. She did not, as I am told some mothers do, wait until the father comes home to lay the law down. I would later learn Mom did this intentionally because she didn't want the first conversation when Dad came through the door to involve what he had to do to straighten us out.

Mom believed Dad needed to come home to a happy family to be successful. This entire conversation might sound completely old-fashioned to some younger couples today, but I can only point them at one number—61. And that wasn't my Dad's lowest score on the golf course.

As Dad has gotten older, the percentage pendulum has swung. Today, Dad makes many life adjustments to fully support Mom's many endeavors. Dad laughed when he said he was lucky to get by the first 50 years in their marriage.

"The first 50 years are the hardest," Dad joked.

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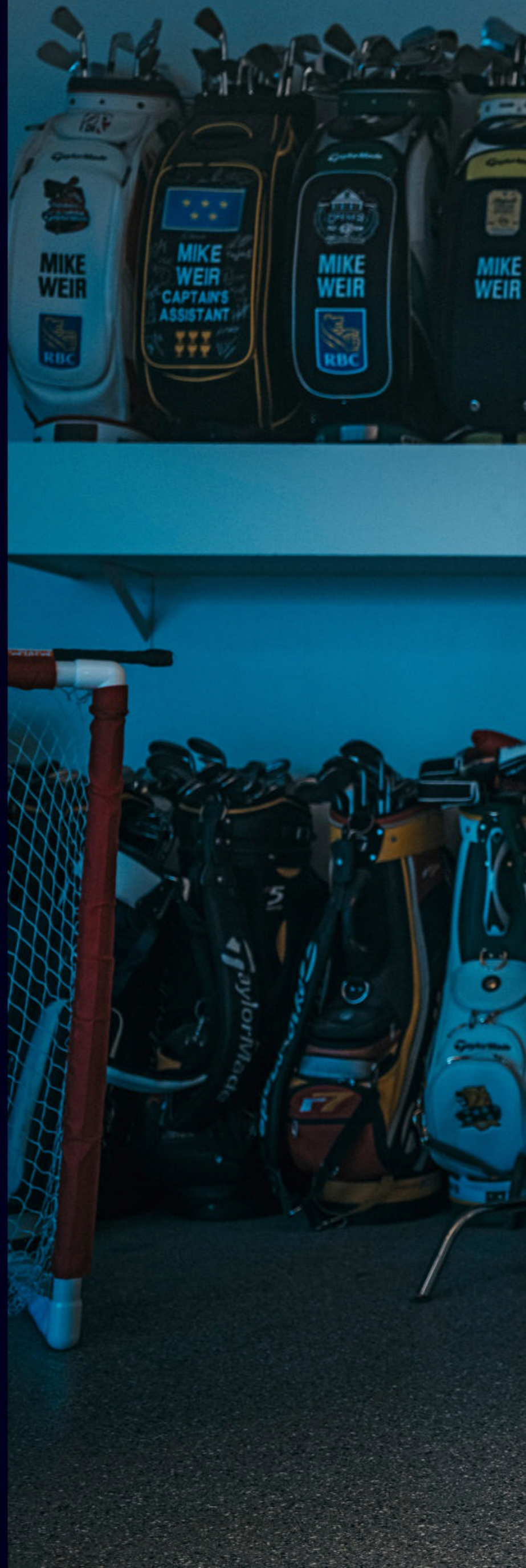
THE LONG ROAD BACK

by JOHN FEINSTEIN

photographs by CHAD KIRKLAND

MIKE WEIR HAS FACED DOWN SOME DARK MOMENTS SINCE WINNING THE 2003 MASTERS. NOW, AT 50, HE'S ON A BRIGHTER PATH

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One might expect a past Masters champion, one who became eligible to play against the old guys last May, to feel pretty good about things. But in the 18 years since Mike Weir became a major winner—and an iconic hero in Canada—his life has been fraught with setbacks: divorce, injuries, loss of playing privileges, loss of confidence in himself as a player and moments of real sadness, especially during his divorce.

"There were times I just cried like a baby," he said recently. "I mean, just flat out crying uncontrollably."

Michelle Money, his girlfriend for the past five years, played a major role in helping him get through some of his lowest moments. She remembers feeling as if Weir "was often in a dark place" when they first started dating. "He was introverted, which he is by nature anyway," she says. "But what I also saw was a genuine kindness. He was—is—the sweetest person I've ever met in my life."

Now, after hitting rock bottom not that long ago with his golf game and his life, Weir has found happiness.

A LIFE-CHANGING VICTORY

For a long time, Michael Richard Weir's life was on the "up" escalator.

He had grown up in Sarnia, Ontario, northeast of Detroit on Lake Huron, the youngest of three brothers. He was a left-handed shot playing hockey, so, when he started playing golf, he played left-handed, even though he did everything else (other than hockey) right-handed. He once wrote a letter to Jack Nicklaus asking if he should listen to those telling him to turn around and play right-handed and got a letter back telling him if he was good playing lefty, he shouldn't change a thing.

He was recruited to Brigham Young University by Karl Tucker and was an All-American as a senior before turning pro in 1992. He worked his way up the golf ladder, starting on the Canadian Tour and the Asian Tour, joining the PGA Tour in 1998, and having to go back to Q school at the end of that year before winning—at the Air Canada Championship—in 1999.

He won the Tour Championship in 2001 and then, 18 months later, the Masters, making an eight-foot putt on the 18th hole to force a playoff with Len Mattiace, then winning the playoff on the first sudden-death hole with a bogey.

It kept getting better: The next day he arrived for an appearance scheduled pre-Masters at a Sears store in Toronto and was stunned to find people lined up around the block to meet him and get his autograph. That night, he was asked to drop the ceremonial first puck before a Philadelphia Flyers-Toronto Maple Leafs playoff game—which he did, wearing the green jacket.

"I still get chills when I think about that night," he says.

Weir finished T-3 at the U.S. Open that year and, shortly after turning 33, was ranked third in the world. He began 2004 by successfully defending his title in Los Angeles—his seventh victory on tour since the initial win in Canada.

Then, gradually at first, then far more quickly, the escalator began to go in the other direction. It actually began in Los Angeles.

"I just didn't feel as crisp or as confident as I had the year before," he says. "I won in L.A. because my short game was great; I made every key putt. But I wasn't hitting the ball as well as I had been the year before, and, after a while, that took its toll on me mentally. By the time I got to the Masters, I was really struggling, trying to find my swing again."

One of Weir's greatest strengths can also be a weakness at times: his work ethic. "Mike is one of those guys that, if you tell him to do 100 reps of something, he'll want to do 500," says Mark Blackburn, Weir's teacher

▸ **MAJOR BLAZER** Weir receives an assist from Tiger Woods after winning the 2003 Masters.

▶ **CANADA HIGH** Weir defeated Woods, 1 up, in the 2007 Presidents Cup at Royal Montreal.

MASTERS: HARRY HOW/GETTY IMAGES • PRESIDENTS CUP: STREETER LECKA/GETTY IMAGES

for the past three years. "Or he won't want to leave the range until he's got something exactly right. You can't always fix something right away. You have to do it gradually. Mike wants to get it right *now*.

"His drive is a great thing. He hasn't got a thing to prove in golf at this point. But he wants to win again; he wants to be really good again. It's that drive that will ultimately get him back where he wants to be."

Weir's week at Augusta National as defending champion was bittersweet. He loved all the reminders of what he had accomplished, especially the Champions Dinner, where he sat between Tom Watson and Byron Nelson and listened to them tell stories.

"At one point Mr. Nelson asked me how I'd put the dinner together," Weir says. "I had a boyhood pal Alastair MacKay who is a chef, and I'd brought him with me to make dinner. We had pre-dinner lobster from the East Coast, smoked salmon from the West Coast, and then elk for the main course. I told Mr. Nelson that Alastair was downstairs, and he'd done all the work. He said, 'Why don't you bring him up here; I'd like to meet him.'

"Alastair came up, and everyone in the room gave him a standing ovation. It was really a sweet moment."

The tournament wasn't nearly as sweet. Weir desperately wanted to play well and, no doubt trying too hard, shot 79 on Thursday. He dug in on Friday and shot 70—missing an eight-foot putt on 18 to miss the cut by one.

"I really wanted to make that cut," he says. "I wanted to be around for the weekend. That one hurt a lot."

He played well the rest of the year and for the next two years. In 2005, he finished T-5 at Augusta, the kind of result he had been hoping for a year earlier. In fact, he continued to play well in major championships, finishing in the top 10 a total of 11 times.

But he wanted to be better. He didn't just want to earn a lot of money; he wanted to win. What's more, he faced the pressure of feeling like an entire country was depending on him every time he teed it up.

"Population-wise, we're a small country," he says. "I know the kind of pride I feel when Canadians do well. I know a lot of Canadians feel the same way about me. The support is great, but I didn't always handle it well when I was struggling with my game."

A FATEFUL SWING CHANGE

There was nothing terribly wrong with Weir's game in 2006, but he wasn't comfortable with his swing. "I was using little keys and cues to try to find consistency," he says. "You don't find it that way. You hit it well for a while, then you don't. It's the old cliché about the definition of insanity: trying the same thing over and over and hoping for different results."

> HE WOULD PLAY, ICE, REST, PLAY AGAIN. HIS SWING CHANGED. HE COULDN'T PUT ANY POWER INTO HIS SHOTS. . . . THE NEXT YEAR WAS WORSE.

Late in 2006, his college teammate Dean Wilson suggested he talk to Mike Bennett and Andy Plummer, proponents of the Stack & Tilt swing method. Wilson had started working with them when he was struggling and had seen good results. Weir figured it couldn't hurt to talk to them.

Wilson had won for the first (and only) time on the PGA Tour at The International in August and had qualified for the Tour Championship. Bennett and Plummer were there with him. Weir was in town for a TaylorMade photo shoot.

"We sat down and talked while Dean was out playing," Weir says. "Then we went out and hit some balls. What they were saying made sense for me. I like to hit a draw; Stack & Tilt helped me do that. They simplified things for me. There was less movement in my swing, and that felt good."

Weir took a while to adapt to the new swing, but by the next summer he was playing well again. The Presidents Cup was in Canada that year, largely because of Weir's overwhelming popularity as the first Canadian to win a major title. Weir didn't make the team on points, but Gary Player made him a captain's pick.

"It was such a relief when Gary picked me," Weir says. "The thought of not getting to play in that Presidents Cup really bothered me."

He more than justified Player's decision, going 3-0-1 to be The International team's leader in points. Though the United States won easily—19½ to

‘I BECAME MORE INSULAR, AND I KNOW I GOT GRUMPY A LOT. I WAS SNAPPING AT PEOPLE. IT WASN’T A GOOD TIME ON OR OFF THE COURSE.’

LOST IN THOUGHT Weir at home in front of his golf simulator.

14½—the highlight of the weekend for the raucous home crowd was Weir’s 1-up victory over Woods.

Soon after he had won the match, Weir said that beating Woods head-to-head was an even bigger thrill than winning the Masters. “Some of that was heat of the moment, the incredible emotion I felt winning with the entire country cheering me on. Don’t get me wrong, it was a big deal, but now, looking back, the Masters is the Masters.”

Two weeks later, Weir won on tour for the first time since L.A. in 2004, winning the Fry’s Electronics Open. All was well. He continued to play well the next two years. In April 2010, he shot 66 in the first round at Hilton Head and was tied for the lead the next day when he came to the par-4 11th. His tee shot went a little right and left him with a 5-iron through some trees to the green. “As soon as my club hit the ground, I felt a stinging pain in my elbow,” he says. “There was a tree root right behind the ball. I kind of shook it off and kept playing, but I was picking the ball. With Stack & Tilt you need to take a pretty good divot. I couldn’t do it.”

Weir’s hockey-player mentality kicked in. He could play through pain, right? He would play, ice, rest and play again. His swing changed. He couldn’t put any power into his shots. He played 10 times the rest of the year and reached the weekend three times—once in the WGC event at Firestone where there was no cut. He finished 128th on the FedEx Cup points list, missing the playoffs for the first time. The next year was worse. In 2011, he made 15 starts and made only two cuts—his highest finish a T-70 at the AT&T National outside Philadelphia.

By July, Weir couldn’t swing without searing pain. He knew it was past time to see a doctor, but he desperately wanted to play in the Canadian Open. But the pain was so bad that he withdrew after the first round.

“In Canada, if you play hockey and you go down, you don’t lie on the ice, you get up and get to the bench,” he says. “You keep playing until you can’t play at all. I made the tear much worse by playing. I was a mess. I’m sure I became more insular, and I know I got grumpy a lot. I was snapping at people. It wasn’t a good time on or off the golf course. I was angry a lot, frustrated, unhappy.”

Canada was the point of no return. In constant pain and struggling with his life at home, Weir finally went to Birmingham, Ala., to see Dr. James Andrews, the famed orthopedist. After examining Weir, Andrews said, “I do surgeries tomorrow; I can fix this then.”

Weir was stunned. Surgery? Tomorrow? He asked Andrews if he was sure he needed surgery. Andrews shrugged and said, “I can do it tomorrow or you can fly back here in a few weeks or months and do it. But you’re going to have to do it.”

What had started as a slight tear of the elbow tendon at Hilton Head was now a complete tear because he had continued to play even as the pain—and the tear—grew worse.

After the surgery, he couldn’t pick up a golf club for three months and couldn’t take a full swing for five. He still didn’t feel as if he could take a full divot even after he returned to the tour. Weir was never a bomber, but he wasn’t short off the tee either. In 2003, when he was at his zenith, Weir

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averaged just less than 290 yards off the tee, which ranked 68th on tour. In 2013, after the surgery, he averaged 270.5 yards, ranking 174th out of 180 in driving distance.

The struggles with his golf game didn't do anything to help his mood at home. He and Bricia had met at Brigham Young, had gotten married in 1994 and had two daughters, Elle and Lili. Unhappy with his golf game, Weir became unhappy at home.

"I probably turned inward a lot," he says. "I know I'm not easy to be around when I don't feel good about the way things are going. I felt so many emotions about what was happening to my marriage—none of them good. My grandparents were married more than 50 years; my parents 60. I wondered what I could have done better. I felt guilty, I felt angry, I felt helpless and, most of all I think, I felt sad. It was overwhelming. My one thought was I had to do everything I could to help my daughters get through it. Elle was 17 and Lily was 14. I really wasn't thinking very much about golf at that point. Just seeing the looks on their faces sometimes made me cry. They knew their mom and dad weren't on the same page, and they didn't know what to do about it or how to help. It was a very difficult time."

Weir felt as if he didn't have anyone to talk to: How would his parents understand? Even his two older brothers were far away—both still living in Sarnia. The person he would have gone to first was Karl Tucker, his coach at Brigham Young. "He was the guy I talked to about things most often," Weir says. "One of the reasons I had decided to live in Utah was to be close to him."

But Tucker had passed away in 2010. As much as Weir wanted to cry, there was no shoulder for him to cry on.

Mike and Bricia divorced in 2014. For the next year, Weir had little interest in golf. He and Bricia never had a formal custody agreement. The girls went back and forth between their parents' houses as teenagers and still do today, even though Bricia now lives in Colorado.

Weir finally decided to take a break from golf in the summer of 2015, withdrawing from the Canadian Open—a difficult decision for him because winning that tournament had been a career-long goal. He had lost a playoff to Vijay Singh in 2004 but had never won what was—in his mind at least—the fifth major.

Weir had made one cut that season in 18 starts. He did not play again until February 2016 at Pebble Beach. But he continued to struggle on the golf course. He had gone to all sorts of teachers, leaving Bennett and Plummer, working briefly with Butch Harmon, then back to Bennett and Plummer and then with David Leadbetter. Nothing seemed to work. Weir's confidence was gone.

A NEW LOVE INTEREST

Life off the golf course began to turn around in March 2016 when, walking out of a Salt Lake City restaurant with some friends, he noticed Michelle Money walking in. He was smitten instantly, so much so that, when he got home, he drove back to the restaurant to look for her. She had left. Fortunately, a friend of his knew who she was—she had been on "The Bachelor" and was hosting a morning show in Salt Lake City—and contacted her through a mutual friend.

> 'MY FRIEND SAID, "DO YOU KNOW WHO HE IS?" I SAID, "EVERYONE IN UTAH KNOWS MIKE WEIR. THERE'S A STREET NAMED AFTER HIM." '

"My friend said, 'Mike Weir would like to go out with you; do you know who he is?' " Michelle says. "I said, 'Everyone in Utah knows Mike Weir; there's a street named after him.' "

Their first "date" was at a birthday party at Weir's house. Driving in, Michelle found it "kind of gaudy. I thought, *Who does this guy think he is?* He met me at the car and then told me he was getting ready to sell the house. I felt a lot better after that."

At first, Michelle found herself dealing with someone who was clearly working himself out from the wreckage of his marriage and his golf game. But she pushed past it because she also saw the sweetness that became the bedrock of their relationship.

A year later, Weir, on the recommendation of several other players, began going to see Blackburn, who has worked with a number of tour pros—among them Chez Reavie, Charley Hoffman, Max Homa, Kevin Chappell and Adam Hadwin—and had developed a reputation as a problem-solver. "The first thing I asked him was, 'What do you want your golf ball to do?' " Blackburn says. "Ultimately he said he was most comfortable hitting a slight draw. I said, 'OK, then, here's what we need to do.' "

Blackburn and Weir looked at Weir's swing from his peak—2003—and then Blackburn said, "You can't hit the ball that way anymore. You're in your 40s; you've had surgery. You can't chase distance anymore. It's like trying to race Usain Bolt when you're 40. Can't be done."

Blackburn wanted Weir to get back to playing off his front foot—not making a shift from his back foot to his front foot. "Mike is plenty long enough for the Champions Tour. I wanted him to make a move that fit his body at 50—not at 30. It's very different. But he's figuring it out."

It wasn't an instant fix. Weir played some Korn Ferry Tour events to prepare for turning 50. The results were less-than-great, but, unlike some older players who find themselves being regularly out-driven by 50 yards when playing with golf's young bombers, he enjoyed it.

"Actually, it was 75 yards sometimes," he says, laughing. "But I enjoyed a lot of the guys. They knew who I was and what I'd done, and a lot of them asked me questions about how I worked my way up the ladder when I was young. I kind of became a mentor to some guys. It was fun."

Turning 50 was more fun, although he had to wait several months to make his debut on the 50-and-older tour because golf was on pandemic pause on May 12 when he became eligible. In his second event, he finished T-10 at the Senior Players Championship and

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SUPPORT TEAM Weir with Michelle Money and their German Shepherd, Lobo, at home in Salt Lake City.

then, in the fall, he had a T-4 and a second—losing to a Phil Mickelson rally in the final round at the Dominion Energy Charity Classic.

Early in 2020, Mike and Michelle had to deal with a genuine crisis when Michelle's 15-year-old daughter Brielle was in a horrific skateboarding accident. She was in a coma for 10 days and in the hospital for 26 with a serious brain injury—she hadn't been wearing a helmet.

"Because of COVID, Mike couldn't go inside the hospital," Michelle says. "He made me breakfast every morning, drove me to the hospital, got me lunch every day and made me go with him to walk the dog, just to do something normal. No way I get through that period without him. He's doing the same things for Brielle."

Brielle is now very much Mike's third daughter. When he talks about her, his voice gets soft as he describes how far she has come since the accident.

> A BAD ROUND OF GOLF ISN'T LIFE OR DEATH. WEIR HAS SEEN WHAT LIFE AND DEATH LOOK LIKE UP CLOSE.

As hard as the recovery has been for Brielle, it bonded Mike and Michelle, and helped Mike understand that a bad round of golf isn't life and death. He had seen what life and death look like up close. "It doesn't mean I care any less," he says. "But seeing Brielle getting better has a kind of meaning that goes way beyond golf."

Brielle has made remarkable progress in the year since the accident, but—in a different context—she's like Weir: There is still work to be done.

Weir and Michelle went to Hawaii for a three-week vacation before Weir's first two starts of 2021. He played in the Sony Open in Hawaii against the kids and finished T-47 after four rounds in the 60s. Then he started the new year among the seniors by finishing T-7 in the Mitsubishi Electric Championship. That was a good sign for Weir. He tends to play his best golf on more difficult courses, so a solid finish on a glorified pitch-and-putt was good for his confidence.

Weir has two near-term goals: Win again and be named the International Team captain for the Presidents Cup when it returns to Canada in 2024.

"I'm still not where I think I can get to. I still see room for improvement," he says. "The important thing is, I jump out of bed every morning ready to go to work, wanting to get out and play. For a long time, that wasn't the case. I had to drag myself to the range or the golf course. Now, every day is fun."

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The New **Tens**

03
2021

GD
P.90

YOUR PUTTING IS GETTING WORSE

WRITTEN BY

MATTHEW RUDY

IT HAPPENS TO MOST OF US BY AGE 28

BUT THERE ARE SOLUTIONS

WHEN THE PANDEMIC SHUT DOWN Dave Stockton's travel, the 79-year-old PGA Champion-turned-instructor went from playing three rounds in the previous three years to clocking 30 in four months at Redlands Country Club, his home base in California. He even acquired a handicap so he could play in the weekly money games with other members. ▸ In his prime on the regular and senior tours, when he won six combined majors, Stockton made his living from 150 yards and in. "I didn't care where my drive went because I knew I was as good as anybody in the world with the short clubs." Not anymore. He found that his plus-1 Handicap Index comes despite his putting, not because of it. The deficiencies with what had been his favorite club were especially painful on Redlands' 10th hole—an Alister MacKenzie-designed par 3 that plays 146 yards and, as the 18-handicap hole on the card, the place where Stockton has to add a shot to his score. ▸ "I guess the good news is that it took 79 years for my putting to go," Stockton jokes, as he notes a recent round of 70 with three three-putts. "That must be when the downward trend starts. I have the same feel with the putter, but my eyes aren't as good. The connection between what I see and what I do isn't as good as it used to be, for sure."

Stockton's delayed putting decline is an outlier in more ways than one. Big data from the PGA Tour and human physiology research points to what seems to be a surprising conclusion. The peak putting age for elite players is much closer to the beginning of their careers than the end. Examining the strokes gained/putting statistic since its inception in 2004 (the tour's statistic that compares what an individual player's putting contributes to score relative to the rest of the field), peak putting comes at age 27. By 35, a players edge on the greens declines by more than two-thirds. And by 41, the average tour player is losing strokes to the field when putting (*see chart, page 96*).

What does that mean for you, an amateur golfer who probably doesn't have access to the same intensive one-on-one coaching, elaborate data analysis and vast blocks of uninterrupted practice time? Does that mean that if you've passed your late 20s, you'll never be any better than you are at putting right now? Not exactly.

The truth about putting is a fascinating mix of physiology, psychology and engineering. Intuitively, you might expect that a skill like putting—one that is less tied to strength and speed like hitting a driver—would be the best way for older players to keep up with younger ones. But you would be wrong.

Humans can and do get physically stronger throughout their 20s and into their 30s, but some of the delicate coordinating functions that make complicated physical movements work—those controlled by the pre-frontal cortex in the brain—begin a slow and steady decline after 27. That means Phil Mickelson can still swing his driver 120 miles per hour at age 50, but the relationship between his eyes, brain and muscles isn't the same as it was for his 25-year-old self, no matter how many special coffees he drinks.

But the vast majority of elite players have optimized many of the factors that go into good putting. They know how to read greens. They have appropriate coaching. Their equipment is precisely matched to their bodies and strokes.

That means you might be past your peak putting age in physiological terms, but your best years rolling the ball could be ahead of you with some adjustments to your routine, your stroke and your mindset. In other words, there's hope. It starts with understanding what's going on with your body.

Dr. Michael Lardon is like a peak performance Swiss Army knife. He's a practicing psychiatrist in San Diego who works with athletes, executives and elite military units, and has research background in psychopharmacology (the effect of drugs on mood) and psychobiology (the biological basis of behavior). He studies the intersection of mind and body, and all the reasons one or both might not be functioning efficiently. He even has some experience as an elite athlete. In between high school and college, he toured Europe as a professional table-tennis player.

Lardon says the primary physical hinderance for a putter of any skill level is a baseline physiological tremor. Think of it as a connection between your mind and your hands, operating like the cell signal on a call. When you're young and healthy, the connection is clear and distortion free. But as you get older and succumb to environmental factors like sleep deprivation, caffeine consumption and stress, the tremor's impact is more prominent. "It's the reason surgeons have to undergo dexterity tests as they age," Lardon says. "Your fine-motor coordination and proprioception start being affected. That touch in your fingers, your vision, your hearing—it's a symphony of stimuli that makes you good at putting. When those senses start to dull, you can't see a putt or perform as well as you used to."

The seeing part is important figuratively—through the ability to use all the senses to create a picture of what you want to do in your mind—and literally, says Stan Utley. Like Stockton, he's another tour winner turned short-game instructor. He holds the PGA Tour record for fewest putts over nine holes (six, at the 2002 Air Canada Championship), and his skill around the greens prompted dozens of tour players to seek him out for help when he was still an active player—which ultimately started Utley's coaching career. "I know my eyes suck compared to the way they used to be, and that makes my green-reading not as good as it was," says Utley, 59. "I didn't realize how good I could see until I couldn't anymore."

Although these slight changes in a player's vision and proprioception are happening, other factors present for tour pros also chip away at performance. "As your brain develops into

PUTTING GREEN (PREVIOUS PAGE): GETTY IMAGES

▸ **K.I.S.S.** Denny McCarthy (*above*) relied more on his senses than technology to lead the tour in putting.

THE TOUR'S TOP GUNS

▸ Here are the PGA Tour leaders in the strokes gained/putting statistic since 2004, the year this measurement debuted. Strokes gained identifies which players best take advantage of their skill on the greens in relation to their peers in any given round.

STROKES GAINED /PUTTING LEADERS / AGE

20 / DENNY MCCARTHY / 27
19 / DENNY MCCARTHY / 26
18 / GREG CHALMERS /44
17 / RICKIE FOWLER / 28
16 / JASON DAY / 28
15 / AARON BADDELEY / 34
14 / GRAEME MCDOWELL / 35
13 / GREG CHALMERS / 39
12 / BRANDT SNEDEKER / 32
11 / LUKE DONALD / 33
10 / LUKE DONALD / 32
9 / LUKE DONALD / 31
8 / COREY PAVIN / 48
7 / JESPER PARNEVIK / 42
6 / BEN CRANE / 30
5 / BEN CRANE / 29
4 / TIGER WOODS / 28

adulthood, the parts that do the analytics get better. For life function, that's a good thing. But for an athlete, a more developed analytical cortex means you're getting in your own way, overanalyzing and overreacting to negative outcomes," Lardon says. "Your analysis of what's happening gets better, but your performance doesn't."

Tournaments provide weekly feedback in the form of missed putts, missed cuts and missed opportunities to win. An unlimited array of technical measuring tools can definitively reveal when the putterface is a few degrees closed or open, or if a stroke isn't repeating. "I'll ask a player what's going on, and he'll usually respond with some technical mumbo-jumbo," Lardon says. "That's further contaminated with frustration from not seeing the results he wants. The answer isn't ignoring the technical stuff that needs to happen in a good stroke. It's trying to help somebody learn something to the point where they can forget it and let the stroke happen. There's a time for tech like SAM PuttLab, but at some point, you need to get up there and hit the putt."

Too much emphasis on analytics can end careers, Lardon says. "When you putt badly, you usually get hyperfocused on technical things—which just makes the process even more conscious. Then performance just gets worse, which initiates the cycle all over again."

Ironically, the fact that the average amateur's competitive environment is so different than a tour player's means you actually have an advantage when it comes to improvement. You can close the biggest skill and knowledge gaps—like green-reading—and sidestep the performance feedback loops that pressurize the pro tours (it also helps that you don't need to make a 10-footer for a million dollars or a green jacket).

Here's how you can make 2021 your best putting year ever.

GET BETTER AT RUDIMENTARY GREEN-READING

The biggest gulf between elite players and average amateurs is the ability to identify the contours on a putting surface. Not only do tour players have a full-time caddie with them to help figure out break and speed, they develop real reading skills. That's substantially different than what you probably do, Utley says. "Most of the amateur players I teach come in saying they know how to read greens, but what they're really doing is remembering what a similar putt did on a hole they play a lot," he says. "And the sad thing is, they're bad at remembering, too."

Going to a putting clinic to learn a comprehensive system for green-reading, like the classes conducted by AimPoint, pays lifetime dividends for

MCCARTHY: BOB KUPBENS/ICON SPORTSWIRE/ GETTY IMAGES

less than the cost of a premium driver. In basic terms, AimPoint shows you how to use your feet to feel the prevailing slope in a putt, then use your fingers and the horizon to pick a spot to aim based on that slope. But even if you aren't willing to attend a clinic, you can improve your pre-putt routine with a few simple adjustments.

Instructor Todd Anderson helps PGA Tour pros Billy Horschel and Brandt Snedeker in parallel with weekend players from his base at the PGA Tour Performance Center at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach. One of the first things he does is help his clients establish a connection between what they perceive in a read and what the ball actually does. "The thing about green-reading is that you have to combine three skills," Anderson says. "One, you have to be able to see the break. Two, you have to accurately perceive where your putter is aimed. Three, you have to make the ball go on your intended line. I'll have a player read a putt and go put a coin down at what they think is the apex of the break or by the hole where they think they need to aim. Then I ask them to aim to their chosen spot. Some players are more than a foot off from where they should be aiming."

Anderson estimates that the average 15-handicap putts at less than 50 percent of his or her capability because of poor green-reading and inconsistency inside of six feet. The worse your green-reading is, the longer your second putts become. But solving the first issue also corrects the second. "And anything you

THE EYES HAVE IT

▸ Top instructor Todd Anderson (*above*), who coaches accomplished putters such as Brandt Snedeker and Billy Horschel, says average golfers can get better by improving their ability to predict the correct putting line *and* making sure they're aimed on that line. Simple advice, but you'd be surprised how often those two skills are neglected, Anderson says.

ANDERSON: J.D. CUBAN

do with putting comes right off the bottom line, too," Anderson says. "If you can take two fewer putts per round, your score will be two shots lower. If you get 20 more yards off the tee or hit your irons 10 feet closer, you still have to make the putt to realize those gains."

By spending entire practice sessions placing that coin on perceived breaks and then evaluating how you're rolling the ball relative to what you predicted, you'll be doing the unavoidable basic computing work that goes into better green-reading—and connecting that read to your stroke.

"I'm shocked at how many players don't bother to look at a putt from the side, halfway between the ball and the hole," Stockton says. "If you just look at a putt from behind the ball toward the hole, you're not in a vantage point where you can really see anything."

By going to the side opposite the highest point of the break, you're looking at the putt as if you were looking at a book propped in front of you, where you can see the whole spread. Looking from the high side, Stockton says, is like trying to read a book tilted away from you. "You might be able to see something, but it's hard and could be distorted."

PRIORITIZE VISUALIZATION OVER MECHANICS

Denny McCarthy has led the PGA Tour in the strokes gained/ putting statistic the last two years—at age 26 and 27 . He's the first person to lead it in consecutive years since Luke Donald did it from 2009-'11. Track McCarthy down on the practice green early in a tournament week, and you won't see him with a bunch of training aids, alignment sticks or electronic devices attached to the butt of his Scotty Cameron GOLO mid-mallet putter. "I think of putting as an art form, not a science," he says. "I like to see the lines and the arcs in my head and putt to that image. See the picture, see the line and putt to it."

To emphasize roll over mechanics, McCarthy draws a line on his ball, finds a straight putt on the practice green and marks the path from his ball to the hole with a chalk line. He then aligns the line on the ball with the chalk line and strokes putt after putt. "The other drill I do is one Tiger uses, where he sets up two tees just wider than his putter's face and hits putts one-handed," says McCarthy, a two-time All-American at Virginia who joined the tour in 2017. "I want to feel the roll, like hitting a topspin forehand in tennis."

McCarthy's approach could have been cribbed directly from Stockton, minus the line on the ball. "That's always been my original premise—see the line and the ball traveling on that line into the hole," Stockton says. "There's a camp that says you should use the line to carefully set up your body, but most people don't line up correctly. I always like to watch the players who are free, they see the line and roll the ball—guys like Lee Trevino and Ben Crenshaw. The players who understand that putting is visualization—not mechanics—are the ones who last."

RANDOMIZE PRACTICE

As tempting and convenient as it might be to groove your stroke on the practice green at your home course or on the mat you've unrolled in your den, the secret to better putting is learning to deal with variability, Stockton says. "You get better at visualization and speed control by playing greens that are different speeds and learning to adjust. Everything isn't straight and precise," he says.

The rescheduled fall Masters in 2020 offered a glimpse of what it might have been like to play Augusta National in the 1960s and 1970s, when the conditions weren't as majestically perfect as they have been in recent decades. Stockton was leading by one over Gary Player after three rounds in the '74 Masters and intended to load his Ray Cook putter with lead tape before the final round to help account for the unexpected slowness of the greens. But after a late-evening media session on Saturday night, he didn't get to it. "I realized on the front nine that I forgot. I hit the first nine greens and still shot one over," Stockton says. "On 13, I hit my second shot to 15 feet. Gary hit it near one of the left bunkers. I left my eagle putt short, and he got up and down for birdie and won by two. That's a mental whiff. I didn't adjust when I needed to. But it's a good reminder to evaluate every putt as unique."

DON'T BE AFRAID TO SWITCH IT UP

Bernhard Langer has been one of the most enduring competitors in golf, winning tournaments every decade from the 1980s to the 2020s. He has won 41 times in 13 seasons as a senior player, including 11 majors. And he has done it while overcoming the yips four different times in his career.

"I was a tremendous putter as a caddie and an assistant pro, but I developed the yips almost immediately after I went out on tour," Langer says. "I had gone from putting on greens that were eight or nine in Stimpmeter speed in Germany to playing really fast ones that were 12 or 13 in Portugal and Southern Spain, and I had the pressure of needing to make money because I didn't have any." Langer persevered and was one of the first players to go to a cross-handed grip in competition. In 1980, he won his first European Tour event, and in 1985, his first Masters. But when the yips returned, he had to rebuild his putting stroke again. "By the time I won the '93 Masters, I was putting cross-handed, leaning the shaft against my forearm," he says. "I made everything from five feet and in, but four years later the yips returned once more, and I had to change it up again, going to the long putter. It was about surviving and staying on tour. There are so many different ways to putt. You have to find the way to be a decent putter no matter what it looks like. It's not about looking good. It's about producing scores."

Ask Stockton what the ideal putting setup looks like, and he'll offer a range of choices based on a player's build, tendencies and comfort zone.

"I had tournaments where I set up open to the target because I felt like I needed to see the line better, and I had tournaments where I set up more closed because it just felt better," he says. "It's more about getting into

a position where you can be stable and let the putter swing." Hearing two players with a combined 100 years of competitive experience say you can freelance your fundamentals might seem like an oversimplification if you struggle to hit putts in the center of the face, but research backs it up.

Debbie Crews has spent 30 years studying how players get into their most productive mental state for good putting. Her research fills volumes, but here's one nugget that should give hope to anybody looking to putt better:

"A 3-year-old can roll the ball in the hole. A lot of what adults do to try to control the putter just gets in the way of getting the ball to fall into the cup," says Crews, who is an LPGA master professional and a researcher and performance consultant at Arizona State University. "The important thing is to build an image that you can use no matter what method of putting you choose. You can imagine a clock-face on top of the hole, and try to roll the ball in over the numbers on the face or even more precisely. Or you can choose to make the ball go in at a slow, medium or fast speed. Once that goal takes over your mind-set, the particulars of how you stand over the ball, grip the putter, stroke the putt or what's happening around you start to fade away. You're getting rid of the middleman between your skill set and the outcome."

UNDERSTAND YOUR TENDENCIES

Your predominant ball flight is probably obvious. You slice it or hook it, draw it or fade it. You have putting tendencies, too—they're just sometimes harder to identify. "I sometimes aim a little left and shove the ball toward the hole," Langer says. "So I have my caddie constantly check to see if I'm aimed correctly, or if I'm pushing it. If you know your tendencies, you can account for them instead of experimenting randomly to correct them. Having that knowledge can dramatically improve your results without any other adjustments."

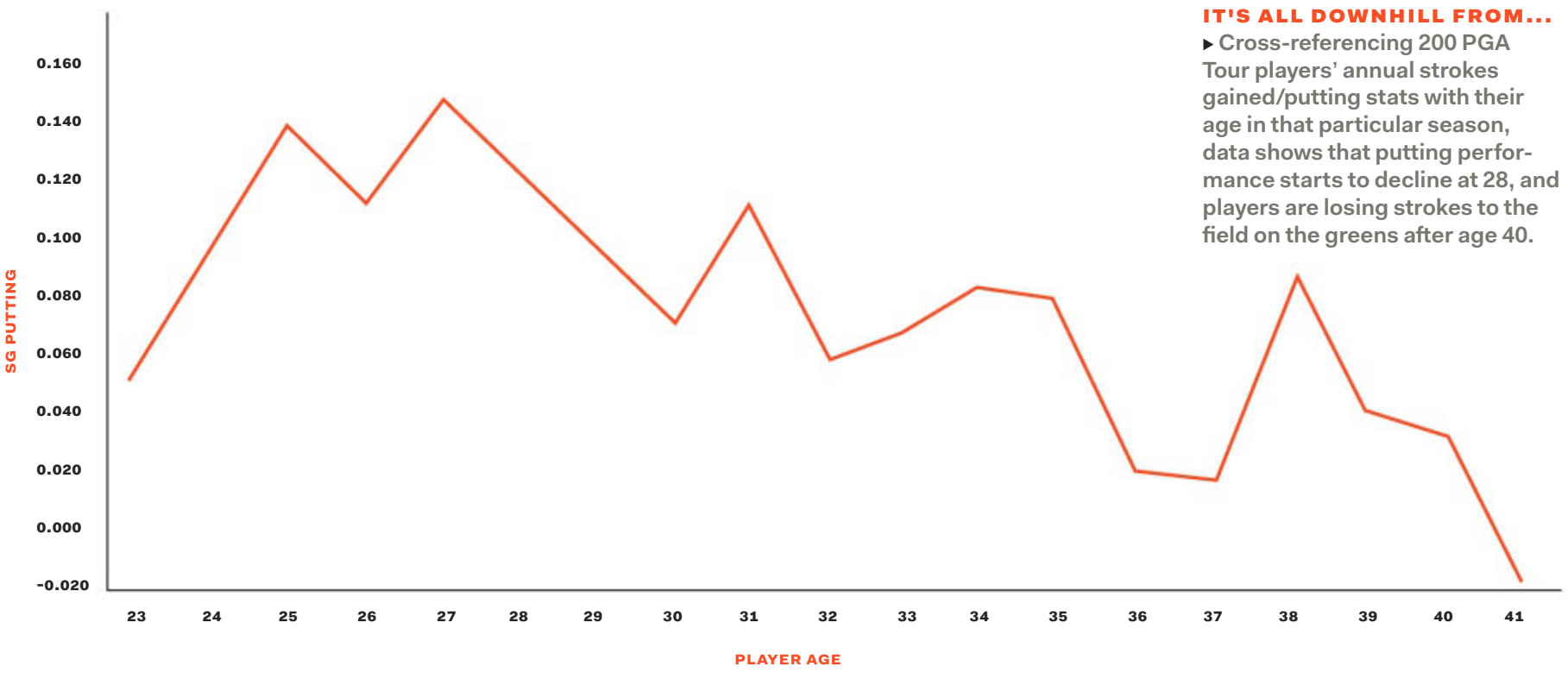
Adds Anderson, "That process I described earlier with the coin? If you did that regularly and saw that you tend to over-aim to the high side of the hole, that would be very important information to have about your tendency. If you don't know what you usually do, you can't adjust."

Another important reason to understand your tendencies is that it helps prevent you from overreacting to a problem, Utley says. "I know that when I putt bad, it's because I'm dragging the handle back," he says. "So I go back to all the same things I worked on when I was 20 to correct it. When you can get yourself back to that neutral place with your address, you make putting easy again, where you aren't making a bunch of compensations."

EMPHASIZE PROCESS, NOT RESULTS

When you play for a score, missing a putt that really matters can trigger long-term effects. "If the average player starts missing putts, he or she usually gets slower and shorter with the stroke," Anderson says. "Or a player who putts poorly starts trying to take the hands out of it, losing feel. When you putt trying not to do something instead of letting the putter flow, you lose control. You'll start doing something like pulling putts, and then you start thinking about holding the face open to stop pulling it, but that makes things worse. The fear of missing hurts you more than the actual misses do."

A life-and-death moment in an emergency room is different stakes than a four-footer to win $10 from your friend, but Lardon says the training medical personnel go through is designed to do exactly what a player should be striving for on the green—provide a thorough process to focus on and follow instead of getting distracted by the magnitude of the moment. "When I was doing a rotation



IT'S ALL DOWNHILL FROM...

▸ Cross-referencing 200 PGA Tour players' annual strokes gained/putting stats with their age in that particular season, data shows that putting performance starts to decline at 28, and players are losing strokes to the field on the greens after age 40.

18+

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in the emergency room, we'd get a patient who needed advanced cardiac life support," Lardon says. "A nurse would hand me the defibrillator paddles, and if you messed it up, somebody died. The nurses handled those situations so often that they were able to operate without getting caught up in [what was a life-or-death situation]. The best putters are able to create a routine that lets them do something complicated by rote so it relieves them of responsibility for it. They're a detached observer. They do their thing, observe the result and move on."

Part of that is developing a pre-putt routine that is always the same, no matter the stakes. The putt leaving the face at impact is just the last step in a repeating process, Anderson says.

"You're putting on an imperfect surface—you can do everything right and still miss, or do something wrong and it goes in. So don't worry about it. Make your read, roll it on your intended line. Control the things you can control and leave the rest to fate. Like [sport psychologist] Dick Coop said, you can't make a putt. You can only make a stroke."

Back to Stockton and his recent battles against club golfers, the part that strikes him the most is how angry his opponents get at missing a putt, and how that anger can torpedo a potentially good score. "The bad putters? There's always a reason they missed a putt, and they'll tell you all about it," he says. "You gotta move on to the next one. Of all those tournaments I played, I won 24 of them. That makes me a loser like 950 times. That '74 Masters I could have won if I putted better? By nightfall, I was done thinking about it."

ALL PUTTS ARE CREATED EQUAL

▸ A cold putter kept Dave Stockton (*above*) from winning the 1974 Masters, but the noted short-game coach says he did not let those missed putts linger in his mind. The takeaway: If you treat the outcome of every putt the same, you can help relieve yourself of that "must make" pressure felt in situations of perceived importance.

STOCKTON: AUGUSTA NATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES

JIM NANTZ
by vineyard vines

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FIT YOUR FOOTWEAR TO YOUR GAME

BY KEELY LEVINS

XANDER SCHAUFFELE, NO. 4 IN THE WORLD, tests his golf shoes with the same vigor as he does his golf clubs. "If I hit a few shots with a club that I don't like, I toss it out. Same thing with my shoes," he says. "If I slip once or feel looseness in the heel or lateral motion, it's done." If tour pros choose their shoes with such care, perhaps you should, too. The good news? With so many options, you don't have to sacrifice style or function.

IF TRACTION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO YOU

▸ Maybe it's your style of swing, or you're afraid of slipping, or you often play in wet conditions, but if you're not taking any chances when it comes to traction, these two spiked options are a great place to look.

1 FOOTJOY
HYPERFLEX
The lacing is placed along the outside of the shoe to create a secure fit and relieve pressure at the top of the foot. **$180**

2 ADIDAS
ZG21
The Adidas tour staff weighed in on the positioning of spikes and traction elements to guarantee plenty of grip in the lightest cleated shoe (13 ounces) Adidas has made. **$180**

IF YOU WANT LESS WEIGHT

▸ Walkers and their feet know the value of a lightweight shoe. In fact, wearing a shoe that's just one ounce lighter means you're carrying and lifting as much as 562 fewer pounds over the course of 18 holes.

3 PUMA
IGNITE FASTEN8
The mesh upper helps make this shoe lightweight, and the TPU saddle wraps around the foot to add stability. **$140**

4 NEW BALANCE
FRESH FOAM PACESL
The lightweight foam midsole has more support toward the arch and more cushion at the outside of the foot. **$100**

5 ASICS
GEL COURSE ACE
The lightweight midsole has ample cushioning to give these shoes the comfort and support of a running shoe with golf-ready traction. **$150**

IF YOU NEED MORE CUSHION

▸ Walking nine, 18 or 36 holes could have you looking for a bit more support. A quality midsole—the section of the shoe between your heel and where the traction elements are—can be the difference between feet that ache after the round and feet that don't. These two models feature thick, foam midsoles to offer maximum comfort with every step.

6 SKECHERS
GO GOLF
TORQUE PRO
The midsole and insole provide thick cushioning without sacrificing responsiveness. **$120**

7 NIKE
AIR MAX 90 G
The Air Max combines off-course cool with plenty of cushion. The air pocket at the heel provides extra comfort. **$130**

IF YOU PREFER WATERPROOF SHOES

▸ Playing in the Northeast and Pacific Northwest comes with the unfortunate truth that you will spend more than a few rounds slogging through the rain. However, even if you're purely a fair-weather golfer, you are still likely to encounter morning dew once in a while. Keep the elements out with these stylish waterproof options.

8 ECCO
BIOM H4
A Gore-Tex lining protects against water and wind, but the breathable construction keeps your feet from overheating. **$200**

9 TRUE LINKSWEAR
LUX KNIT
If you think a mesh upper can't be waterproof, think again. This lightweight upper has been treated to keep water out. **$185**

IF YOUR SHOES GO ON AND OFF COURSE

▸ These shoes have traction elements on the outsoles instead of spikes and uppers made to look more like street shoes than the classic leather golf shoes of the past. They can easily transition from the course to wherever your plans have you headed afterward. Here are two options no one will suspect are golf shoes.

10 CUATER
THE WILDCARD
These minimalist, all-white kicks offer versatility away from the course, but traction elements on the sole keep you steady on it. **$130**

11 GFORE
KNIT DISRUPTOR
The first knitted golf shoe in the Disruptor line features a cushy insole for extra comfort in a style you can wear around town. **$225**

Photographs by The Kaplans

Center Strikes

Try my drill to improve your contact

BY JESSICA KORDA

CONSISTENTLY CREATING solid contact with irons and wedges is one of the most important parts of the game. I hit 18 greens in my final round at the Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions in January, including one that led to a birdie on the first playoff hole for my sixth LPGA Tour win. That wouldn't have happened if I wasn't puring it.

I'll often use this drill to keep my contact sharp—it's good for chipping and iron play. If you're a righty, grip the club with your right hand, take your stance, and then put your left hand on your left thigh (near photo, *right*). Whether you're chipping with a wedge or making a half-swing with a longer iron, hit one-handed shots while keeping your left hand from moving on the left leg (far photo, *right*).

Don't worry about where the ball goes. Focus on the quality of contact. This drill tells you whether you're keeping your chest down through the shot. If you pick your chest up, you will change your address posture, and that makes it really hard to hit the ball solid. Why keep your left hand steady on that thigh? It helps remind you to stay down through impact.

If you try this drill, hit five shots one-handed, then take your normal grip and hit five shots trying to recreate that chest-down feeling in the through-swing. I go back and forth from one-handed to two-handed swings during my warm-up to get that feeling locked in before I get out on the course.

—WITH KEELY LEVINS

"This will help keep your chest down through impact."

Photographs by J.D. Cuban

"You'll make the clubhead move faster where it counts."

Hinge, Then Extend

Release the power you create at the right time

BY EARL COOPER

THE GOLF TERM "releasing the club" doesn't mean helicoptering it into a pond after hitting a drive out-of-bounds (although you might be tempted). Rather, it's a way of describing the widening of the angle created by your arms and club in the downswing—and if your timing is right, this release will allow you to tap into a great source of power.

If you hinge the club skyward with your hands and wrists as your upper body rotates away from the target in the backswing, you will create a noticeable V- or L-shaped angle between your lead arm and the shaft of the club. Now I want you to maintain that shape as you start the downswing (*below, left*), waiting a beat before *releasing* the club into the ball. As your body rotates toward the target in the downswing, you release by keeping your grip relaxed and letting your wrists fully unhinge, which helps sling the clubhead through the hitting area and into full extension (*below*). The widening of the angle between the shaft and your arms (extension) has a whip-like effect on your shots if it happens slightly later in the downswing than it does for many recreational players.

So remember to hinge going back, and then unhinge after your lower body starts the downswing.

EARL COOPER, one of Golf Digest's Best Young Teachers, is at the Union League Golf Club at Torresdale near Philadelphia.

Photograph by Steve Boyle

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Last-Minute Prep

Haven't been exercising? There's still time to get ready for golf season

WE CAN'T BLAME YOU if you've been avoiding the gym because of Covid-19, and trying to exercise in a house full of family members isn't easy. But if you're worried that because you didn't do much to physically prepare for this golf season you're setting yourself up for injuries or a lackluster year, fitness trainer Jennifer Fleischer says there's still time to prime your game.

"Think of this like an overnight cram session for a college test," says Fleischer (*right*), one of Golf Digest's 50 Best Fitness Trainers in America. "You can do these exercises on off days or before a round, and they'll help a lot to get you ready."

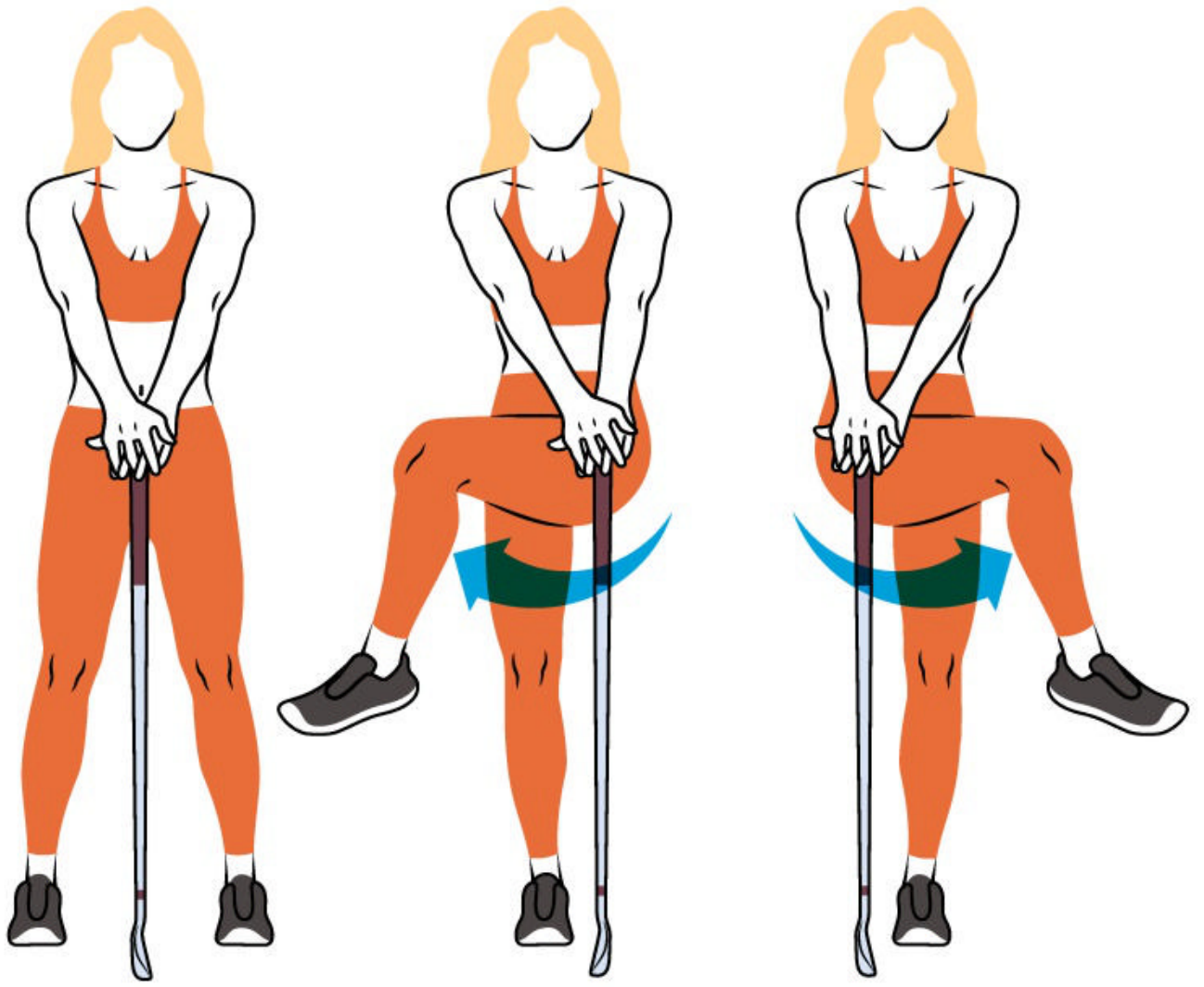
Do two sets of eight to 12 reps for each exercise. You should be able to complete all three moves in less than 10 minutes. —RON KASPRISKE

MINI-BAND ARM RAISES

If you don't have a band, you can use a short iron for this exercise. Get into address posture with your arms extended in front of you at shoulder height while keeping the band taut (if you're using a golf club, feel like you're trying to pull it apart). As you try to increase the stretch in the band, raise your arms as high as possible while remaining in your address posture. This exercise is great for helping with swing speed and solid contact because it improves stability in the shoulder blades, mobility in the shoulder joint and the ability to maintain good posture when you swing.

CHRISTIAN IOOSS

"Within a week, you'll notice you're swinging more freely."

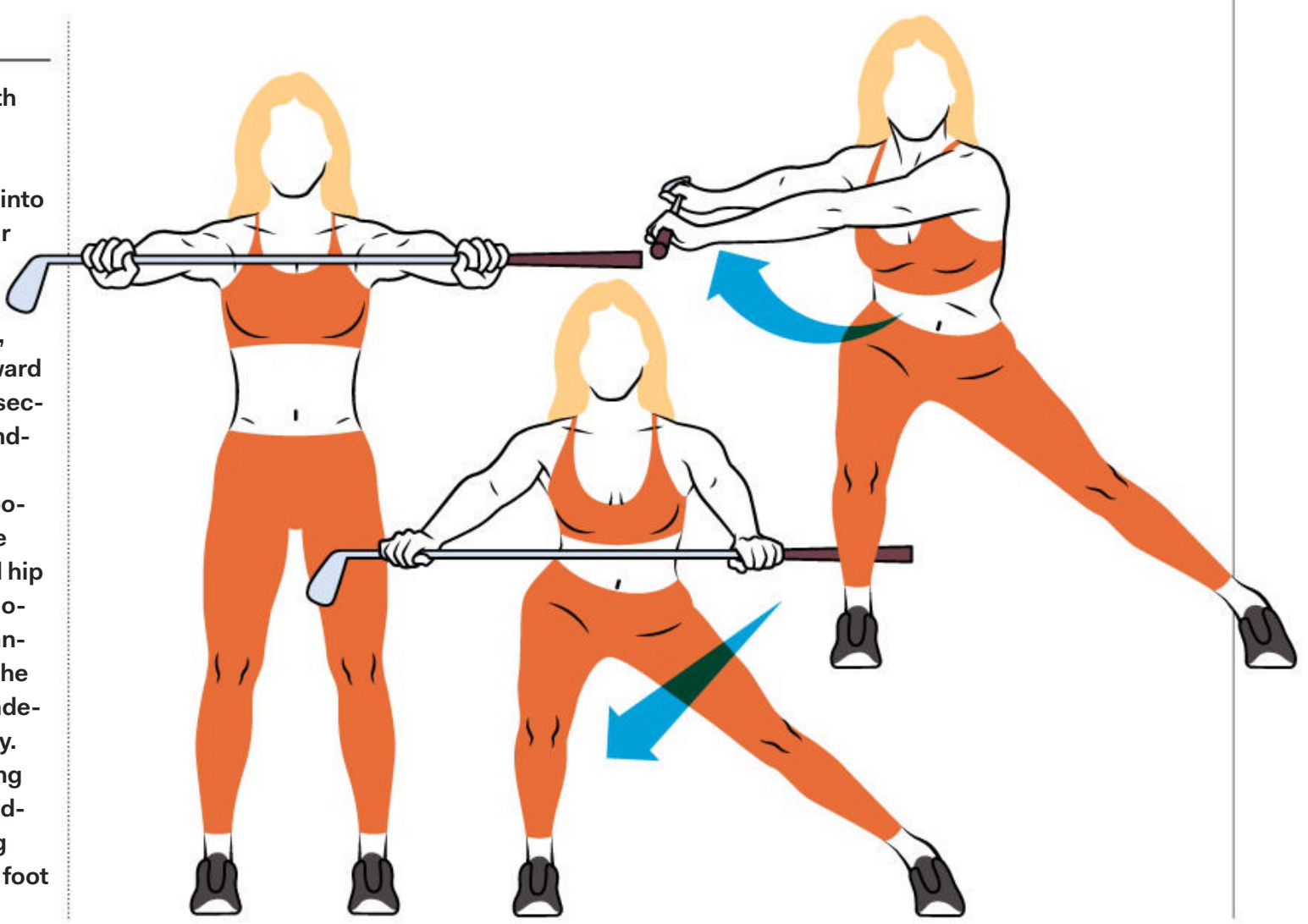


TORQUE TWISTS

Grab an iron long enough to use for support and plant it vertically in front of you, placing both hands on the top end. From a tall standing position, raise one leg so it's bent at 90 degrees, then rotate your pelvis inward toward the posted leg before returning to the start position. Make sure to rotate in both directions. This exercise keys on improving internal hip rotation, balance, core stability and torso separation. In golf terms, that means the ability to generate more rotational power and better sequencing in the swing while maintaining good balance.

COIL LUNGES

Grab an iron at both ends and hold it in front of your body while standing. Next, drop into a lateral lunge, shifting your body over the support leg while letting the other fully extend to your side. Finally, rotate your upper body toward the support leg, hold for a second, then return to the standing position. Make sure to lunge and rotate in the opposite direction. This exercise strengthens the glutes and hip adductors and improves mobility in the mid-back and ankles. It also helps develop the ability to rotate the torso independently of the lower body. It can correct a host of swing flaws including swaying/sliding, a steep out-to-in swing path and favoring the back foot in the downswing.



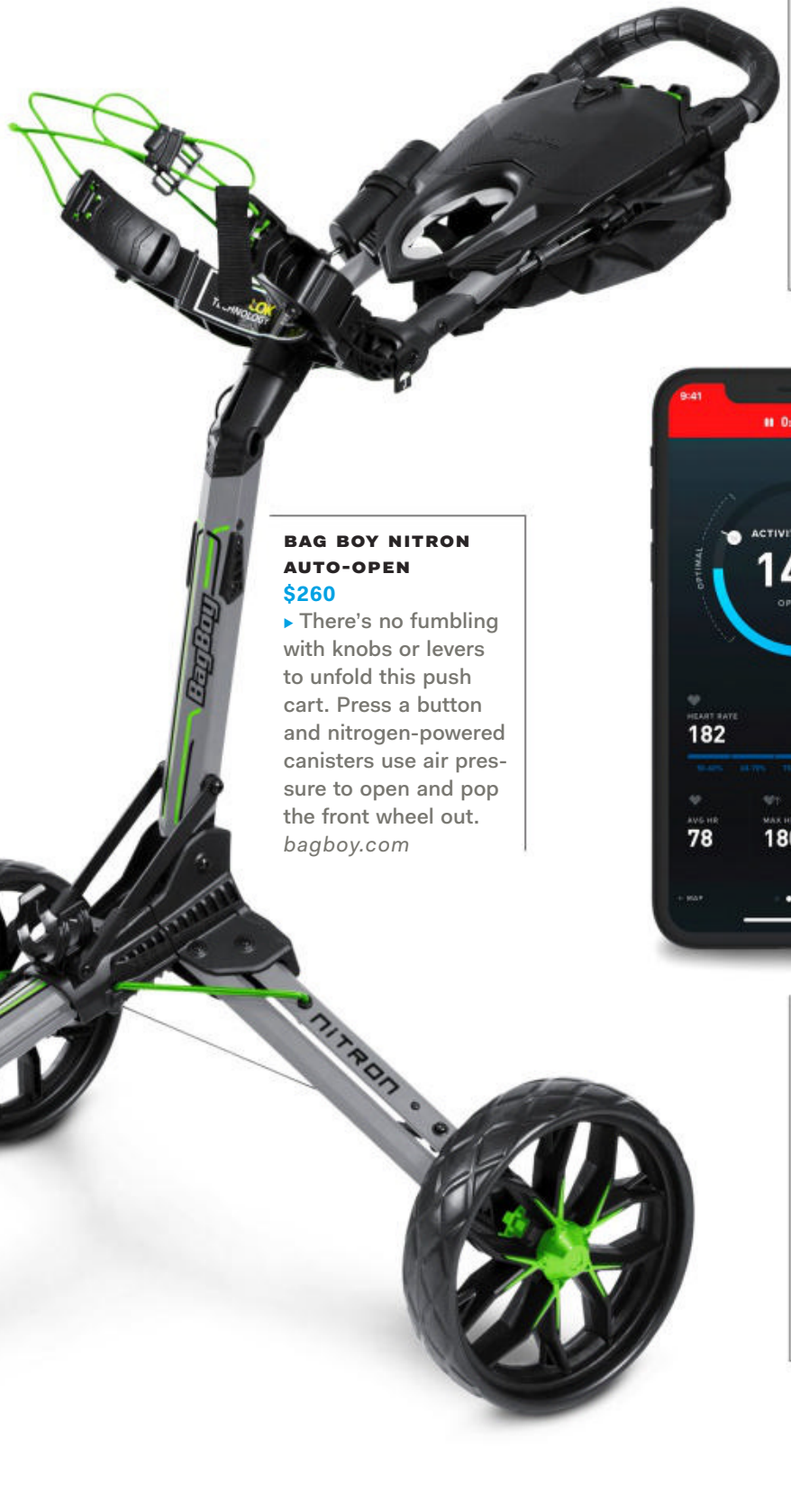
Illustrations by Mckibillo

Play Better, Smarter, Healthier

Our Editors' Choice award winners help golfers get the most from their games

GOLFERS USUALLY are a curious bunch. Entice them with an opportunity to improve their games, and they will probably take a look. If this sounds like you, well, you might want to carve out a little extra time in your schedule because we have plenty of "enticements" you'll be curious about. Our annual Editors' Choice package offers an assortment of products that can help golfers play better, smarter and healthier in 2021. From training aids to game analyzers, fitness equipment to golf apparel and accessories, our honorees provide you with the tools to become a better golfer. The following products provide a glimpse at some of the 220-plus award winners from across 30-plus categories that can be found at GolfDigest.com starting in late March.

RYPSTICK
$190
▸ Tour pros all seem to be looking to swing the club faster, and you can, too, if you strengthen the right muscles. This aid uses interchangeable weights that let you pick up speed gradually. *rypstick.com*



BAG BOY NITRON AUTO-OPEN
$260
▸ There's no fumbling with knobs or levers to unfold this push cart. Press a button and nitrogen-powered canisters use air pressure to open and pop the front wheel out. *bagboy.com*

WHOOP 3.0
Monthly subscription starting at $30
▸ Fasten a strap to your wrist, and you can have access to all sorts of biodata that can help you sleep better, train smarter and improve the efficiency of your daily physical activities. *whoop.com*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE COMPANIES

Golf Digest EDITORS' CHOICE 2021

WEATHERMAN
$90
▸ Special features prove it was designed for golfers: A mesh pocket inside the canopy stores your glove, and one of the supporting ribs is coated in silicone so that a hanging towel won't slip. *weatherman umbrella.com*

GALVIN GREEN RAINGEAR
$699
▸ This ultra-durable rain jacket has a lightweight feel, is made with a water-proof Gore-Tex stretch fabric and is designed to last many, many years of rain or shine. *galvingreen.com*

FINN SCOOTER
$3,500
▸ Single-rider carts grew in popularity during COVID-19, turning this street-bike-like model from curiosity to viable means of club transport. *finnscooters.com*

▸ Tiger Woods, first tee, final round, 2020 Masters.

Photograph by Ben Walton

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