

Golf Insider

IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR GAME

Buttons to the ball

By T.J. TOMASI
Universal Press Syndicate

I teach a wide range of golfers, from tour pros to beginners. One of the biggest differences between them is that the tour players and low handicappers almost always make solid contact with the ball while the less-accomplished golfers do not.

It's not just a coincidence that a major complaint of mid- to high-handicappers is the lack of consistency — one swing produces that pure feeling where you catch the ball directly in the center of the club face, the next is a jarring, off-center hit.

What allows the good player to find the center of the club face time and again? One important element is that the good player maintains the radius of the swing, i.e., the distance from the tip of your shoulder to the center of your club face.

The radius is lost when the hands cock the club into a 90-degree angle at the end of the takeaway and it must be returned through impact in order to hit the ball squarely. This is called "the release," and it cannot occur correctly if the chest and shoulders are pulling away from the ball.

This pulling away is the mistake that many beginners make, and it is the reason they hit so many topped and thin shots.

Let's say your arm is 30 inches long and the club is 40 inches. That's 70 inches at address. During the backswing, you cock your wrists and shorten your radius, so just before impact you must come back to 70 inches. If your chest and front shoulder are pulling away during your downswing, you're going to catch the top of the ball, producing a low worm-burner.

Look at all great players — they cover the ball with their front shoulder and keep their "buttons to the ball," as demonstrated in the photos below.



PGA tour player Bill Glasson exhibits a fundamental of good impact position — his upper chest points at the ball.



Take your address position so that your body line (a line connecting your toes) is parallel to the target line (an imaginary line connecting the ball and the target). Now check to make sure that lines connecting your knees and hips match the toe line, creating a geometry of body alignment that will be complete only when you add its most important element — the shoulders.

Once your club head is positioned behind the ball, remove your right hand (left for left-

handers) and make a pistol with your thumb as the hammer and index finger the barrel. Now lay your right forearm across your chest so the barrel of your "pistol" points along the toe line, parallel left of the target. If your shoulders, by comparison, point too far to the left, your stance is open with a tendency to pull and slice the ball. If your shoulders point to the right of target, it can cause a hook.

In any case, by "pointing the pistol," you'll have a much better chance at proper shoulder alignment, and that's a step in the right direction.



Tiger Woods, shown during the 2004 Masters, won his 52nd tournament Sunday in Akron, Ohio. The Bridgestone Invitational was Woods' fourth consecutive victory.

A pivotal moment

Final hole at Winged Foot transformed Tour's landscape

By CRAIG DOLCH
Cox News Service

West Palm Beach, Fla. — Of long ago, this was considered Phil Mickelson's year. He had won the Masters. He had won the BellSouth Classic by 13 shots. He was on the verge of winning the U.S. Open at Winged Foot, which would have been his third consecutive major title.

Tiger Woods? He wasn't even in town when Mickelson was on the precipice of joining some hall-of-fame company. Woods had missed the cut at the U.S. Open, the first time he had done so in a major since turning pro. He had failed to win the Masters, knowing it would be the final major his ailing father, Earl, would be able to see. He then didn't play golf for eight weeks while mourning his father's death.

The two most recognizable names in the sport were headed in opposite directions. It seemed almost a given that Mickelson was on the verge of earning his first Player of the Year honors.

But then one hole — a dog-leg left, par-4 — altered everything. Mickelson's ascent, Woods' decline. The landscape at the top of the PGA Tour.

When you've played 1,224 holes, as Mickelson has done this year, it's difficult to think how just one of those holes could cause such a seismic shift. But it has, and it continues to.

Had Mickelson parred the 16th hole at Winged Foot when he stood on the tee with a one-shot lead late that Sunday afternoon, he would have joined Woods and Ben Hogan as the only golfers to win three consecutive majors. But



Phil Mickelson reacts to a missed putt during the BellSouth Classic in April. Mickelson started the year on a roll, but his fortune has changed since Winged Foot.

Mickelson double bogeyed the hole, finishing a shot behind Geoff Ogilvy and Lefty's game hasn't been right since.

Mickelson barely made the cut at the Western Open (T65), wasn't in contention at the British Open (T22) or the PGA Championship (T16), missed the cut at the International and looked like he simply was going through the motions at the Bridgestone Invitational (T54).

Woods quickly capitalized on Mickelson's wobble, re-finding his swing while finishing second at the Western Open. Woods then won the British Open by two despite hitting one driver all week, the Buick Open by three with four consecutive 66s, the PGA

Championship by five and claimed last week's Bridgestone Invitational by making a birdie putt to beat Stewart Cink in a playoff.

Not since Jean Van de Velde at the 1999 British Open at Carnoustie has one little hole had such a dramatic effect on golf.

Mickelson insists he has put his collapse at Winged Foot behind him. But his scores indicate otherwise.

"I'm playing terrible," Mickelson said. "There's nothing else to say. In golf, you just don't always have it clicking the way you want to, and when you don't, it's part of the sport. It's part of the Tour that you have to fight through it and finish the rounds and hang in there. That's kind of what I'm trying to do right now."

The only heavy lifting Woods has had to do lately involves championship trophies on the 18th green. It's difficult to make this comment based on what he's already achieved, but Woods may be playing the best golf of his career.

Here's why: He doesn't worry about what he did last week, or what may happen next month at the Ryder Cup. He doesn't care about scoring records. His only concern is getting "another W."

"I'm focusing on this event," Woods said during last week's tournament in Akron, Ohio. "That's what I was trying to tell you guys... the event I'm focusing on is the one I'm focusing on. I'm trying to win the event. So, yeah, the Ryder Cup is in the future. I've got three tournaments prior to it, so hopefully I can get all three of those before I get to the Ryder Cup."

For the record, Woods is sounding like someone who's trying to win six tournaments in a row. Heck, nobody's done that on the PGA Tour since... well, Woods in 1999-2000. All that started with that one hole.

Lack of sponsorship dooms Atlanta LPGA event

By STAN AWTREY
Cox News Service

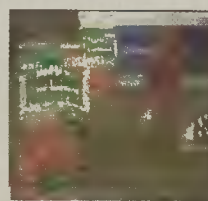
Atlanta — The inability to find a title sponsor has cost Atlanta its LPGA Tour event for 2007.

Orange juice giant Florida's Natural decided against renewing as title sponsor, leaving tournament officials of the annual Charity Championship hosted by Nancy Lopez to cancel the event held annually at the Eagle's Landing Country Club in Stockbridge, Ga.

"A lot of companies were interested, but they all had different things going on and all had some reason why they couldn't do this year," said J.T. Williams, president of Metro South Golf Charities, which ran the event.

The decision leaves Atlanta without an LPGA Tour event for the first time since 1991.

"It's a sad day, and I'm absolute-



Florida's Natural was the sponsor in 2005, but hurricanes hurt the business.

ly surprised that no Atlanta-based company was interested in supporting women's golf," said Torrey Gane, the event's tournament director since its inception in 1992.

Last year's tournament didn't have a title sponsor until two weeks before the event, when

Florida's Natural signed on. "Florida's Natural said they loved being involved with the tournament, but they had two hurricanes last year and wiped out about 25 percent of their crop," Williams said.

The tournament was crippled when Chick-fil-A, which sponsored the event from 1995-2005, pulled its money from the event and threw it into support of the Peach Bowl college football game. Williams worked feverishly to find a replacement last spring, but the last-minute salvation came at a cost: there was no television coverage.

Williams didn't want to go through the same situation again this year, and when his self-imposed deadline arrived, he decided to cancel the event.

"When you've been through that sort of thing once, you don't want to do it again," he said.

SCHEDULE

All Times EDT
PGA TOUR
Deutsche Bank
Championship
• Site: Norton, Mass.
• Schedule: Friday-Monday.
• Course: TPC Boston (7,415 yards, par 71).
• Purse: \$5.5 million. Winner's share: \$990,000.
• TV: USA (Friday, 5-7 p.m.; Saturday, 3-6 p.m.) and ABC (Sunday, 5-7 p.m.; Monday, 3-6 p.m.).

LPGA TOUR
State Farm Classic
• Site: Springfield, Ill.
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday.
• Course: The Rail Golf Club (6,649 yards, par 72).
• Purse: \$1.3 million. Winner's share: \$195,000.
• TV: ESPN2 (Friday, 2-4 p.m.; Sunday, 1:30-4:30 p.m.) and ESPN (Saturday, 3-4:30 p.m.).

CHAMPIONS TOUR
First Tee Open
• Site: Pebble Beach, Calif.
• Schedule: Friday-Sunday.
• Course: Pebble Beach Golf Links (6,822 yards, par 72) and Del Monte Golf Course (6,357 yards, par 72).
• Purse: \$2 million. Winner's share: \$300,000.
• TV: The Golf Channel (Friday, 6:30 a.m., 10 p.m.-midnight; Saturday, 6:30 p.m., 9:30-11:30 p.m.) and NBC (Sunday, 3-6 p.m.).

PGA EUROPEAN TOUR
BMW International Open
• Site: Nord-Eichenried, Germany
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday.
• Course: Munich Nord-Eichenried Golf Club (6,963 yards, par 72).
• Purse: \$2.55 million. Winner's share: \$425,100.
• TV: The Golf Channel (Thursday-Friday, 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday, 8-11 a.m.).

NATIONWIDE TOUR
Legend Financial Group
Classic
• Site: Highland Heights, Ohio.
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday.
• Course: StoneWater Golf Club (7,045 yards, par 71).
• Purse: \$500,000. Winner's share: \$90,000.
• TV: The Golf Channel (Thursday, 1:30-4 p.m.; Friday-Sunday, 2:30-4 a.m., 1:30-4 p.m., Monday, 2:30-4 a.m.).

LEADERS

WORLD RANKINGS	
1. Tiger Woods	22.23
2. Phil Mickelson	8.92
3. Jim Furyk	8.18
4. Vijay Singh	7.28
5. Adam Scott	6.48
6. Retief Goosen	6.35
7. Ernie Els	5.93
8. Sergio Garcia	5.77
9. Geoff Ogilvy	5.73
10. Luke Donald	5.56

MONEY LEADERS PGA TOUR	
Player	Money
1. Tiger Woods	\$7,651,663
2. Jim Furyk	\$5,184,016
3. Phil Mickelson	\$4,256,505
4. Geoff Ogilvy	\$4,228,869
5. Vijay Singh	\$3,479,070

LPGA TOUR	
Player	Money
1. Lorena Ochoa	\$1,840,774
2. Karrie Webb	\$1,708,753
3. A. Sornsiarn	\$1,381,450
4. Mi Hyun Kim	\$1,220,882
5. Juli Inkster	\$1,185,540

CHAMPIONS TOUR	
Player	Money
1. Loren Roberts	\$1,884,739
2. Jay Haas	\$1,607,360
3. Brad Bryant	\$1,422,534
4. Gil Morgan	\$1,312,840
5. Tom Kite	\$1,190,435

THE GOLF DOCTOR

Take a shot at alignment

Your arms, and by extension your golf club, swing along the shoulder line, so it is important to point your shoulders in the direction you want the ball to go. Unfortunately, one of the hardest things for golfers to do is align their shoulders correctly at address.

The difficulty in alignment is caused by the distorted view of the target called binocular parallax (BP) that occurs when you stand to the side of the golf ball. I cover the detailed solution to BP in my book "The 30-Second Golf

Swing," but here is a drill you can do while you play to make sure your shoulders are properly aligned:

Take your address position so that your body line (a line connecting your toes) is parallel to the target line (an imaginary line connecting the ball and the target). Now check to make sure that lines connecting your knees and hips match the toe line, creating a geometry of body alignment that will be complete only when you add its most important element — the shoulders.

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ASK THE PRO

Q: I'm new to the game, and I don't know a lot of the terms. Could you list a few of the most important ones?

A: Sure, Patty. • Address: Taking your stance and setting the club behind the ball in preparation to swing your golf club.

• Par: The score an expert is expected to make. There are par 3s, 4s and 5s, based on yardage of the hole.

• Birdie: Hitting out your ball in one swing less than par.

• Bogey: Hitting out your ball in one swing more than par.

• Double Bogey: Two strokes over par.

• Dog Leg: Golf hole that is curved or angled from right to left or left to right (resembling the shape of a dog's hind leg).

• Draw: When struck, the golf ball curves slightly from right to left for a right-handed player.

• Slice: The golf ball curves from left to right. The hook is the opposite.

• Fade: When struck, the golf ball curves slightly from left to right.

• Fore: A warning signal called out by golfers to warn others that they may be in danger of being hit by an errant shot.

• Heel: The portion of the club face located toward the hosel or neck of the club.

• Toe: The end of the club face opposite the heel.

• Mark: Used as a verb, it means to place an object, such as a small coin, behind your ball to identify its original position once the ball is removed. As a noun, it refers to the object used for marking.