

Golf Insider

Speaking his mind

Golfer-turned-announcer Miller returns to scene of his biggest win

By CRAIG DOLCH
Cox News Service

West Palm Beach, Fla. Every time the U.S. Open returns to Oakmont, the talk turns to Johnny Miller's final-round 63 that won the 1973 tournament and is regarded as the finest round in championship history.

But there's not as much discussion on that subject for this week's national championship. Two generations removed from that magical day, most of the talk about Miller revolves around what he has to say about today's stars and how he says it.

Despite rarely bringing out his clubs for public display, the Hall of Famer and TV analyst has a stronger impact on the game today than he did when he was winning tournaments in bunches with one of the smoothest swings ever seen.

Nobody in golf is as controversial, as loathed, or as loved — depending upon your point of view — than Miller.

"I just do what I do," Miller said. "I don't try to make anything happen. I just call it the way I see it. I was always sort of tough on calls about my own game. I'd be the first guy to tell you I was choking. I'd be the first guy to tell you I'm the best in the world, if I was."

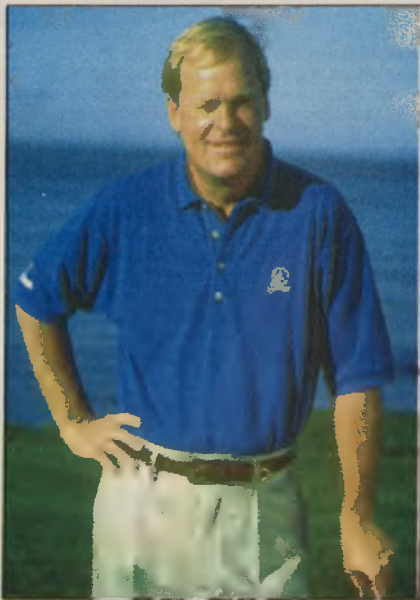
"I make a lot of mistakes (as an announcer), too. I wish I didn't. But it is what it is. It's just Johnny at work. That's all I can tell you."

Return to Oakmont

Johnny will be working extra hard this week, because he often has said the U.S. Open — which returns to the western Pennsylvania course for a record eighth time — is his favorite tournament and there is no clear runner-up. The Johnny you'll hear during four pressure-packed rounds will no doubt make players mad, fans laugh and the casual observer cringe. Maybe all of the above, at the same time.

Miller can make Simon Cowell seem warm and fuzzy and everyone is a potential target, from Tiger Woods to journeyman Craig Parry, whose unorthodox swing, Miller once remarked, "would make Ben Hogan puke."

At last year's U.S. Open at Winged Foot, Miller picked apart a collapsing Phil Mickelson, whose double-bogey on the final hole cost him a third consecutive major championship. In Miller's mind, Lefty didn't get it right from the start, choosing to hit a driver off



Golfing legend Johnny Miller raises eyebrows with his highly opinionated comments during TV telecasts. This week, Miller returns to Oakmont, where his final-round score of 63 in 1973 is regarded as the finest round in U.S. Open history.

the tee. "Phil, you don't have to run down the last stretch on a white stallion, you know," Miller said on the NBC telecast. "You could limp in there and say, 'Thanks for the trophy.'"

Miller insists his acerbic critiques are never a personal thing. Case in point would be his unflinching pick for this year's Open favorite.

"I believe Phil is the favorite," Miller said. "If it were between Tiger and Phil, I take Phil. If he can hit the cut shot, he will win the Open. He has put in more effort to know the course. He has spent an hour on every green. He has as much talent as Tiger, but is driving the ball much better. It wouldn't surprise me if he won by six shots."

Fans' opinions differ

Miller's bias (or perhaps because of it), Miller's stock as an analyst may be dropping. A recent Sports Business Journal/Sports Business Daily poll showed 72 percent of the respondents preferred CBS Sports' lead analyst Nick Faldo over Miller. And in Sports Illustrated's sixth annual PGA Tour player survey this spring,

Faldo was recognized as the players' favorite (92 percent to Miller's 18 percent).

"All I know is our viewers love Johnny," said NBC's lead golf producer Tommy Roy. "And that's the most important audience for us."

Miller doesn't seem bothered by the lopsided polls.

"Faldo is a good friend of mine, but he said when he got on CBS, he would make Johnny Miller sound like Mary Poppins, which I thought was a pretty funny comment," Miller said. "As far as the players, I sort of make them answer to the piper, so to speak, a little bit more than most people. So that's probably where that is coming from."

Miller has even managed to agitate former players, including Hall of Famers from his era.

"I think that Johnny kind of goes overboard and I think he will be the first to admit that he goes overboard," Lee Trevino said. "I do not know why people like to kick somebody when they are down. I was always the kind of guy that if you are down, I want to help you up. I like Faldo; I think he has done a tremendous job. I do not understand him, but I like him."

IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR GAME

How to get out of the frying pan

By T.J. TOMASI
Universal Press Syndicate

The so-called "fried egg" lie in the bunker (buried in a crater of sand, as shown at right) is always challenging because it involves an aggressive swing that's so full of force it can go haywire at any point. This is especially true when you're in a deep bunker and you have to carry a tall lip, as I'm having to do in the photos below.



I'm playing this shot from an open stance. My toe line, represented by the arrow closest to my feet, is pointing well left of the target line, which lies along the second arrow.

After I am my clubface at the target, my goal on the backswing is to swing my left arm along my toe line. Since the arms swing on the body line, my clubhead path will be across the ball, producing a cut-across swing that will carve the ball out of its crater. If I do one very important thing: I must keep my right forearm pointed toward the sky all the way through the swing. This keeps my clubface from turning over and allows me to start the ball at the target.



Notice that my club is swinging way to the left of where it would for a normal shot. If my clubface were square to the path of the long arrow on the left, the ball would shoot too far to the left of my target, but by keeping my forearms from rotating, the clubface stays looking at the target. It's this combination — a club path that goes left and a face that points straight — that provides the height I need to clear the lip of this bunker.

Because I'm going to give this egg a good whack, it's all too easy to turn my forearms over as I would in a normal, full-power swing. Fortunately, I've hit enough of these to know that speed plus rotation spells disaster, so I'm focused on keeping my right forearm from turning over — a thought I would encourage you to try the next time your bunker menu includes a fried egg.

Defending champ doesn't care how he won last year's Open

A little grin crosses the always five-o'clock shadowed face of Geoff Ogilvy every time he's introduced at the first tee of a golf tournament. It's a simple pleasure he couldn't enjoy 12 months ago.

"It's quite nice to be introduced as the U.S. Open Champion every week," he said. "That doesn't get old. Hopefully that doesn't stop after this week."

Ogilvy has had plenty to smile about for the past year, even though he's asked every week to analyze whether he won the Open at Winged Foot or if Phil Mickelson lost it by making a double-bogey on the 72nd hole. The semantics don't matter to Ogilvy.

"There's a bunch of people who think of last year and think about Phil," Ogilvy said. "And there's probably a few people that think about me. That's just the way it turned out."

— Stan Awtry, Cox News Service



Ogilvy

THE GOLF DOCTOR

Prepare for three decisions when hitting the links

Every time you play a round of golf, there are three critical decisions you should make:

Choice 1: Which tees

The best way to get off to a good start is to play the tees that match your strength and weakness profile. Play a course that's too long and you turn most of your strengths into weaknesses — then all you're left with is a weakness and weakness profile. Plus, when you play from the wrong tees, you set yourself up for a flood of psychological "no signals" that will simply ruin your day.

Choice 2: Which type of golf

There are two kinds of golf: spectacular golf and scoring golf. You need to decide which one you're playing before you arrive at the first tee.

Spectacular golf is a game of hitting the perfect shot, taking a driver off every tee and going for every flag. You don't keep score, and the benchmark is great shots that include sensational attacks and daring recoveries.

Scoring golf is based on an evaluation of your current golf swing and the circumstances of play. It's a

game of position. As you progress from the tee (where, by rule, all positions are equal), the idea is to increase your positional advantage with every swing until you hole out — the ultimate in positional advantage. The benchmark to judge success here is your score.

The key is don't mix scoring golf with spectacular golf. If you're going to go for everything, don't keep score, and if you're keeping score, don't go for everything.

Choice 3: The plan

When you arrive at the tee box, take a few moments to identify the shape of the hole and what the architect had in mind.

Develop your plan behind the ball with consideration for your strength and weakness profile, the circumstances (match play or medal one-up or two-down, etc.) and the conditions of play (lie, wind, hazards, etc.).

Your plan should match your profile perfectly so that you receive permission from your subconscious mind to play each shot with confidence.

— T.J. Tomasi

ASK THE PRO

Good putters aim for the hole

Q: Not wanting to be too aggressive on the first hole and ruin my round, I left my short iron shot about 40 feet away from the hole, and at my course, the first hole is not the place for a three-putt. My partner told me to just let it up into a 3-foot circle, and it worked. What do you think of this for long putts? — H.P. from the Web

A: Anything that works in putting is OK by me, but long term I don't like the "3-foot circle" theory. In my experience, good putters try to hit

the ball into the hole, not 3 feet from it. From a long distance, it's easy to leave your putt 3 feet short of where you want it to stop. And if you miss the 3-foot circle by that much, you're 6 feet from the hole.

As far as the mechanics of lag putting go, there are a couple of things to remember: From long range, the best way to get it close is to strike the ball solidly by concentrating on a dimple on the back of the ball so your head stays still until your ball is well under way. I think after you've figured out the distance and the break, if you focus on solid contact you might make a few of the long ones.

Once you've chosen your line, take a practice stroke next to your ball, looking at the hole to program your

mind for the distance of the putt. By doing this your eyes register the distance to the target and your brain calculates how much energy is required.

As is often the case, if you have a long uphill putt, take your practice stroke farther from the hole than your ball lies to account for the added force you'll need because of the slope. If it is a downhill putt, stand closer to the hole to program hitting the putt easier.

In all cases, take dead aim for the 4 1/4-inch circle rather than the 3-foot circle. You'll be surprised at how many more 40-footers you'll make.

And don't forget to practice your irons a bit more. Then you won't have those 40-footers.



Dr. T.J. Tomasi is a teaching professional at Manhattan Golf Club on Manhattan Island. Misses to ask him a question about golf e-mail him at Tj@insider@aol.com

SCHEDULE

All Times EDT
U.S. GOLF ASSOCIATION
U.S. Open
• Site: Oakmont, Pa.
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday
• Course: Oakmont Country Club (7,230 yards, par 70)
• Purse: TBA (\$6.8 million in 2005)

TV: ESPN (Thursday-Friday 10 a.m.-3 p.m., 5-7 p.m.; Monday, if necessary, noon-2 p.m.) and NBC (Thursday-Friday 3-5 p.m.; Saturday-Sunday 1-7 p.m.; Monday, if necessary, 2 p.m. to conclusion)

NATIONWIDE TOUR
Showdown at Somerby
• Site: Byron, Minn.
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday
• Course: Somerby Golf Club (7,025 yards, par 72)
• Purse: \$500,000. Winner's share: \$90,000.
• TV: None.

PGA EUROPEAN TOUR/
PGA EUROPEAN CHALLENGE TOUR
Saint-Omer Open
• Site: Saint-Omer, France.
• Schedule: Thursday-Sunday
• Course: An Saint-Omer Golf Club (6,845 yards, par 71)
• Purse: \$693,225.
• TV: None.

LPGA TOUR
Next event: Wegmans LPGA, June 21-24, Locust Hill Country Club, Pittsford, N.Y.

CHAMPIONS TOUR
Next event: Bank of America Championship, June 22-24, Neshawate Country Club, Concord, Mass.

NGA HOOTERS TOUR
Lona Linda Classic, Thursday-Sunday, Lona Linda Resort, Joplin, Mo.

CANADIAN TOUR
Times Colonist Open, Thursday-Sunday, George Vale Golf Club, Victoria, British Columbia.

LEADERS

WORLD RANKINGS	
1. Tiger Woods	19.70
2. Phil Mickelson	9.03
3. Jim Furyk	7.65
4. Adam Scott	7.11
5. Ernie Els	6.82
6. Henrik Stenson	6.14
7. Vijay Singh	6.08
8. Geoff Ogilvy	5.70
9. Luke Donald	5.36
10. Retief Goosen	5.14
11. P. Harrington	5.13
12. Sergio Garcia	4.95
13. Zach Johnson	4.65
14. Rory Sabbatini	4.65
15. T. Immelman	4.51

MONEY LEADERS PGA TOUR

Player	Money
1. Tiger Woods	\$4,274,091
2. Phil Mickelson	\$4,120,588
3. Vijay Singh	\$3,345,193
4. Zach Johnson	\$2,960,894
5. Rory Sabbatini	\$2,800,108
6. Adam Scott	\$2,504,266
7. C. Howell III	\$2,501,717
8. K.J. Choi	\$2,163,629
9. A. Gaddaday	\$2,020,558
10. John Rollins	\$1,980,110

LPGA TOUR

Player	Money
1. L. Doherty	\$1,254,404
2. S. Pattinson	\$1,023,133
3. Paula Creamer	\$668,974
4. Nicole Caserio	\$658,317
5. B. Lincicome	\$653,389

CHAMPIONS TOUR

Player	Money
1. Jay Haas	\$1,500,658
2. Loren Roberts	\$1,055,047
3. Brad Bryant	\$1,002,991
4. Halo Irwin	\$891,738
5. Tom Kite	\$839,251

Lefty will play but 'won't be pain-free'

By STAN AWTRY
Cox News Service

Oakmont, Pa. Under any other circumstances, Phil Mickelson wouldn't be playing golf this week. His left wrist, wrapped by a navy blue elastic brace that takes a lap around his thumb, needs another solid week of rest before it is deemed back to normal.

But this is the U.S. Open, and there's no way a sore wrist, even one that required a cortisone shot and constant physical therapy, was going to keep Mickelson out of the field at

Oakmont Country Club. "I probably won't be pain-free like I had hoped, but I should be able to have it manageable as long as I don't aggravate it or hit it in the rough," Mickelson said.

The untimely injury actually occurred while hitting practice shots from the Oakmont rough several weeks ago. It forced Mickelson to withdraw from two tournaments (Memorial and Sanford St. Jude) and caused him to alter his preparation routine. He's had to restrict his practice just to keep the wrist healthy enough to compete.