

Golf Insider

By T.J. TOMASI

BIRDIES AND BOGEYS

Teacher's pets

Open winner Louis Oosthuizen is a product of the Ernie Els Foundation that put up the money for his development. Els also mentored Charl Schwartzel, who almost beat Els this year at Doral.

During the Open, an announcer quipped that Els was watching somewhere thinking, "How stupid am I, developing kids who are now beating me." Just kidding, of course, but Els did miss the cut at the British, so he probably was watching.



Els

Good old days

English raconteur Peter Alliss tells the story of the Old Tom Morris era, when playing late in the day was a big advantage because the cups were cut with a knife and since there were no cup liners, the hole would get bigger as the day went on.

Control in the wind

John Daly, Laura Davies, Tiger Woods and Louis Oosthuizen all use a strategy you might want to try next time you're playing in windy conditions.

On the tee box, hit the ground with your fairway wood and place your ball on the mound created by your clubhead. Since there is a small channel behind the ball, making solid contact with a square face has a greater probability. It keeps the ball down and rolling, which is a great way to play in the wind.

GOLF SPOKEN HERE

Biscuit brown

adj.: the color of a "real" links course like St. Andrews

True links courses are made hard and fast by strong winds that dry out the course. To play well you must be able to run the ball as well as hit it high.

On a links course there are often multiple ways of playing the same shot. It's the opposite of most U.S. courses, which are heavily watered and feature bunkers directly in the line of play that force you to play one shot type only — a high shot.

IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR GAME

Bend the ball

It's the course architect's job to make golf exciting, so he prepares a progression of tests, some requiring the ball to curve to the left, some to the right and some to fly straight.

For a right-handed golfer, a fade is a curve on the ball from left to right; a draw is just the opposite. A fade for a pro is a straight ball that gets to the top of its flight pattern, then falls to the right, at most about three or four yards.

When you see a good player fade the ball, it looks like a straight shot to the untrained eye, but a slice is noticeable no matter who's looking at it.

Most golfers slice the ball, creating a shot that starts curving soon after it begins its flight, and by the time it's on the ground, it may have curved 20 or more yards. The fade is easy to control; the slice is not.

Here's the rule of thumb: If you can see the curve immediately, it's a slice or a hook; if you have to wait to tell, it's a fade or a draw.

How to work it

To work the ball the way you want, you must have a slightly open face at impact for the fade and a closed face for the draw.

Set up at address with the face you want at impact. But be careful — don't simply set the clubface

behind the ball and then rotate the face open or closed by adjusting the forearms. This won't work since the forearms will naturally rotate the face to square, taking the curve off the ball. Instead, adjust the face either open or closed in your hands before you sofe the clubhead. This way your forearms are not a factor.

ABOUT THE WRITER



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The diamond drill

This drill will improve your ball striking:

Tee up your ball and arrange three others in a triangle two feet in front of your ball. The top ball of the triangle should be on the target line with the other two on either side (see photo below).

Your task is to hit three balls per series: one that starts over the right ball and curves back to the target; the second goes directly to the target over the front ball; and the third starts over the left side of the diamond and fades back to the target.

When you can do three series in a row without mistakes, you'll be accurate to any pin.



I'm at address with three balls arranged in a diamond pattern. I'll bend one shot over the right side of the diamond, one over the left and one down the middle.



Tour player Jeff Overton, who finished T11 at the Open last weekend, sets his forearms square with the face closed for a draw at the ninth hole at the Honda Classic. It's a dogleg left that requires a right-to-left curve.

TEERING OFF

Woods: From chosen to frozen?

At the British Open, where he finished tied for 23rd, Tiger Woods' swing was much improved, but I fear he's lost his "feel" for the game — the sense of the moment. And that's not unprecedented for a superstar.

Feel for the game includes the ability to score, and there is a fine line between hitting the ball well and scoring. Ask former world No. 1 David Duval, who currently hits the ball as well as he ever did but can't score. Now, that 15-footer to save par at a crucial juncture rims out instead of going in.

When your sense of the moment disappears, you go from the Chosen One who scores better than he swings to the Frozen One, frozen out of the winner's circle no matter how well you play.

It happened to Arnold Palmer, winner of 62 PGA Tour events, who never won another Tour tournament after 1974. He was the king, then poof, it was gone. Another phenom, Johnny Miller, winner of 25 tour events, suddenly lost it. In 1974-75, Miller won 12 tournaments, but after his 1976 victory at the British Open at Royal Birkdale, his reign at the top of the game evaporated.

Just another good player?

Miller told me that since he had always had the touch, he didn't know it could be otherwise. But when he returned to the game after months of working on his ranch, he'd put on a bunch of muscle and he said "the club felt like a 40-pound hammer." His feel was gone, and he became just another good player.

In what I hope is not a harbinger, former coach Hank Haney described Tiger's loss of feel.

"In the weeks leading up to the Masters, he struggled. He was trying to get ... his feel back. He'd make the statement that he couldn't feel his swing and wasn't feeling it like he had in the past. He said, 'I hear what you're saying, and I see where the shots are going, but I'm not feeling it.' That's why he didn't play before the Masters."

It's freaky

Feel is part of a performance queue I call the sense of the moment, and no athlete had it more than Woods. Ian Poulter described Tiger during his zenith years: "The only Tiger I know is No. 1 in the world, the most ruthless person I've ever seen, the most focused person I've ever seen. I don't understand how you hole 30-foot putts time and again. It's freaky, defies all logic."

Now it seems logic is back in charge. Tiger recorded 10 three-putts and an amateurish 33 putts per round in his return to St. Andrews this year — this from the 2005 Open champion, who had only one three-putt in 72 holes that year. Same venue, different mind-set.

THE GOLF DOCTOR

The man with the red dot on his glove

In the movie classic "The Manchurian Candidate," a hypnotist used a visual anchor, the queen of diamonds playing card, to control the behavior of the hero. Every time he saw the playing card, he acted as programmed. In the British Open, winner Louis Oosthuizen used an anchor to control himself — he drew a red dot on his glove.

Oosthuizen once shot a 57 when he was 19, so he can play, but like many golfers, one of his problems is that he has too many swing thoughts on the course. His solution at the British was to put a red dot at the top of the thumb of his glove so that when he looked down

just before a swing, it reminded him to "get back in the moment, to compose myself and clear my mind," as he described it.

And it's not a coincidence that his mentor, Ernie Els, uses the Velcro flap on his glove as an anchor to trigger every shot.

The queen, the dot and the Velcro are all examples of anchoring, a process that allows you to control the contents of your mind. An anchor is a powerful intervention — one you should add to your skill set.

For more on this subject, see my book "The 30-Second Golf Swing" at www.tjtomasi.com.

DON'T MISS IT

A cure for the yips

The SKLZ Tempo Tray snaps onto your putter shaft and trains you to smooth out your stroke on long and short putts. The ball holder design requires a smooth tempo to keep the ball on the tray. Bonus: If you take a mulligan, you don't have to fish in your bag for another ball.

Look for the Tempo Tray at www.golfsmith.com; \$9.99.



ASK THE PRO

You are not alone

Q: Every time I get ahead in our skins game, I end playing bad. I choke, and I want to stop it. Help! — J.V.

A: For what it's worth, you are not alone. Look at the PGA Tour this year for proof.

Jason Day made six bogeys and shot 2-over during the last round of the Byron Nelson, but still won over rookie Blake Adams. Both players hit into the water on 18, but Day made bogey while Adams doubled.

At the U.S. Open, Dustin Johnson led by 3 then shot a Sunday 82. Justin Rose, who had a three-shot lead at the Travelers, stumbled in on Sunday with a closing 75,

plummeting to a tie for ninth place.

And then there was the Collapse of the Year, featuring Robert Garrigus doing his best impression of Jean Van de Velde when he tripled the last hole of the St. Jude Classic, then lost in a three-way playoff.

So take heart — even good players collapse. Failing can either be crushing or motivating; the key is how you recover.

Pressure is perception. The winner controls his or her perceptions the best, and that keeps the pressure under control.

(To Ask the Pro a question about golf, e-mail him at: TJInsider@aol.com.)

BY THE NUMBERS

Short shots from the Open

- Why are there 18 holes in a round? There are a lot of answers to this question, but the one I like is because there are 18 shots in a fifth of scotch.

- The odds were 200-to-1 that No. 54 in the world, Louis Oosthuizen, would win the Open.

- Driver's paradise: The first and 18th at St. Andrews have over-100-yard-wide fairways.

- Putter's nightmare: High winds even things out.

- Approach-shot paradise: The greens at St. Andrews average about 22,000 square feet, making them easy to find.

- In 1964 when Tony Lema was asked, "How did you find the greens today?" Lema replied, "Easy, there's one at the end of every fairway."

- Tiger: The Open was his seventh consecutive major without a win.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"I was there from the crack of dawn waiting or hoping someone was going to pull out, and you watch all your friends and see guys that you know you're every bit as good as teeing it up and getting all prepared for the tournament ... you feel like a spare part on the driving range."

— Justin Rose, on being an alternate at the 2005 Open Championship at St. Andrews. He missed the cut this year.