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INSIDER'S

MARCH 6, 2025

Tournament Guide

DEFENDING CHAMP SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER

ONLY BACK-TO-BACK
WINNER OF THE PLAYERS...
WILL HE THREE-PEAT?



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THE RECORDER
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Cover photo by Craig
O'Neal after winning
the tournament in 2024.





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Welcome to THE PLAYERS

PHOTO BY THE PGA TOUR

To THE PLAYERS Community,

As we prepare to welcome the world's best golfers to TPC Sawgrass, I want to thank you — our neighbors — for being such an integral part of THE PLAYERS Championship. Each year, this tournament not only showcases incredible competition but also highlights the spirit of Northeast Florida, and we couldn't do it without your support.

This year, we're excited to feature a fantastic lineup, including Military Appreciation Day on Tuesday with a concert from country music star Jordan Davis. Our inaugural Creator Classic on Wednesday and Thursday will kick off competition with 144 of the world's best golfers vying for the

coveted PLAYERS trophy. All of this will be complemented by over 20 local food vendors and fun fan zones and activities for everyone to enjoy.

While the excitement on the course is always a highlight, we also remain deeply committed to making a positive impact off the course. Since its inception in 1974, THE PLAYERS has donated over \$120 million to local nonprofits, supporting education, health care and programs that strengthen our community. We take great pride in ensuring that THE PLAYERS leaves a lasting legacy well beyond tournament week, and it's all thanks to you.

We look forward to another great year and can't wait to share it with you!

See you on 17,

Lee Smith
Executive Director
THE PLAYERS Championship

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE PGA TOUR



LEE SMITH

VOLUNTEERS

The men, women and children who volunteer their time during THE PLAYERS Championship each year are an integral part of the event's success, both during tournament week and in THE PLAYERS' ability to positively impact hundreds of local charitable organizations. Volunteers support every element of the tournament, from tracking statistics, greeting guests, feeding fans to keeping the grounds beautiful throughout the week.

2025 Volunteer Leadership:

The tournament chairman and the vice-chairmen are THE PLAYERS Championship's volunteer leadership team. They work year-round with the tournament staff to deliver THE PLAYERS Championship — in addition to their day jobs, family duties and other community endeavors! They are some



PHOTO BY BEN JARED/PGA TOUR

THE PLAYERS Championship tournament volunteer leadership team for 2025: Vice-Chair Kevin Copeland, Vice-Chair Laura Renstrom, First Vice-Chair Marc Hassan, Chairman Tyler Oldenburg, Vice-Chair Hamilton Neal and Vice-Chair Luke Pritchett.

of THE PLAYERS' biggest ambassadors in Northeast Florida and beyond.

Tournament Chairman – Tyler Oldenburg

As tournament chairman, Tyler Oldenburg

oversees the nearly 2,000 volunteers who support the PGA TOUR's flagship event. In addition, he represents THE PLAYERS at various speaking engagement opportunities in Northeast Florida throughout the year, educating the community on the tournament and explaining how their support enables THE PLAYERS to positively impact lives in the five-county area.

Other members of the volunteer leadership team are:

- First Vice Chairman – Marc Hassan
- Vice Chair of Player Services – Kevin Copeland
- Vice Chair of Spectator Services – Laura Renstrom
- Vice Chair of Facilities – Luke Pritchett
- Vice Chair of Volunteer Services – Hamilton Neal

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As a seasoned professional, Sharon understands that real estate is more than just a transaction—it's about trust, relationships, and finding the perfect fit for every client. Her in-depth market knowledge, combined with a passion for helping others, makes her the go-to advisor for navigating the dynamic real estate landscape in Northeast Florida.

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PHOTO BY CRAIG O'NEAL

TICKETS

Tickets are mobile-only and day-specific. They can be purchased exclusively online at [THEPLAYERS.com](https://www.theplayers.com).

Parking is purchased separately at [THEPLAYERS.COM/parking](https://www.theplayers.com/parking). Parking passes are completely digital and cannot be purchased on-site.

Youth tickets: Up to two children, ages 15 and younger, will be admitted free with a ticketed adult all week. All children ages 6 and older must have a ticket in order to access hospitality venues.

Need more information? Go to [theplayers.com/tickets/faq](https://www.theplayers.com/tickets/faq).

PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION

Gate Times

Gates will open at 7:30 a.m. each day.

Parking

The General Parking Lot address is 5360 Palm Valley Road, Ponte Vedra Beach.

Parking passes are not included with ticket purchases. A separate parking pass is required for each day of championship week (Tuesday through Sunday) and must be purchased online in advance. Purchase parking at <https://www.theplayers.com/parking>.

Rideshare

Rideshares will drop off and pick up at the

Couples Entry off ATP Boulevard, just steps from the 15th hole.

Bike and Golf Cart Parking

THE PLAYERS offers complimentary bike and golf cart parking just past Gate B inside TPC Sawgrass. Fans should enter TPC Sawgrass from the PGA Tour Boulevard entrance, by the Sawgrass Marriott, and follow signs to golf and bike parking. Bike and golf cart parking is not available in the general parking lot. Bike racks are provided free of charge, and fans are reminded to bring their own lock to secure their bicycles.

Cashless Experience

All payments will be digital, contactless and cashless throughout the entire tournament property.

Disabled Guest Services

THE PLAYERS offers shuttle services for disabled guests throughout the tournament. Fans with a handicap parking hang tag must still purchase a parking pass for the general parking lot (off County Road 210). Once parked, golf carts will transport them to designated locations on the course. Carts operate from gate opening until 30 minutes after play ends, following a set route with specific pick-up and drop-off points.

Carts will run from the time gates open until 30 minutes after play ends and will only pick up and drop off from the designated locations below. They will not stray from the official route under any circumstances.

- Behind 16 Green by Couples Gate and The Bier Garden

- Behind 17 Tee adjacent to the Welcome Experience and the Food Court
 - Players left of 9 Fairway by Wine & Dine on 9.
 - Players left of 9 Green by Past Chairman Hospitality.
 - Clubhouse area behind 3 Tee
 - Players right of 16 Tee
 - Players right of 15 Fairway at Taste of JAX
- If disabled guests need assistance from a location without shuttle access, they should contact any tournament official with a radio.

Shuttles

Whether you're a local resident or visiting from out of town, the shuttle services provide convenient and cost-effective transportation options to ensure a smooth and enjoyable experience.

Free shuttles for Nocatee and area residents. Shuttles are first-come, first-served. Dates: Friday, March 14; Saturday, March 15; Sunday, March 16

Parking Locations:

- Palm Valley Academy: 700 Bobcat Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32081 (Friday-Sunday)
- Valley Ridge Academy: 105 Greenleaf Drive, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32081 (Friday-Saturday)
- Pine Island Academy: 805 Pine Island Rd, St. Augustine, FL 32095 (Saturday-Sunday)

Shuttle Times: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Drop-off Location: Nicklaus entrance to THE PLAYERS

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POLICIES AND INFORMATION

Spectator Information Tents are located at:

- Davis Love III entry
- Taste of Jax (11 green/12 tee)
- PGA TOUR Fan Shop at THE PLAYERS Welcome Experience
- Wine & Dine on 9 presented by Meiomi Wines

Help keep THE PLAYERS clean and safe

Fans can text THE PLAYERS from anywhere on course to notify a staff member of an on-site issue. Text 69050 to reach a staff member while at the tournament.

Fan Code of Conduct

Spectators will be subject to expulsion and the loss of ticket privileges for the following breaches of etiquette:

- Making rude, vulgar or other inappropriate comments or gestures;
- Verbal or physical harassment of players, volunteers, officials or spectators;
- Distracting a player or any disruption of play;
- Behavior that is unruly, disruptive, unsafe or illegal in nature;
- Failing to follow the instruction of a championship official, volunteer or security personnel.

Fans can text THE PLAYERS from anywhere on course to notify a staff member of an on-site issue. Text 69050 to reach a staff member while at the tournament.

Mobile Device Policy

Spectator Mobile Device Policy for PGA TOUR Tournaments (please see your ticket for complete terms):

- Devices must be on silent at all times; flash may not be used.
- Devices may be used to capture video, audio and photos (content) in all areas throughout tournament week.
- Content may be used for personal purposes (e.g., personal social media); no commercial use.
- No live streaming or real-time coverage (e.g., no shot-by-shot coverage).
- Data use (e.g., texting) is permitted in all areas throughout tournament week.
- Phone calls are allowed only in designated areas.
- Please be respectful of play and do not interfere with players, caddies or media.
- All posted signage and instructions from tournament staff must be observed.
- Failure to comply with this policy may result in the revocation of your ticket.

Autograph Policy

- On-course autograph seeking is prohibited. (This includes, but is not limited to, tees, fairways, greens and practice areas during practice rounds and tournament rounds.)
- Autograph seeking will be restricted to designated autograph zones: practice grounds and scoring area
- No memorabilia can be brought into the tournament including pin flags, photos, trading cards, balls and other sports paraphernalia.

Alcohol Policy

- Strict adherence to alcoholic beverage consumption laws will be enforced on course and in all hospitality areas.
- Alcohol will not be served to anyone younger than 21; proof of age will be required for anyone younger than 35.
- Only two drinks may be purchased at a time; spectators are not allowed to carry more than two drinks at any given time.

Bag Policy and What You Can Bring

Fans may bring bags that meet the following guidelines:

- Opaque bags measuring 6-by-6-by-6 inches or smaller
- Clear bags measuring 12-by-6-by-12 inches or smaller

Additionally, fans are allowed to bring their own food in a one-gallon clear plastic bag, with food items wrapped in clear wrap. Reusable plastic or metal cups (up to 32 oz.) are also permitted, provided they are empty upon entry. No memorabilia can be brought into the tournament including pin flags, photos, trading cards, balls and other sports paraphernalia.

Fan Lockers

Located at the Nicklaus (by the main parking lot) and Couples (by the rideshare area) entries, THE PLAYERS offers free fan lockers for convenient and secure storage of belongings.

WHAT'S NEW IN 2025

• Bagels R Us: Hole-in-One Breakfast

Fuel up with fresh bagels from Bagels R Us, a perfect breakfast before you hit the course.

• Carolina Jax

Known for their award-winning burgers, Carolina Jax is bringing their irresistible creations to THE PLAYERS.

• Fan Viewing Platform at Hole 10/11

Responding to fan feedback, the tournament has brought back fan seating at Hole 10/11. Thanks to Mayo Clinic, this new platform is the perfect place to congregate, cheer and enjoy the action.

• Fiesta on 12 with Tacos and Tequila

TacoLu is back and bringing their fan-favorite

tacos to Hole 12, now joined by Maestro Dobel Tequila. Enjoy the perfect pairing of fresh tacos and smooth tequila, all while taking in the exciting action on the course.

• Grand opening of PGA TOUR Studios and debut of World Feed

THE PLAYERS Championship 2025 marks the official launch of the PGA TOUR World Feed, which allows the TOUR and its international media partners to provide fans worldwide with more customized coverage and storytelling of the TOUR's international players. Originating just a few hundred yards away from the new PGA TOUR Studios, which opened its doors in January, the PGA TOUR World Feed is produced and curated exclusively for international media partners and their viewers, with up to six dedicated cameras focused on international players at PGA TOUR events across the FedExCup Season. The new, live telecast will be produced for all remaining events on the 2025 PGA TOUR schedule.

• Creator Classic: Where Content Meets Competition

Following its success at the TOUR Championship, the Creator Classic returns to THE PLAYERS Championship. Top social media creators will compete in a nine-hole event at TPC Sawgrass. The competition features eight holes of gross stroke play, followed by a playoff between the top four finishers.

EVENTS

These Kids Can Play

Wednesday, March 12: 9:30 to 11 a.m.

Location: Stadium Village

The PGA TOUR Wives Association, Furyk Foundation and EverBank are partnering to bring children and families from Community Peds Care (Community Hospice + Palliative Care Foundation) to experience the excitement of THE PLAYERS Championship. This special event offers children a day of fun, tournament action and activities tailored just for them.

Dream Day at THE PLAYERS

Wednesday, March 12: 9:30 to 11 a.m.

Two children from Dreams Come True and the Tom Coughlin Jay Fund will be treated to a "Dream Day" at THE PLAYERS. This unforgettable experience includes sitting inside the ropes at the Island Green 17th Hole, meeting players and caddies, followed by a VIP lunch and a behind-the-scenes tour.

THE PLAYERS Championship Caddie Competition in Memory of Bruce Edwards presented by Knockaround

Wednesday, March 12

The Caddie Competition on the iconic 17th hole honors Tom Watson's longtime caddie, Bruce



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EVENTS

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Edwards. This closest-to-the-pin contest offers added excitement, with the winning caddie receiving all player contributions, a personalized money clip, VIP parking and a commemorative drawing.

Billy Horschel's #DriveOutHunger Campaign for Feeding Northeast Florida

Ongoing through Sunday, March 16
Ponte Vedra Beach resident and five-time PGA TOUR winner, Billy Horschel, is once again supporting Feeding Northeast Florida through his #DriveOutHunger campaign. Horschel will donate \$1,000 for every birdie and \$5,000 for every eagle he makes at THE PLAYERS Championship. Fans can contribute to the campaign by going to www.feedingnefl.org and selecting the #DriveOutHunger Campaign to make a donation.

FOOD AND DRINK

THE PLAYERS takes pride in offering an exceptional culinary experience that showcases the vibrant flavors of the region. This commitment to highlighting local food and restaurants means spectators can enjoy much more than traditional tournament fare — though classic options like burgers and hot dogs are always available. From savory lobster rolls to authentic Neapolitan-style pizza and, of course, plenty of barbecue options, the diverse food offerings ensure there's something for every palate.

Taste of JAX

Featuring a selection of local Jacksonville restaurants, Taste of JAX offers fans a chance to indulge in some of the city's best flavors and culinary creations. Enjoy everything from fresh seafood to Southern barbecue and international-inspired dishes.

- **Cousins Maine Lobster** — Serving up its 100% premium, wild-caught, sustainably harvested lobster from Maine.
- **Mojo BBQ** — A premier barbecue, southern food, and craft cocktail destination with eight locations in North and Central Florida.
- **Ajua Mexican Kitchen** — Ajua Mexican Kitchen offers authentic Mexican flavors with fresh ingredients and bold spices, making it a must-visit spot for delicious, handcrafted dishes.
- **Carolina Jax** — New in 2025. Known for their award-winning burgers, Carolina Jax is bringing their irresistible creations to THE PLAYERS.
- **Pele's Wood Fire** — Offering wood-fired pizzas and other modern Italian-inspired dishes. Located near 11 Green/12 Tee.

Food Court — THE PLAYERS Welcome Experience

- **Homespun Kitchen** — A fresh twist on fast

food, Homespun offers a variety of healthy, flavorful options for every diet, including vegan, gluten-free, and paleo.

- **Firehouse Subs** — This sandwich shop was founded in Jacksonville and specializes in hot subs and sandwiches made with premium meats and cheeses, steamed to perfection, and then piled high on a toasted roll.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE PGA TOUR
Bono's Pit Bar-B-Q

- **Bono's Pit Bar-B-Q** — Serving up a taste of authentic Southern barbecue since 1949, Bono's Pit Bar-B-Q brings you mouthwatering, slow-cooked meats straight from the pit.
 - **The Local** — A Jacksonville hotspot serving up delicious dishes with a unique twist. Whether you're in the mood for a quick bite or something more indulgent, it's the perfect place to satisfy your cravings.
 - **Tropical Smoothie** — Bold, flavorful smoothies, wraps, sandwiches, flatbreads, and salads with high-quality ingredients and fresh produce.
 - **Daily's Concessions** — Your convenient stop for quick bites and snacks, featuring Dash's made-to-order breakfast and lunch options like sandwiches, salads, and specialty coffee drinks, along with classic concession stand favorites. Perfect for grabbing a snack or drink while you're on the go!
- The Food Court is located inside Stadium Village, adjacent to the PGA TOUR Fan Shop.

Wine & Dine on 9 presented by Meiomi Wines

Enjoy food from **Bonefish Grill** and a glass of wine from **Meiomi Wines**, the official wine of the PGA TOUR, in a beautiful garden setting. Also, located at the 8th Fan Bleacher, fans (ages 21+) can test their putting skills while savoring samples of signature Meiomi Wines, including the new Meiomi Sangria Wine Cocktail. Don't miss out on exciting daily giveaways (while supplies last) and some friendly competition at this must-visit destination!

Trucks on 10

This venue offers flavors from local favorite food trucks and an open-air Michelob ULTRA Mobile bar.

- **Twisted Okie BBQ**
- **Mama's**
- **Saffron Mediterranean Kitchen**
- **Tikiz**

- **Alma**
- **Hibashi Party**



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE PGA TOUR

TacoLu

Tacos on 12

TacoLu, Jacksonville's popular Baja Mexicana spot, is back at Hole 12, serving up its signature tacos and more. Now, they've teamed up with Maestro Dobel Tequila for the ultimate pairing of fresh tacos and smooth tequila. Located near 12 Green.

The Patio — between 10 tee and 18 green/16 tee

The Patio offers a shaded fan zone that includes open-air seating and a videoboard to keep up with the tournament action. The Patio features a Michelob ULTRA bar as well as food from V Pizza, founded by Jacksonville natives with the goal of bringing true Neapolitan pizza to their hometown.

Bier Garden presented by Hoptinger — behind 16 green

Near the Couples (rideshare) Entry. Choose from a variety of craft beer and bar bites from Hoptinger, a locally-owned bier garden and sausage house.

The Oasis ft. Tito's Golf Club

The Oasis provides a comfortable, open-air space for fans to take a break while enjoying views of the 9th tee, featuring signature cocktails from Tito's Handmade Vodka and **ABBQ**. Known for its Texas-style barbecue, ABBQ serves up mouthwatering smoked meats that pair perfectly with your favorite cocktail. The venue has a ton of fun additions for fans, including the Tito's Golf Club, where fans can enjoy refreshing cocktails, putting contests for fun giveaways, great views of golf and lounge seating. Pro Tip: be sure to enjoy a Sawgrass Splash or Tito's Transfusion.

The Grove featuring Maestro Dobel

Located in Stadium Village behind the 17th tee, The Dobel Lounge offers a selection of premium tequila cocktails, showcasing 11 generations of Maestro Dobel Tequila mastery. Fans can enjoy handcrafted cocktails, test their skills at the Closest to the Pin golf simulator and take part in golf and tequila trivia for a chance to win prizes — all while being right in the heart of the action.

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Friday, March 7

- 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The PGA TOUR Fan Shop is open to the public.

Saturday, March 8

- 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Military Job Fair
- 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The PGA TOUR Fan Shop is open to the public.

Sunday, March 9

- Noon to 1:30 p.m. Operation Shower
- 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The PGA TOUR Fan Shop is open to the public.

Monday, March 10

- Practice Day for professionals
- Course closed to the public
- THE PLAYERS Onesie Program: Every baby born in Northeast Florida during the entire week of THE PLAYERS receives a special onesie provided by THE PLAYERS.

Tuesday, March 11 – Military Appreciation Day

- Charity of the Day: Five Star Veterans
- Entries open at 7:30 a.m.
- Practice Day for professionals



PHOTO BY CRAIG O'NEAL

Rory McIlroy plays the 17th hole in the 2024 PLAYERS.

- 11 a.m. Commissioner Monahan Press Conference
- 4:30 p.m. Military Appreciation Day Ceremony begins
- 5 p.m. Military Appreciation Concert

Wednesday, March 12

- Charity of the Day: Community Hospice Foundation
- Entries open at 7:30 a.m.
- Practice Day for professionals
- All day: THE PLAYERS Championship Caddie Competition in Memory of Bruce Edwards presented by Knockaround – Closest to the pin competition at the 17th hole amongst all of the caddies.
- 9:30 to 11 a.m. “These Kids Can Play”

- 9:00 to 11 a.m. Dream Day at THE PLAYERS
- 8 to 10 a.m. THE PLAYERS First-timers press conference
- Time TBD: Creator Classic begins after play

Thursday, March 13

- Charity of the Day: First Tee — North Florida
- Entries open at 7:30 a.m.
- First round of competition begins at 7:40 a.m.

Friday, March 14

- Charity of the Day: Wounded Warrior Project
- Entries open at 7:30 a.m.
- Second round of competition begins at 7:40 a.m.

Saturday, March 15

- Charity of the Day: Jacksonville Humane Society
- Entries open at 7:30 a.m.
- Third round of competition begins at approximately 8:15 a.m., depending on the size of the cut (twosomes off No.1)

Championship Sunday, March 16

- Charity of the Day: MaliVai Washington Youth Foundation
- Entries open at 7:30 a.m.
- Final round of competition begins at approximately 7:33 a.m., depending on size of the cut (twosomes off No.1)

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MERCHANDISE

The PGA TOUR Fan Shop at THE PLAYERS has been completely transformed, offering fans an immersive shopping experience like never before. The space is designed to engage and excite with new fixtures, custom-made furniture, a refreshed layout and even a live DJ. More than just a place to shop, it's a destination in itself. And pro tip: it has the best AC on the golf course, perfect for fans looking to cool down!

As always, the shop will offer the best selection of your favorite gear, with an exciting array of product debuts, curated brand collections, specialty items and local brands, including exclusive special-edition products.

Did you know? Last year, the tournament sold more than 49,000 hats!

Notable brands this year include:

- LaFarve
- Sugarloaf Social
- Good Good Golf
- Ellsworth and Ivey
- Blue 84
- Rhoback

The Fan Shop will be open to the public the weekend before the tournament so that the community can check out the unique merchandise collection and purchase commemorative items and apparel. The shop will be open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday (March 7), Saturday (March 8) and Sunday (March 9).

SAWGRASS SPLASH THE SIGNATURE COCKTAIL OF THE PLAYERS

As part of the PGA TOUR's commitment to leading the advancement of sustainability in the industry, THE PLAYERS will be serving the tournament's signature drink, the Sawgrass Splash featuring Tito's Handmade Vodka, in a lightweight, aluminum cup.

Aluminum is the most sustainable beverage packaging material, and like aluminum cans, aluminum cups can be easily recycled; the 16 oz. cups are lightweight, sturdy, cool to the touch and provide an elevated drinking experience for all fans.

While the cup is changing, the iconic Sawgrass Splash is staying the same; the drink will continue to feature Tito's Handmade Vodka, and a refreshing combination of orange juice, lemonade and lime juice.

Sawgrass Splash ingredients:

- 1.5 oz. Tito's Handmade Vodka
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THE PLAYERS Championship has a long-standing commitment to honoring our Northeast Florida military members, veterans and their families.

Active-duty Service Member Tickets:

Complimentary admission is available to active duty, retired, reserve and National Guard members, plus one dependent, on Tuesday, March 11, and Wednesday, March 12, and one competition day (Thursday, March 13, to Sunday, March 16), while supplies last. Tickets also include a \$20 digital voucher for food and nonalcoholic beverages. Valid ID required.

Veteran Tickets:

Discounted admission is available to veterans and one dependent on Tuesday, March 11, and Wednesday, March 12, and one competition day (Thursday, March 13, to Sunday, March 16), while supplies last. Tickets include a \$20 digital voucher for food and nonalcoholic beverages. Valid ID required.

To Secure Military and Veteran Tickets:

- Go to [THEPLAYERS.com/tickets](https://theplayers.com/tickets) and select CLAIM TICKETS in the Military Admission section.
- Choose your tournament day(s).



PHOTO BY CRAIG O'NEAL

- Verify your military status via GovX.
- Complete the transaction and access tickets on THE PLAYERS' digital portal.
- Add tickets to your mobile wallet prior to arrival.

NOTE: Parking is not included in military tickets. Parking passes are available for purchase at [THEPLAYERS.com/parking](https://theplayers.com/parking).

Military Venue – Patriots' Outpost presented by CSX:

Active-duty, veteran service members and their dependents can access the Patriots' Outpost, an exclusive hospitality space at No. 16, offering complimentary snacks and beverages throughout the tournament.

PGA TOUR Fan Shop Discounts:

On Tuesday, March 11, active-duty, reserve and

retired military members will receive a 20% discount in the PGA TOUR Fan Shop (must show valid ID).

Military Appreciation Day – Tuesday, March 11:

Military Appreciation Day honors those who serve. The day will include a ceremony and a performance by country music star Jordan Davis, starting at 4:30 p.m. on the Island Green 17th Hole.

Flyover: The annual flyover tradition on Military Appreciation Day will feature the 169th Fighter Wing.

Military Job Fair:

Saturday, March 8, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Location: Patriots' Outpost presented by CSX
THE PLAYERS, in partnership with the Jacksonville Military Veterans Coalition, will host its 12th annual Military Job Fair. The event is free for military personnel, veterans and military spouses. Approximately 30 companies with job opportunities will be on-site.

Operation Shower:

Sunday, March 9, noon to 2 p.m.
Location: Patriots' Outpost presented by CSX
THE PLAYERS and Operation Shower will host a baby shower for local military mothers-to-be in the Patriots' Outpost venue, located next to the 16th hole.

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Where Scheffler's repeat at THE PLAYERS stands in golf history

BY KATHY BISSELL

It's hard to repeat at any important golf event. That's why it happens so infrequently. Scottie Scheffler's repeat victory last year at THE PLAYERS was historic. He was the very first person in the tournament's 51-year history to win back-to-back. How does that compare to the other biggest tournaments each season?

For the sake of argument, let's look at how many times the Masters, the PGA, the U.S. Open and the British Open have had repeat winners.

The United States has three of the four or four of the five majors, depending on what you count. Here in Ponte Vedra, many of us count THE PLAYERS as a major. Whether you do or not is a subject for another time. Right now, we have to compare a back-to-back victory at THE PLAYERS to something, and the other majors are the only things comparable because it is the championship of the PGA Tour.

The Historic Viewpoint: The Oldest Biggie

There are plenty of repeating champs at the British Open, but that makes sense because it's been held since 1861. It actually started

HISTORY CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ■

CAN SCHEFFLER DO IT AGAIN?

SEE STORY ON PAGE 32.



Scottie Scheffler plays the 18th hole in the 2024 PLAYERS Championship

PHOTO BY CRAIG O'NEAL

SCHEFFLER: BACK-TO-BACK CHAMPION AT THE PLAYERS

BY KATHY BISSELL

Last year, Scottie Scheffler did something that neither Jack Nicklaus nor Tiger Woods nor any other golfer who has won THE PLAYERS was able to do: win the tournament in back-to-back years. Only a few have had multiple victories in the event, which is basically the Championship of the PGA Tour. When you think of it like that, no wonder it's hard to win.

Although Nicklaus won THE PLAYERS three times, in 1974, its inaugural year, and again in 1976 and 1978, his victories were each two years apart. Woods won THE PLAYERS in 2001, in his Tiger Slam year, and then not for 12 more years, in 2013.

In 2024, Scheffler did what had been impossible for the best in the world. He repeated. Nobody really knows why it's so hard to defend this tournament, but some past champions have their own thoughts on it.

The Past Champions' Theories

"It's a golf course that doesn't necessarily fit any one style of player," past champion Rickie Fowler explained some time after he won. "I saw something that was posted not long ago of kind of the recent past champions here and what guys did well from whether it was driving the ball, approach, putting, scrambling, and there was nothing really that stood out as one thing between all players."

He's right about that. We've had long hitters Davis Love III and Fred Couples winning twice each, and we've had Tim Clarke and the late



Scottie Scheffler holds his trophy after winning the 2024 PLAYERS Championship.

PHOTO BY CRAIG O'NEAL

Calvin Peete, two short hitters, find the victory circle. We've had surprise winners, like Craig Perks who chipped, blasted and otherwise short-gamed the course to death. There have been tough guy champs, like Raymond Floyd and Lanny Wadkins who would just about kill the competition for a stroke. Europeans have won, starting with Sandy Lyle and going through to Rory McIlroy. There have been

CHAMPION CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ■



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HISTORY

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

out with a back-to-back champ in Old Tom Morris, followed by his son, Young Tom Morris who won four in a row, 1868-1872, and there was no tournament in 1871, so credit his victories however you like.

Others to double up on British Opens include Jamie Anderson, Bob Ferguson and Peter Thomson, who actually won three in a row. (Thomson has five in all.) There was the Great Triumvirate of Brits, Harry Vardon, J.H. Taylor and James Braid, who won the tournament 16 of 21 times between 1894 and 1914. They all had back-to-back victories in there somewhere. They were kind of like three Tiger Woods all at once, winning nearly everything around the turn of the 20th century.

U.S. players have double-dipped at the British Open, starting with Bobby Jones in 1926 and 1927, followed by Walter Hagen in 1928 and 1929. But in 1960, a legend was about to appear on the scene. He became the Elvis Presley of golf: Arnold Palmer.

That year, Palmer had already slipped into a green jacket at the Masters and hoisted the trophy at the U.S. Open. On his plane ride to St. Andrews for the British Open, he asked the late sportswriter Bob Drum, who was on the flight, what it would be if he continued winning and captured both the British Open and the PGA.

Drum replied it would be the equivalent of Bobby Jones' Grand Slam. And that's when Palmer told Drum he was going to win the Grand Slam. And yes, that conversation is where today's idea of the modern Grand Slam began. (No matter what anybody else tells you, that's when it happened because Bob Drum told me, backed up by Dan Jenkins. There are some people you just have to believe.)

Well, as much as we all would have liked for Palmer to win the Grand Slam in 1960, even The King couldn't make the game of golf

bend to his desires. He was defeated by Australian Kel Nagle that year. But he became the first golfer to be frustrated by not winning the modern Grand Slam. It would dog Jack Nicklaus his whole career.

Despite the 1960 loss, Palmer returned, and in 1961 and 1962, he became the next American back-to-back winner. At that point, nobody could hold the U.S. players back. Lee Trevino caught fire in 1971 and '72. Tom Watson in 1982 and 1983. Tiger Woods in 2005 and 2006.

Finally, the Europeans got back into the consecutive win column when Pdraig Harrington won the British Open in 2007 and 2008.

For a tournament that is so old, it does not really have a huge number of back-to-back champions, 16 in all, but it has more than any other important event. The reason is likely due to the fact that at the beginning, there were not a lot of golfers competing and there were not a lot of really, really good golfers. It got tougher over time. And the weather can be a beast.

The Oldest U.S. Biggie: U.S. Open

U.S. Open has been played the next longest, debuting in 1895. The first back-to-back winner was in 1903 with Willie Anderson. He actually won the tournament three times in a row and four times in all.

After Anderson, the U.S. Open refused to have a repeat winner until 1911 and 1912 when so called phenom John McDermott snagged the title. It is probably no surprise to you, if you are a golf historian, that next up was the great Bobby Jones who won in 1929 and 1930.

Seven after Jones double, his feat was matched by someone who doesn't receive many accolades in golf: Ralph Guldahl. He racked up his repeat victory at Oakland Hills and Cherry Hills in 1937 and 1938.

That was it until 1950-1951 when Ben Hogan, after his hideous car-gets-hit-by-bus accident, went back-to-back at Merion and Oakland Hills. No one suggests that as a plan for how to win.

CHAMPION

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

champs from all ends of the globe, like Si-Woo Kim and Nick Price.

One interesting thing is the number of trophies that have gone to Australia with Jason Day and Adam Scott and Steve Elkington at the top of the list and some others who we won't mention now for reasons of diplomacy.

But as fabulous as all of them are and were at the time, none of them won the tournament two times in succession.

"This golf course isn't necessarily long, so it doesn't necessarily benefit a bomber," Fowler added. "To me, at the end of the day, it's whoever has the most control and kind of keeps it simple, fairways and greens."

Some hit more irons off the tee, he said, some hit drivers instead. Some winners putted well, but there was no constant thing that the past champs did that would translate to a "type" of golfer.

McIlroy had a slightly different view.

"I think this golf course can play so differently day-to-day, depending on wind direction, conditions," he said. "It is such a cliché here, but it really doesn't suit any one style of play or any one type of player."

He said he would have loved the chance to be the first one to repeat. But of course, Scheffler beat him to it.

Justin Thomas had a bigger picture view on why it's been nearly impossible to defend.

"I'd say because it's one of the deepest fields in golf, and it's really hard to win golf tournaments," he explained. "It's really hard to win a golf tournament once, and it's really hard to win it again."

It IS the deepest field, factually. The PGA Championship, which likes to say it has the deepest field and points to the top 100, has 20 club professionals in the tournament. That means it's not the deepest field. They hope no one will notice that.

THE PLAYERS may have some who don't want to try to play it, but most years, it has had the top 141 players in the world. Those who are stretches to that statement would be the winner of the Kaulig Senior Players, the money leader from the 2024 Korn Ferry Tour, and the money leader from the Korn Ferry Finals. All three get to play.

The other exceptions now, like Brooks Koepka and Bryson DeChambeau, have gone to the "dark side" of golf. So maybe THE PLAYERS is top 138 or so. But if a guy is good, he's likely to be in the field. He will want the trophy, the money, the status and the five years of PGA Tour event exemptions.

Thomas also pointed to the pressure and expectations that come with defending any tournament but ended up going back to the depth of the field as the main reason. When there are 144 of the best in the world, particularly the top 100, it really is a dogfight to get your hands on any trophy, never mind THE PLAYERS "Goldman."

HISTORY CONTINUED ON PAGE 29 ■

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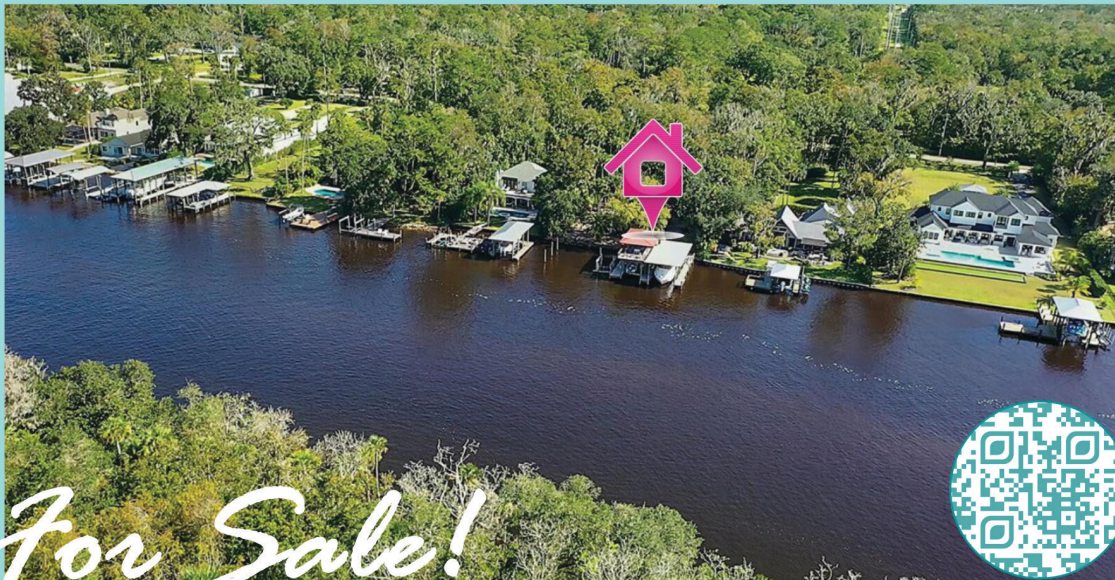


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HISTORY

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

It was then nearly 40 years until Curtis Strange mounted a charge at The Country Club and Oak Hill in 1988 and 1989. And finally, there's Brooks Koepka, who won our country's open championship in 2017 and 2018 at Erin Hills and Shinnecock Hills.

So, in 130 years, we've only had seven back-to-back U.S. Open champs. And a lot of them have had Hill or Hills in the name of the courses.

The First Match Play Biggie: PGA Championship

The PGA is the second oldest important U.S. tournament, and it was begun in 1916. A man named Rodman Wannamaker, who apparently had department stores at the time, donated the trophy. And it's huge.

The PGA Championship is kind of a two-headed beast when it comes to counting back-to-back victories. That's because, from 1916 until 1957, it was conducted as a match play event. Since 1958, it's been four

rounds of stroke play.

In the match play era, there were five who were back-to-back winners: Jim Barnes in 1916 and 1919 (because there was no tournament during WW I); Gene Sarazen in 1922 and 1923; Walter Hagen in 1924, 1925, 1926 and 1927 (yes, he was apparently that good); Leo Diegel in 1928 and 1929; and Denny Shute in 1936 and 1937.

Since the PGA went to stroke play, there have only been two back-to-back winners. Brooks Koepka in 2018 and 2019 and Tiger Woods, twice, in 1999 and 2000 and again in 2006 and 2007. Does that mean Tiger Woods was twice as good as Brooks Koepka? Sounds like a good topic for a bar argument.

If you are wondering how many won in each format, it was seven total in 109 years. There were five in match play over a period of 42 years and two in stroke play over 67 years. Seems like the stroke play is the harder format!

Now, in case you are wondering what happened to Jack Nicklaus in all this, the answer is nothing. He won five PGA Championships. In fact, he has one of the

most — perhaps the most — incredible records in terms of numbers: six Masters, five PGAs, four U.S. Opens, three British Opens, three PLAYERS and — ta-da! — two U.S. Amateurs. Tiger Woods also has a strong record with five Masters, four PGAs, three U.S. Opens, three British Opens and three U.S. Amateurs.

The Greenest Biggie: The Masters

Now we come to the tournament that — outside of THE PLAYERS — has had the fewest number of back-to-back champions, and it's surprising because if ever there was a horses-for-courses location, this is it. Jack Nicklaus has won it six times. Tiger Woods has won it five times. Arnold Palmer won it four times. Naturally, we are talking about the Masters. It was started in 1934, just under 20 years after the debut of the PGA Championship.

Although 18 players won the tournament more than once, only three have repeated as champions: Jack Nicklaus in 1965-1966, Nick Faldo in 1989-1990 and Tiger Woods in 2001-2002.

HISTORY CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ■

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HISTORY

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

Really, that's kind of hard to believe when you think about the number of times the same players have played in the tournament. Usually, familiarity with a course breeds increased success. But I guess people couldn't play through Palmer, Nicklaus, Faldo and Woods to get to a repeat.

The Meanest Biggie: THE PLAYERS

Nearly every important golfer in the last 50 years has won THE PLAYERS. There are some that haven't. But only one person has repeated as PLAYERS champion in the 51 years that it has been held: Scottie Scheffler.

The reason, as past champions have said, is because the course hates everybody. OK, they didn't say that. I said that. Pete Dye designed it to not give anybody an advantage but to give everybody on their game an advantage. While that sounds slightly nuts, remember Rickie Fowler said the person who wins is "whoever has the most control."

No golfer has to be Superman to win THE PLAYERS, but he might want to keep a cape in his bag, just in case a Superman shot is required. The reason is the design of the golf course. Pete Dye always gives every player a chance on every shot. However, the player has to hit to the area that Pete wants him to go, or figure out some other way to avoid the trouble lurking.

We could go through the golf course, hole-by-hole and note where Pete wants guys to hit the ball. But some of them can't, some of them won't and some of them refuse to. What they are doing is lessening their chances of winning.

Pete's designs are similar to those of Jack Nicklaus, and that's not surprising since the two of them worked on several courses together in the beginning of their design careers. Many of them have a severe look. They are designed first and foremost to scare the golfer on every shot. The player who can't see beyond that is not going to do well. But Pete always gives every golfer a place to go. An example is the 1st hole of TPC Sawgrass. When you stand on the tee, it looks like the landing area is a little sliver of grass left, woods left and a yawning bunker to the right. When you get to the landing area, you realize that the fairway is almost huge, and it was just a trick of the eye to scare you. Seventeen more holes like that follow it. Until golfers learn that there's a place out there on every shot, in every fairway, on every green (well, maybe not the 8th), they aren't going to win, much less repeat.

Now, that's a lot to take in, so go make yourself a Sawgrass Splash and enjoy THE PLAYERS!

SOURCES:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_The_Open_Championship_champions

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._Open_\(golf\)_champions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._Open_(golf)_champions)

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_PGA_Championship_champions

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IS A THREE-PEAT PLAYERS POSSIBLE? THE JULIA CHILD CHEF-FLER DIVERSION

BY KATHY BISSELL

If you are married to a PGA Tour pro, and he won nine tournaments last year, like Scottie Scheffler did, including THE PLAYERS and the Masters, never let him cook in the off-season. Something is bound to go wrong. A slip and fall accident on the kitchen floor that tweaks his back for months, if not years. A knife fight, because you disagree about which holiday guest gets the biggest filet. A burn when you are trying to make twice-baked potatoes. A good skewering when trying to remove the cork from a wine bottle. The kitchen is rife with danger. Whatever you do, do not let the Player of The Year anywhere near it. Lock the door. Better yet, go out to dinner or do take out.

And whatever you do, don't cook Italian. Especially don't cook ravioli. Just ask Scottie Chef-fler what happened to him.

Around Christmas, Scottie and his wife Meredith decided they wanted to have handmade ravioli. The kind where you roll

out the dough, put the filling on it, put the second layer of dough on top of that and then cut out the individual ravioli (or raviolis, if you prefer). They didn't have a ravioli maker because they were not at home when the ravioli inspiration and subsequent "incident" occurred. They needed something to cut out the ravioli bits.

"The only thing there was a wine glass that we found," Scheffler explained. "I had my hand on top of it and it broke, which side note, I've heard nothing but horror stories since this happened about wine glasses, so be careful. Even if you're like me and you don't drink wine, you've got to be real careful with wine glasses. It broke and the stem kind of got me in the hand."

Scheffler said he has since talked to someone who had the same thing happen, but that guy had the stem go right through his hand. Yee-ouch!

"It's one of those deals where, immediately after it happened, I was mad at myself because I was like, gosh, that's so stupid, but

you just don't think about it when you're in the moment," Scheffler admitted.

The bleeding didn't last long, he noted. About 15 minutes. Unfortunately, all this happened on Christmas Day.

They immediately reached out to a doctor who had helped Scheffler with a thumb issue in the past. He was, of course, out of town, but told them what to do and referred them to another person to do the surgery on his ravioli-wine-glass-injury because there was still glass stuck inside Scottie's hand. Ee-oowwww!

Have these people never heard of the stemless wine glass? Were there no highball or old-fashioned glasses in the house? How about a nice cookie cutter?

"I was able to heal pretty quickly," Scheffler added.

After his self-inflicted hand injury, Scheffler was out of golf commission for nearly two months. The AT&T Pro-Am was his first

THREE-PEAT CONTINUED ON PAGE 34 ■

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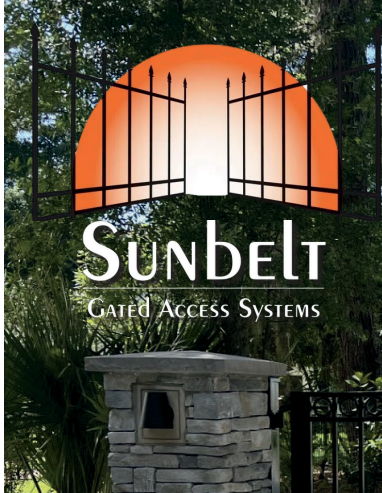
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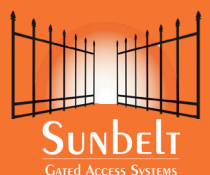
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THREE-PEAT

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32

tournament back. The Genesis, which was moved to Torrey Pines due to fire damage in the Pacific Palisades area around Riviera Country Club where the Genesis is usually held, was his second. His results were just a little off the top spot. Rust had formed on the No. 1 player's game.

And guess what. In spite of everything, the ravioli was good, according to Scheffler. Not the best ever, but nothing is good when your hand is throbbing in pain.

Now everyone waits to see how long the Julia Child Chef-fler Diversion will keep Scheffler out of the winner's circle. (THE PLAYERS is three weeks out as this is written.) So, before you run to Draft Kings or Fan Duel to bet on the three-peat, put the Julia Child Chef-fler Diversion in your calculations.

Rory McIlroy suggested Scheffler might want to think about getting a chef.

Scheffler replied, "I've got a chef. Her name's Meredith. She's pretty cute."

How can you not love this couple? Meredith and Scottie, not Rory and Scottie.



Roger Steele, one of the final four in the first Creator Classic

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE PGA TOUR

CREATOR CLASSIC RETURNS @ THE PLAYERS

BY KATHY BISSELL

The Creator Classic, a golf event featuring social media personalities, was held last summer for the first time at the Tour Championship to rave reviews. It will return at THE PLAYERS. And it's the first of three Creator Classics for 2025.

Last summer's event featured 16

participants who played the first eight holes of East Lake Golf Club's back nine on the Wednesday before the Tour Championship. Then there was a cut from 16 to the top four at that point, and those at the top played the final hole to determine the winner.

Participating in the inaugural event were

CREATOR CONTINUED ON PAGE 36 ■



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Wesley Bryan, one of the final four in the first Creator Classic



Luke Kwon, one of the final four in the first Creator Classic



Gabby Golf Girl finished in the top 10 at the first Creator Classic

CREATOR

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

the Bryan Brothers (Wesley and George), Aimee Cho, Gabby Golf Girl (who is just 16, maybe 17 by now), Mac Boucher, Peter Finch, Luke Kwon, Micah Morris, Mason Nutt, Fat Perez (No, that's not a typo!), Tyler Tony from Dude Perfect, Roger Steele, Paige Spiranac and three of the Good Good guys: Garrett Clark, Brad Dalke and Sean Walsh.

According to the PGA Tour, there are 20 content creators in total who will participate during the year. So not everybody will be in

all three events.

CBS's Mark Immelman was on-camera talent for the first Classic and did a good job of highlighting the talents of each golfer and remarking on their social media presence. He was joined by Jake Marsh, part of the Pardon My Take podcast (Barstool).

The final four who emerged to play the sudden death hole, the 18th, were Wesley Bryan, Roger Steele, Sean Walsh and Luke Kwon. Two women, Paige Spiranac and Gabby (Gabby Golf Girl) DeGasperis finished in the top 10.

"The inaugural Creator Classic served as a valuable testing ground as we look at new

ways to connect with fans and creators," said Chris Wandell, PGA Tour senior vice president, media.

Amazingly, last fall's Creator Classic, which featured 16 of the most popular YouTube golf creators, had more than 2.6 million views on the combination of PGA Tour YouTube channel, ESPN+, Peacock and PGA Tour FAST.

The competition had staying power for fans, too, and was the No. 2 trending video on YouTube, reaching just under 60 million golf fans in all social media for a four-week time

CREATOR CONTINUED ON PAGE 38 ■



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period. This is one time when having presence on social media for a long period of time paid off!

THE PLAYERS version of Creator Classic will be streamed live on the PGA Tour's YouTube channel and ESPN+. In addition, it will be available on the PGA Tour channel on Pluto TV, Roku, Samsung TV Plus, Prime Video, Fire TV, Tubi, Xumo Play and LG Channels and NBC platforms. The Creator Classic at THE PLAYERS will utilize ShotLink and CDW scoring and data.

Anyone with a ticket for Wednesday's PLAYERS or PLAYERS Practice Round will be able to watch the event in person. As with everything for THE PLAYERS, arrange your digital parking in advance. When parking is gone, it's gone.

However, there will be more Creator Classics. Enough fans watched the first event to justify having more of them. In addition to the event at THE PLAYERS, there will also be one at the Philadelphia Cricket Club, the 2025 host of the Truist Championship and at The 2025 Tour Championship at East Lake Golf Club.



Garrett Clark and Paige Spiranac, who finished in the top 10 at the first Creator Classic



Robby Berger



Fat Perez and Joel Dahmen



Roger Steele and Aimee Cho



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A look at the merch

Here's a look at some of the brands represented in the Fan Shop this year, including new merchandise for 2025.

- Nike
- Greyson
- Barstool
- Malbon
- Eastside Golf
- Breezy (New apparel for 2025)
- Vineyard Vines
- Bad Birdie (New to the merch tent for 2025)
- Swannies (New to the merch tent for 2025)
- Flomotion
- Good Good (New to the merch tent for 2025)
- Sugarloaf Social Club (New to the merch tent for 2025)
- LaFavre (New to the merch tent for 2025)
- PGA Tour (New to the merch tent for 2025)

MERCH CONTINUED ON PAGE 46 ■

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PGA TOUR



"17th Hole Dive Team" men's white T-shirt from Breezy



Men's light blue THE PLAYERS Gator Polo from Flomotion



Unisex navy THE PLAYERS Toothy T-shirt from Flomotion

THE FAN SHOP FEATURES FUN DESIGNS ON GOLF GEAR

BY KATHY BISSELL

This year's Fan Shop, that giant retail space on the way in and way out of the THE PLAYERS at the Nicklaus Gate near the 17th hole, has new designs you'll want to see.

There's extra fun for this year with a DJ who will be spinning some songs so you can dance while you shop!

From what we could see ahead of time, there are some interesting new designs for polos and

T-shirts. There are plenty of classics, too.

The funniest T-shirt has 17th Hole Dive Team showing two alligators and a diver. They all found golf balls! It's a white shirt with a lot of pale teal for the alligators and diver. Gold for the golf balls!

One of the best sellers from the Flomotion line is a polo called THE PLAYERS Gator Polo. It's a very sharp looking ice blue with

FAN SHOP CONTINUED ON PAGE 46 ■

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MERCH

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

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- Ellsworth & Ivey (New apparel for 2025)
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- Rhoback (New apparel for 2025)
- Vineyard Vines
- Flomotion
- Barstool (New apparel for 2025)
- Ellsworth & Ivey (New apparel for 2025)

FAN SHOP

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

large white gators sprinkled all over it. It has four-way stretch and is wrinkle resistant. But is it chomp resistant?

I think I'd like that pattern in a dress. How about you? Right now, it's only in a polo (sigh!).

They also have one with a gator carrying a palm tree in its mouth.

I think you have to live here to

understand that's funny. Somebody from North Dakota might not see the humor. Someone from here might not see the humor in dino hunters and their giant bones in North Dakota.

There are a whole series of polo shirts and T-shirts with what's called Toothy design. That name was hard to figure out until I saw a close-up of the Toothy pattern, which is sharks' teeth! They are fabulous! Likely under \$40.

There's even a T-shirt in medium blue with a Toothy Goldman on the back! I'm bringing one of those home with me for sure. I like getting them extra, extra, extra-large to wear to the swimming pool. Under \$40.

For anyone who doesn't know because they don't live here, one of the warm weather activities



Unisex denim THE PLAYERS Toothy Goldman T-shirt from Flomotion

for beachgoers is actually hunting for sharks' teeth on the beach. You can never tell what's going to be a good day for them and what isn't, but there are people who are out early every day bent over searching, searching, searching, trying to beat you to the best teeth. I once bought a megalodon tooth just to have it. I can't imagine what size beast it came from, but it had to be huge. The tooth is as big as my hand.

Staying with the gold theme, and why not, there's a T-shirt in gold with an outline of the 17th hole on the back of it.

Over the water it says, "Just an easy par 3." Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. Ask somebody who lost the tournament by taking a 7 or 9 or 11 at the 17th.

My personal fav in the non-clothing category is the Sawgrass stemless wine glass with a gold golf-ball-like base on the bottom half and the Goldman design on white on the top half. (Last year's champ might like to take a look at those!) Under \$25.

Second on the glassware list is the tumbler with a drawing of the Pete Dye design of the 17th hole. It's a 16 oz. thirst quencher for under \$20.

And if you go all out, there are several used pin flags from THE PLAYERS as well as other tournaments in the online Fan Shop, priced from about \$170 to just over \$1,500.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PGA TOUR



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25 YEARS AGO: SUTTON DEFEATED WOODS

BY KATHY BISSELL

Hal Sutton was something of a phenom when he first came to the PGA Tour. In his first season, 1982, he won the Walt Disney World Golf Classic and was named Rookie of the Year. The next season, he won THE PLAYERS, and then later in the year, the PGA Championship where Jack Nicklaus finished second. He was immediately named The Next Nicklaus.

Nearly 18 years later, when the 2000 PLAYERS began, Sutton had won 11 PGA Tour titles. He'd been on numerous U.S. teams including three Ryder Cups. But at age 41, he was looking toward the end of his PGA Tour career, not the beginning of it.

For whatever reason, perhaps because he was a past champ and had four top 10s

already in the season, Sutton was asked for a pre-tournament interview. At first, the big discussion was about autograph sellers and then whether THE PLAYERS should move to May. But immediately after that, media members started in with Colin Montgomerie's quote after round one at Bay Hill, where Tiger Woods was one off the lead, that it looked to him — Colin — like everybody else was playing for second.

Sutton took exception.

"He is going in a different locker room than I was going in," Sutton replied about Montgomerie's quip.

Media members love a good brouhaha, so they stirred the pot, and asked him to clarify.

Sutton added his own experience playing the first two rounds with Woods in Los Angeles earlier in the year.

"I felt like it was important that I send a message to me and him in those two rounds," Sutton explained. "One, that I could beat him, playing with him; and two, that he knew that I could beat him playing with him."

He said it could prove valuable on a Sunday somewhere down the line.

"I need to know going into that, that, hey, I have beat him in these circumstances. And that proves one thing, that it can happen again," Sutton added.

Who knew that it would be this upcoming Sunday? No one. Certainly not Hal Sutton. Certainly not Tiger Woods.

However, in the interview, Sutton said there was a lesson he had learned in an early Ryder Cup when he was staying with Jack

25 YEARS CONTINUED ON PAGE 50 ■

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25 YEARS

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 48

and Barbara Nicklaus (because he was the only single guy on the team). Sutton asked Nicklaus if he thought his record would be the same if he were playing today, and Nicklaus said no. He said there were only three or four golfers who believed they could beat him then. So, Nicklaus won a lot. Obviously, he won a lot because he was exceptional, but he was in the head of every other golfer.

Sutton said that translated to playing against Tiger Woods, that a lot of people don't believe they can beat him.

"Some of it is put there. Some of it is self-inflicted. Some of it is put there by you all. And some of it is put there by Tiger's own doing. The guy plays great. I mean, he plays the game at a level that few people have ever known. But that system doesn't mean he can't be beat," Sutton concluded.

That week, Sutton, who still knew how to play very good golf, reached into the wayback machine and recreated some greatness. Amazingly, it was right when Tiger Woods was coming into the height of his powers.



Tiger Woods at a past PLAYERS Championship

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE PGA TOUR

Woods won the week before THE PLAYERS and had been on a roll, winning 10 of his previous 16 tournaments, something this generation of golfers and fans and media had never seen.

As fate would have it, at the end of round three, Sutton had a one-shot lead over Woods and a two-shot lead over Tom Lehman. Then, in the third round, the heavens opened up. It

was lightning, thunder, torrential March rain, all the usual suspects. Sutton and Woods were on the 12th hole.

Up to that point in the round, Sutton hadn't missed a fairway and missed only one green. Woods hadn't birdied the par fives, giving his opponent a three-shot advantage when play

25 YEARS CONTINUED ON PAGE 52 ■

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25 YEARS

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 50

was called.

“If there’s any golf course you want to play when you’re behind, it’s one like this,” Woods said. That’s because anything can happen on the back nine.

Sutton retained his three-shot lead until the 16th. That’s where he did not make birdie and where Woods made eagle. Woods gave maximum fist pumps. It could have shaken a lesser man. Sutton was now leading by just one.

But after it was over, Sutton said, “I knew it wasn’t going to go without Tiger making his charge. All I can say is I was planning on him making that eagle putt.”

Ever the strategist, Sutton noted that it was good because he wanted Woods to tee off first on 17. Unfortunately, Sutton was 4 over par for the week on that hole. Fortunately for Sutton, they both parred it.

Sutton was one shot up with one hole to play. Woods hit an iron off the tee, mainly because a longer club was too much for his prodigious length.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE PGA TOUR
Hal Sutton at a past PLAYERS Championship

“I was really shocked when he pulled out his iron off that tee,” Sutton said.

“I think I am one of the best drivers in the game, so I am going to play to my strength. And I picked out those trees in the distance, those real light-colored trees. I hit it right at it,” he explained, adding that he needed an advantage on the last hole.

His driver landed in the middle of the fairway.

Then, his second shot, the 6-iron, is the one, out of all four-and-a-half days of play that has gone down in golf history.

When he struck it, he said, “Be the right club ... Be the right club to-DAY!”

And of course it was.

One important footnote to the 2000 PLAYERS is that while Sutton didn’t become the Next Nicklaus, perhaps Tiger Woods did. In 2000, Woods didn’t win the PLAYERS or the Masters, but he won the U.S. Open, the British Open and the PGA. Then, the following spring, he added another Masters. That run is now considered the Tiger Slam. But Woods also won the 2001 PLAYERS. He’s the only one to do that in a 12-month span.



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PONTE VEDRA BECOMES CENTER OF GOLF TV UNIVERSE

PGA Tour opens new TV production building

BY KATHY BISSELL

If you've seen the new PGA Tour headquarters building down the road from the intersection of Palm Valley Road and A1A, or for residents, across from the post office and Walgreens, then you know that another building has gone up next door. That's the TV production building, and it's getting ready to take over the golf television universe. Well, a good part of it anyway. Cue the warning music that goes dum-dum ... dum-dum ... dum-dum ...

Since PGA Tour Productions — now PGA Tour Studios — was opened in 1990, it has gone through various stages of development in programming capability to the point where it now has everything it needs to handle worldwide broadcasts. And more.

Initially, it was located in the third floor of an office building on Route 1, just south of the end of Butler Boulevard. (I know this because

I used to go there to produce a program called "The Golf Show," which was syndicated for 10 years on WGN and WOR and before that was on Prime Network and Sunshine Network and most of the sports channels across the country.)

From there Productions moved to the World Golf Village, to a 35,000-square-foot facility next door to the former World Golf Hall of Fame.

Now Productions has officially become PGA Tour Studios, and it has its own huge, 165,000-square-foot facility with things most people would not even believe possible.

To give you an idea of the size, the TPC Sawgrass clubhouse is 77,000 square feet, if that helps, and it has two floors, so 38,500 square feet each floor. This new TV production building has three floors, which means they are about 55,000 square feet each. The Publix in Sawgrass Village is about 50,000 square feet, and that's counting the back part that we never see because it's where the food comes in and gets stored until it goes onto the shelves. So, stack three Sawgrass Publix on top of each other and that's close to

the size of the Studios facility.

The new PGA Tour Studios building includes eight production rooms, eight audio control rooms and seven LED-outfitted studios, including a 270-degree LED display in Studio 1A. That means every place in that room except where the cameras sit can be lit.

PGA Tour Studios is now creating the live telecasts for the PGA Tour Champions events, Korn Ferry tournaments and PGA TOUR LIVE on ESPN+. Announcers will often come to Ponte Vedra to voice the telecasts instead of going to the site of the tournament, which some of them have different feelings about, but that's just the reality of today.

In addition, PGA Tour Studios is creating a number of new original programs like "Scottie 24" and "Xander Embedded," which were shown on PGA Tour YouTube channel, pgatour.com and PGA Tour social channels, PlutoTV, Roku, Samsung TV Plus, Tubi and XUMO.

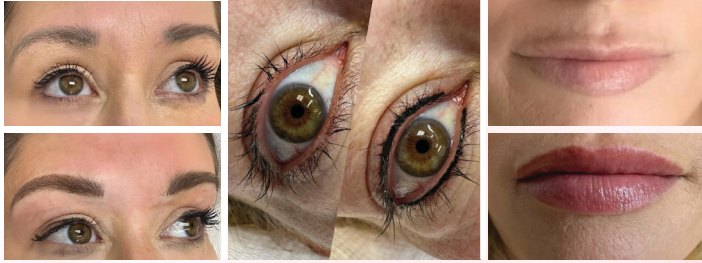
"These two programs represent just the beginning of the new and dynamic, original

GOLF TV CONTINUED ON PAGE 56 ■

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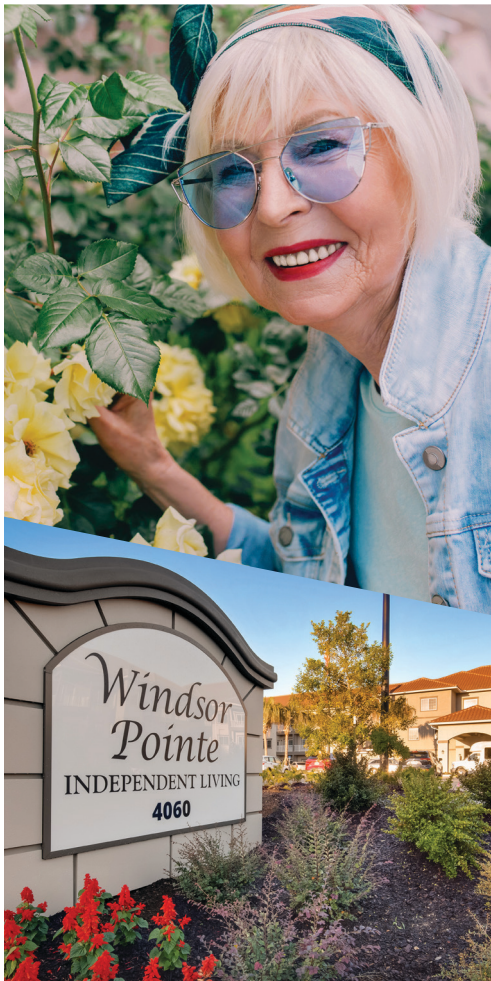
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Behind the scenes, there's a lot to keep track of.

GOLF TV

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 54

content that we plan to deliver to our fans in the years to come through the new PGA Tour Studios,” said Michael Riceman, PGA Tour senior vice president, content and production.

Six more similar programs are planned.

“Every new technology and forward-thinking innovation we introduce is about serving our fans and meeting them where they are, and the creative capabilities of PGA Tour Studios will help us further that mission

while showcasing the beauty of our sport,” Commissioner Jay Monahan said.

At THE PLAYERS, a new World Feed of PGA Tour telecasts will debut. It is kind of like the telecast of the British Open that we used to receive from the BBC decades ago and we have lately gotten from Sky Sports. Our network would receive it and might add some additional shots of U.S. players that the Brits and the rest of the world didn't care so much about seeing.

But the PGA Tour Studios World Feed will have the ability to focus on both the tournament leaders as well as the players

from each of more than between 150 and 200 countries that carry golf telecasts. They will be able to custom-create each broadcast for each country with country specific and correct-language-speaking announcers. That, folks, is an unbelievable achievement. Somebody's going to have a headache making it work that week, for sure.

They do this by having cameras on a majority if not all players. If you've ever tried the every-player, every-shot live offering that the PGA Tour created in the past for THE

GOLF TV CONTINUED ON PAGE 58 ■



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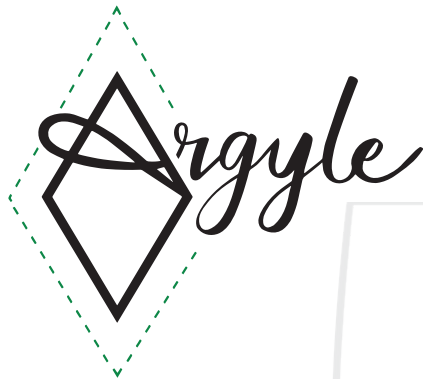
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Tiger Woods visits the new PGA Tour Studios.



Several lighting and background effects are available in the broadcast studios.

GOLF TV

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 56

PLAYERS, that's what everyone would have as the base for the program. Then what happens is, for example, some shots of U.S. players are dropped out of the telecast that's going to perhaps Japan, and several Japanese players are shown instead. And while they are shown, Japanese announcers, who are voicing the telecast to Japan, talk about the Japanese players and the shots they are making. So, it's golf, tailored to the country, to the language. Then, they revert to the main telecast when they want to. If they want all Hideki Matsuyama all the time, they can have it. That's what World Feed will eventually become, and the World Feed programming at THE PLAYERS is the first step.

It's all made possible in part due the combination of the new Studios building and the addition of what is called PGA Tour Fleet, a group of nine state-of-the-art production trucks that debuted at the Farmers Insurance Open in January. A production truck is like a studio on wheels. All the cameras are connected to it, either



Detail of a control board

wirelessly or by wire. All the audio from the announcers runs through it, and directors give instructions on what camera shots to use from it. Graphics run through it, too. There might be 25 or 30 or 40 cameras to choose from at one time, with, in the every-player, every-shot version, the ability to capture action from up to 144 cameras or live feeds from locations of tournaments.

And while sometimes there's important action at two or three locations at once — that's when you rely on the guys and gals in the tape truck — and believe it or not, sometimes there's nothing but guys walking down the fairway or off the tee and nobody hitting a shot. And you'll probably still see the same shots of squirrels and ducks.

Now, somehow, they have the capability to stick shot tracers on all the shots. Personally, I love that. It's my all-time favorite feature of golf telecasts ever. There's even a new one where the tracer path is like a ribbon, and you can fly over the top of it. Love inventive electronics.

The PGA Tour Fleet is a collaboration between the Tour and CBS/Paramount+, NBC/Golf Channel/Peacock and ESPN+. It is the production center for seven live shows, including the network broadcast, four PGA TOUR LIVE streams on ESPN+ and two live streams for IMG Arena.

After the debut of the World Feed at THE PLAYERS, there will be a World Feed for all the rest of the tournaments in 2025.

Coming in 2026, PGA Tour Radio moves in. In addition, PGA Tour Studios will house Pro Shop, the PGA Tour's partner in Hollywood dedicated to creating what they call "premium content." Think of this, perhaps, as like the Netflix golf series "Full Swing."

So, there's more happening by the post office and Walgreens than you ever imagined. In fact, Ponte Vedra has just become the center of the golf television universe.



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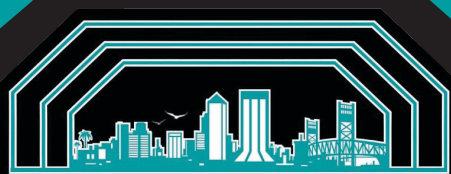


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HONEY, I SHRUNK THE TOUR

Fewer guaranteed places on PGA Tour starting 2026

BY KATHY BISSELL

It has always been hard to get a PGA Tour card. There are successful players who have gone through numerous Q-schools trying to score well enough to get a playing card. The record for Q-School failures probably belongs to Mac O'Grady who did not qualify for the PGA Tour 16 times from 1971 through 1981, sometimes going through two PGA Tour Q-Schools in the same year. Finally, in 1982, he succeeded. Even Mark McCumber, PLAYERS champ in 1988, failed seven Q-schools before finally earning the right to play. The same thing happens every year. Some succeed and some don't.

Starting in 2026 there's a new measuring stick for who does and who doesn't get to play in PGA Tour events.

If you're new to golf, you might not even know that certain players are guaranteed a spot in, for instance, The Sony Open or the Cognizant Classic in The Palm Beaches (formerly The Honda Classic), or The American Express (a long time ago called The Bob Hope) to name just three early in the season.

Since 1983, the number on this guaranteed list of players has been 125. It's actually called the "exempt" list. What it means in normal language is that this year,

the top 125 players in FedEx points from 2024 could enter any regular PGA Tour event in 2025. Guaranteed. They are exempt from pre-tournament qualifying events. They can walk right in.

The exempt list does not include the Masters, the PGA, the U.S. Open or the British Open, all of which have their own rules for who can play. It also does not include special events like the signature events, which have had fewer players, but it does include the rest of the tournaments on the golf calendar in the United States and some outside the U.S. that are still PGA Tour-sanctioned.

The idea of an exempt list has been around for a long time, but the number of players has varied widely. Back in the dark ages of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the exempt list was the top 60. I remember talking to players in the mid-1980s who said about their careers before the exempt Tour that they had always been in the top 60, meaning they always had a place to play and compete.

As you probably know, there are more than 60 golfers in any regular PGA Tour event these days. It's usually 144 or 156, depending on daylight. But what you might not know is, historically, just because golfers enter an event, it doesn't mean they are going to get paid. Roughly half the field goes home with no money. That's still true today, even if his name is Tiger Woods or Scottie Scheffler or Rory McIlroy or Jordan Spieth.

It has been that way since the PGA Tour was created, and that was a custom taken from what

TOUR CONTINUED ON PAGE 62 ■

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TOUR

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 60

existed before the PGA Tour was officially an organization. The PGA Tour, after all, began as an offshoot of the PGA of America, the people who have traditionally run golf courses across the country. It was begun in 1968, and it has to be called a roaring success.

Back to tournaments. To fill the rest of the field after the top 60, there might have been 120 players competing for another 40 or 50 or 60 or more spots in that week's tournament. The number differed, but the situation was the same. They had to play a one-day tournament, and a certain number of players, based on the best scores, were added to the top 60 to play in that week's event. It was not only dog eat dog. It was dog eat dog, cat, birds, bread crusts and anything that was in the way of getting into an event.

As Al Barkow's "History of The PGA Tour" explained, if a player qualified for that week's tournament on Monday, he knew where he would be, at least until Friday. He would play two rounds. If he didn't make the half-way "cut," then he had to go to the next Monday qualifying and try again. These



PHOTO BY CRAIG O'NEAL

Monday qualifiers were called Rabbits.

Qualifying every week was expensive and frustrating, running around the country not knowing when you'll have success. To explain how big the issue was, Gary McCord, who most people know from his time as an announcer at CBS, for a while lived out of a storage unit in Southern California, presumably to save money and because he was always on the road trying to qualify.

It was McCord who proposed the all-exempt Tour. He did it, according to a story on golf.com, because he was at a qualifier at Doral and saw Miller Barber, who had 11 PGA Tour wins at that time, and Don January, who had won 10 times including a PGA Championship, both qualifying. McCord looked through the names and did some

TOUR CONTINUED ON PAGE 64 ■

A collage of various BBQ food items. In the center, there's a large white text overlay that reads "TPC + BBQ = WIN". Surrounding this are images of different BBQ dishes: a tray of ribs, a tray of brisket, a tray of chicken, a tray of coleslaw, a tray of corn, and a tray of sauce. A hand is visible holding a fork and a knife, serving the food. The background is a red and white checkered tablecloth.

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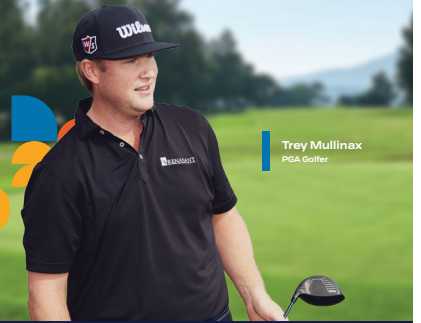
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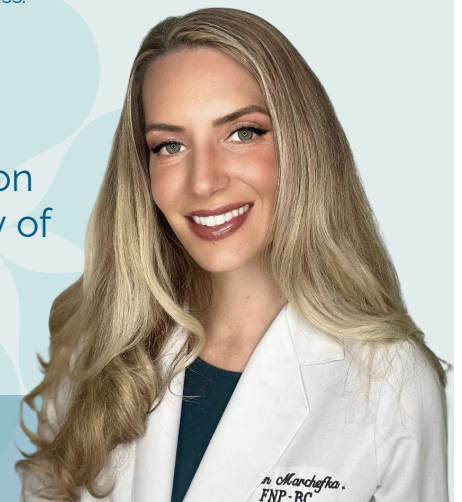
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quick math and realized there were golfers with a total of 54 tournament wins who were qualifying. He decided the system was nuts, although he didn't say it that way. He decided to do something about it.

So, at a tournament in Tallahassee that was being held opposite the official PGA Tour event that week, he thought he'd get a few of the guys together and talk with them about it.

In that same article, he explained that he first wanted to get support from guys who were not in the regular tournament that week, guys who were probably going to get kicked off the Tour for the next season because they weren't top 60.

He rented a conference room in the hotel where he and the others in the opposite field event were staying and got the word out and figured maybe he'd get 20 to 30 guys, but 105 showed up. He explained his idea. He wanted to expand the exempt list to 125 and told them he probably needed another 50 to go to the Tour to tell the organizing body what the players needed. He got 80 more. It was more than a majority of the players who

participated on the Tour. So, he went to the governing body. Needless to say, he got a call from then-commissioner Deane Beman.

Beman was already considering changes, although not quite what McCord had in mind. Regardless, the commissioner asked McCord to attend the next board meeting and present his concept. And the board went for it, for a 125-man "exempt" or guaranteed spot on the PGA Tour, which was more than double what it had been.

So, in 2026, that guaranteed number that McCord came up with in 1982 will shrink to 100. And 25 golfers are out of luck.

Now there are some exceptions to this. Someone who has won a Tour event gets an automatic exemption for two more seasons after his victory. That means, for instance, that Thomas Detry, who won the first week of February, doesn't have to worry about his status on the PGA Tour until the end of 2027. If he finishes 130th in FedEx points at the end of this year, he is still guaranteed a spot in regular Tour events. But he better be in the top 100 at the end of 2027, or win another tournament, so that he can continue to play.

As you can imagine, there has been much complaining began by those who were 101 and above.

Regardless, there are still plenty of ways to get into an event, even with the change in exempt player numbers. Usual PGA Tour fields are between 144 and 156 now, and that means tournaments still have to find another 44 to 56 players for regular Tour events. In addition, all 100 exempt players typically don't show up at every event. So, there will be room for more players. Some of the field will continue to come from categories like Past Champions or Major winners in the last five years. Some of the rest may come from Monday qualifying, which has now morphed into Friday pre-qualifying for Monday qualifying. Others will be sponsor picks and so on.

So, while there are big changes coming next year, while the guaranteed player pool shrinks, that change may actually open up a chance for more non-exempt or non-guaranteed guys to get a shot at playing. We won't really know how it works until it happens, but there's definitely going to be a catfight for those remaining spots. In addition, at the end of the year, in the fall events, people will really be clawing their way up the points list trying as best as they can to earn enough points to play another season. Somebody may play in every event to try to gain enough points for 2027.



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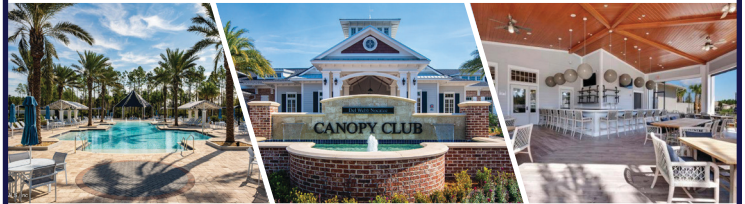


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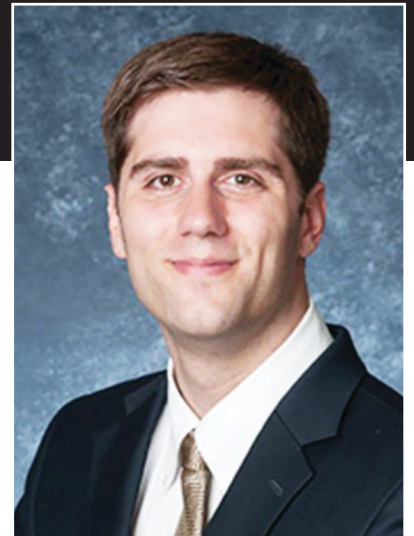
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20 YEARS AGO: FUNK BECAME OLDEST PLAYERS WINNER

BY KATHY BISSELL

Fred Funk was no phenom. He didn't make it to the PGA Tour until he was 33, but give the man credit for persistence. At age 48, he became the oldest winner of THE PLAYERS.

"I felt kind of like Herbie the Volkswagen, The Love Bug, because I'm just out there just hitting my little pea shooters, and the bombers are going 40 by me," he said about the week that would define the highlight of his long career in professional golf.

The Times-Union's Garry Smits called the 2005 PLAYERS a "Monday Marathon," and he wasn't wrong. Funk played 32 holes that day.

Because of the weather delays on Saturday and Sunday, the third round was not completed until about 12:30 p.m. on Monday. In order to finish the tournament in an expedited fashion, the groups from round



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE PGA TOUR

Fred Funk

three also played round four together. Funk was not in the final group.

In addition, he started the day four shots behind Luke Donald who was leading at the time. He was followed by Joe Durant, Tim Herron and Zach Johnson, who would go on

to win the Masters in 2007.

The wind was up, with gusts to 35 mph. Sand, reportedly, was being blown out of the bunkers. It wasn't a great day for golf, but someone would win by sunset on Monday. Funk played the last two rounds with Vaughn Taylor and Adam Scott, two long hitters.

"Adam can bomb, and Vaughn can take it right with him," Funk said after the victory. "I tried not to let that bother me, because I knew it was more important to be in the fairway."

Funk birdied the 16th hole to take the lead. He nearly lost it on the 17th.

"You can hit a good shot and end up in the water. You can bail out left, you think, or you just don't know what the ball is going to do, because the wind was blowing so hard," he said at the time. "I was trying to put as good a swing as I could put on it. I aimed it at the

20 YEARS CONTINUED ON PAGE 72 ■

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10 YEARS AGO: FOWLER'S BIGGEST VICTORY

BY KATHY BISSELL

Rickie Fowler's sudden death victory at THE PLAYERS in 2015 was, as Snoop Dogg says in one of his T-Mobile commercials, "like peanut butter on jelly on gold."

It was exceptional and unexpected. Not that Fowler can't play, but that week, he had not threatened the leaderboard until after the 12th hole on Sunday. He was, by his own admission, out of the tournament until then. Even his family agreed because his mother and sister left for the airport around 4 p.m. while Fowler was still on the course. His caddie at the time, Joe Skovron, stayed in touch with them via text. When Rickie made his charge, they turned around and came back, his sister driving.

After winning, Fowler was asked if he was worried about his sister behind the wheel, he gave an answer few could top.

"She can handle herself behind the wheel. We grew up riding and racing dirt bikes," Fowler quipped.

That dirt bike racing is probably where Fowler gets his gutsy play. He just hits fearless shots when he has to. Nothing demonstrated it more than his last four holes and the playoff at the 2015 PLAYERS.

During the final round, in his mind, the turning point came when he was able to make par out of the bunker on the 12th. Then he birdied the demanding par 3, 13th. He wasn't done, either. He continued to make up shots on the field.

"I made the birdie on 15," he recalled. "I hadn't played 16 particularly well."

But this time, he did.

"I was trying to aim kind of left side of the green and let it drift into the middle," he said about the second shot. "It was 3-wood, and I think we had 243 hole or so. The ball was a

little above my feet. I was just going to hit a choked-down 3-wood."

He said he had a similar shot at the 8th hole, which is a par 3.

"I started a little right of where I wanted to but had a good tight flight and held its line," he recalled.

It held its line well enough that Fowler was able to drop a putt for an eagle. That's when he said he felt like he had a chance to win the tournament.

"So 17, regulation, I had perfect numbers there for kind of a choked-down gap wedge," he explained.

"I've played the hole well, so just picked a line a little bit left of the target or left of the pin and hit a perfect shot, hit it right where I was looking. And I knew the putt there."

The reason he knew it was that he made a

10 YEARS CONTINUED ON PAGE 70 ■



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10 YEARS

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 68

putt from that spot in 2012. He knew it would start to break left.

“And then, where my putt was, it actually goes back right. So, I felt confident with that,” he added.

When he made the putt of course the crowd went nuts.

The 18th, Fowler said, is the hardest driving hole on the course.

“I really couldn’t have hit one better, both in regulation and in the playoff,” he noted.

After he finished, he had to wait for the rest of the players to come in. He went to the range to hit balls and stay loose.

Fowler had finished the last six holes birdie-par-birdie-eagle-birdie-birdie. What a run.

Then, Sergio Garcia and Kevin Kisner tied him at 12-under par, which meant there would be the first three-hole, aggregate playoff ever at THE PLAYERS.

Well, naturally, this being THE PLAYERS, the aggregate playoff didn’t produce a winner. However, Garcia was eliminated. Now there were two.



Rickie Fowler

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE PGA TOUR

Kisner and Fowler went to sudden death starting at, you guessed it, the 17th.

“I had a great number there on 17,” Fowler admitted. “I was able to just hit a choke down gap wedge, and it played a little longer in the playoff the two times, but just had a good number, I’ve always liked playing 17, it’s been good to me.”

Kisner also had a birdie attempt, but his

missed, and Fowler poured in his putt to seal the victory.

According to Laura Neal, who was handling press room interviews that day, no one had ever played TPC Sawgrass’ last four holes in 11 strokes. No one but Fowler. His finish was 3-3-2-3.

And he was the 2015 PLAYERS champ.



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20 YEARS

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camera tower behind the green, which is dead center of the green, I hit a really solid 7 iron, it went higher than I wanted but started cutting to the right. I thought it was going to be close.”

He ended up three-putting the 17th for bogey. When Funk’s second shot at the 18th found the greenside bunker, he was upset. When he hit it out to five feet, he was relieved. When he made the putt for par, he was elated, screaming, “Yes!” He was still one shot ahead of the field. A number that held.

The three who could not conquer Fred Funk in 2005 were Luke Donald, Tom Lehman and Scott Verplank.

“I always will cherish this win here,” Funk said.

The oldest winner played 14 holes on Monday morning

followed by 18 holes Monday afternoon. He posted a 71 in for the fourth round on a day when the field average was 76.512.

“We finally had beautiful blue skies. Bright, you know, just a really beautiful day,” Funk recalled of the Monday. “But the wind. You look at the trees and the winds are blowing the trees halfway over. And we had 30-35 mph sustained winds and 42 mph gusts that day and it was just one of those days, like, oh c--p. I gotta go play this course and these conditions are going to be brutal.”

When told he was going to have a five-year exemption for the victory, he asked, “What am I going to do with that?” In just two years he would age up to the PGA Tour Champions circuit. But it also gave him the ability to play PGA Tour events if he wanted to. It also exempted him into majors, if he wanted to play them.



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WHO WILL WIN THE PLAYERS? **SOPHIE TELLS ALL**

BY KATHY BISSELL

It's time for THE PLAYERS again. Can't believe it's been another year since Scottie Scheffler won his second one. Meanwhile, my plants died with the frost in late January, something that hasn't happened for years. And my grass turned mostly brown, something else I haven't seen for quite some time. (So much for global warming!) In addition, my back seems to require Tylenol Extra Strength and anything else I can come up with to keep it in line. My

furnace/AC unit is getting whiplash going from heating to cooling and my fingernails are getting damaged from all the typing required to write about THE PLAYERS. Yeah, if that's all, you wish you had my problems. Did I mention the Dollar weed?

OK, OK. By now you know that was all a diversion to keep from picking a winner of this year's PLAYERS, something that is a horrible task. People who write about golf are not supposed to have favorites for anything, so that makes it extra difficult. Then there's the betting

thing, which for decades was a no-no in golf. Now it's not. What's a woman to do?

That's why I always consult the Cracked Crystal Ball. I've decided after all these years to give her a name: Sophie, after the stage name of the "star" of "Funny Woman" on PBS. She seems to be cracking up audiences right and left, at least when she's not getting booted from the network, so it's a match.

Sophie, or Barbara — her real character

PREDICTION CONTINUED ON PAGE 76 ■

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PREDICTION

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 74

name — has moxie and so does the Crystal Ball, Crack and all. So, I'm going to ask her everything until she complains and does a twirl and hides.

Well, first of all, she's distressed because Rickie Fowler hasn't won THE PLAYERS a second time. She was NOT upset with his all-Camo outfit a few weeks ago because she knows, as does Rickie, that there are a ton of golfers out there who are also outdoorsmen and women. Just ask Steve Stricker. Every fall, he disappears into a tree or climbs up a tree or tree house somewhere in Wisconsin and hunts. He does it the old-fashioned way, with bow and arrow. If he gets something, he gives it away to a food bank organization.

Personally, you would never catch me up a tree with a bow and arrow. I'd be awful at it. And what if a bear showed up? Then what? I saw my life's full of bears when I went to Alaska with my mother. They were everywhere. Not as prolific as moose. The state is completely littered with moose or mooses or meese, take your pick. There was the lone wolf, and you can have all of those you want; I'm happy to leave

them in Denali National Park. (Has anybody changed the name of that yet? Just asking.)

I passed Sophie a note asking about this year's PLAYERS. Now that she warmed up thinking about Rickie, I only have to flash something orange at her to get an answer.

Ah, a missive from Sophie. While we'd all like for super-history to be made and have it be Scottie Scheffler for a third time, she says it doesn't seem to be in the cards. Scottie had that ravioli injury and lost time from the pre-season preparation that he likes to do. He's probably a month behind where he wants to be because he couldn't hold or hit a club for several weeks. She says we have to give him another month to get back in his groove. Maybe just in time for the Masters. He was OK at the WM Phoenix Open and the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am and actually had a chance at the Genesis, but they all slipped away from him. He probably needs a little more practice so his laser-like shots are on target. Maybe April, May, he should be back in the center of the bullseye range. It could be perfect timing for the Masters or the PGA Championship, but he's going to have to wrestle Rory McIlroy for that one. Quail Hollow is where McIlroy won for the first time in the U.S. He loves Quail Hollow.

Speaking of McIlroy, his drives have been

a thing of beauty lately, Sophie notes. And she likes the spring in his step. The driver is his favorite club, Sophie thinks, and if he can continue to improve that accuracy, he would be hard to beat anywhere. Unfortunately, unless he's picking one or two holes at THE PLAYERS, it's not going to do him much good because he hits it so far, he's not going to use many drivers. Hopefully he's as accurate with his 3-wood as with driver. He's really hard to beat anyway. And now that his irons have improved so that his second shots dance around a little closer to the pin, he could be really dangerous, at least that's what Sophie says. Arguing with the Cracked Crystal Ball is a fool's errand. I never try to do it.

McIlroy said he learned some things when he played with Scheffler over the last year, as he explained on Sky Sports. He said he's become better at strategy and picking conservative targets.

"Another big thing is obviously my short game," he added. "Last year, it was a little up and down where I would have a good week, then I'd have a bad week. There wasn't a ton of consistency in it."

He also learned some mental toughness

PREDICTION CONTINUED ON PAGE 78 ■

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PREDICTION

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 76

playing with Scheffler.

"Every time I play with him — and watch how he plays and how disciplined he is — it's a really cool thing to watch," McIlroy noted. "I'm trying to take a little bit of a leaf out of his book."

And why not? Scheffler won nine times last year.

The Cracked Crystal ball is nodding in agreement. We should all be as disciplined in our golf games as Scheffler. And none of us should make pasta of any kind using wine glasses. We should eat pasta. We should drink some wine. We should keep the utensils separate.

Sophie says that the foreign players are having a banner year so far on the PGA Tour. Except for Harris English and Maverick McNealy, all the winners to date are from outside the U.S., originally, although it's hard to hang that on Sepp Straka since his family moved to Georgia when he was much younger. He says that made him the only golfer from Vienna, Austria, with a slightly Southern accent, although his idea of a Southern accent and mine are different. You'd agree if you heard an interview. But there's an outside chance you'll get an "all y'all" out of him. You want to hear Southern Speak, listen to Kevin Kisner.

What it does look like is that it's past Ryder Cuppers and Presidents Cuppers who are winning. Hideki Matsuyama and Adam Hadwin — Presidents Cup. Rory McIlroy, Ludvig Åberg, Thomas Detry and Sepp Straka — Ryder Cup. Harris English, Ryder Cup. It's hard to argue with that because it's been true in the past.

However, Maverick McNealy has opened the door to new guys winning the RSM last fall. He was overdue, really, and perhaps is coming into his own.

Sophie likes him a lot and thinks it's hysterical that he and his three brothers are all named after cars. There's Maverick, Scout (Maverick's caddie), Colt and Dakota. Obviously, his parents have a great sense of humor and like cars a lot. His dad, Scott McNealy, is the former CEO of Sun Microsystems, which was sold to Oracle in 2010. Scott's father was a bigwig many years ago in the auto industry, so it obviously rubbed off.

What car would you want to be named after? I'd say anything but Edsel! Younger people will have to look that one up. Volante, which was an Aston Martin convertible, isn't bad. We digress.

There are some guys that Sophie thinks have been overlooked in past years, and she says it's time to give them a mention. Players like Patrick Cantlay, somebody who's cerebral enough to outthink Pete Dye and play the right shot at the right time. Then, of course, it's about execution. Cantlay, Sophie thinks, has sooooo much potential, and she'd love to see him win it. She just did a twirl ending with backspin. That's pretty convincing right there.

X-Man has injured himself. Something about a rib? Well, you can only reach back and hit those 330-yard drives so often without something getting tweaked. Sophie is sorry to hear about that. She likes X and hopes he heals soon. She likes anybody Fred Couples likes, and Fred is fond of both X and Cantlay.

She's also interested in seeing Justin Thomas have another one of his comebacks. And I heard her sigh a couple weeks ago when Jordan Spieth's game was looking promising. But she has to look at who played well at TPC Sawgrass lately.

I suggested Wyndham Clark. She asked if that was a hotel or a person. I reminded her that he recently won the U.S. Open and did NOT mention that he beat Rory McIlroy and Rickie Fowler in the process. (You know how she feels about Rickie.) She didn't flash light or spin, so guessing Sophie's a No on him.

I asked about Sahith Theegala, and she kind of started humming a happy sort of song. That's a yes. He's a possible, has a chance as far as the ball is concerned. Brian Harman made her hop up and down and Matt Fitzpatrick caused a wiggle in her wobble. She's obviously conflicted at this point.

Hideki Matsuyama has never won THE PLAYERS, she pointed out, but she wouldn't give me more than a definitely maybe on his chances. Adam Scott has won THE PLAYERS, and she thinks maybe he could again. That's interesting.

Collin Morikawa has the perfect style game for TPC Sawgrass. He's a thoughtful player, though not long, and that's not a problem with this course. Everyone saw the way he just held onto the "Hammer" in the TGL match because he said he was the brains of the team and didn't want to do anything crazy. He's doing something right because his team has a gazillion point lead now. Well, OK, they have 15 points and the next closest team has 8. Maybe the Cal Berkeley grad is smart enough to pick his way around the alligators to win.

Sophie likes this idea. She's doing a little shimmy.

But there's one golfer she has really been impressed with this season and last. Ludvig Åberg. Even though she has a hard time pronouncing his last name — who doesn't — she likes his chances. Besides, he moved to Ponte Vedra last year. She's sure it was to be closer to her. You'll have to forgive her. She's totally infatuated with Ludvig and the little funny mark over his last name. But what really convinced her was that he has Rickie's former caddie, Joe Skovron.

She sighed and gave off sparkles and then rotated and hopped into the closet where she rests between each PLAYERS. So, we've seen the last of her for a while. But her pick is not bad.

There you have it: Ludvig Åberg for PLAYERS Champ.

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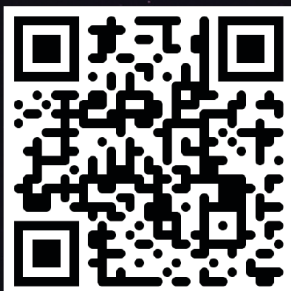
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