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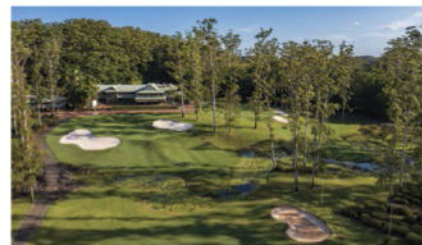
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HOW TOUR PERFORMANCE SHOULD FEEL



AND THEN THE SKY FELL ... HARD

Dark clouds unfurled over Oakmont Country Club on the Sunday afternoon of the 125th U.S Open, turning the backdrop of the tournament into something resembling a disaster movie. From the sixth hole, the skyline turned an ominous charcoal, with players and caddies glancing nervously at the

heavens. The roars of the crowd were drowned out by distant thunderclaps, as the atmosphere shifted from tense to electric ... literally. For all the precision and planning which went into the U.S Open, nothing reshuffled the leaderboard like this storm cell rolling in from the Allegheny foothills. By the time the final groups approached

the 18th, the sky looked ready to swallow the course whole. Play was suspended and umbrellas popped like kernels. It reminded us of Bill Murray's Carl Spackler, who caddied through a biblical storm on *Caddyshack* and who famously offered to The Bishop: "I'd keep playing. I don't think the heavy stuff's gonna come down for quite a while." ●



PHOTOS: MAIN BY PATRICK SMITH / GETTY IMAGES; INSET BY WARREN LITTLE / GETTY IMAGES



"CAM'S HAD A FEW EARLY EXITS ON THE BIGGEST STAGES. HE'S NOT FAR OFF."



Cam Smith is on the cover of this issue – and honestly, how could he not be?

He's still our guy. Our favourite laidback Queenslander with the mullet, the magic touch around the greens, and that steely calmness when it counts. Sure, he hasn't exactly torn up the majors lately. We've all seen the results, but here at *Golf Australia* magazine, we're not jumping to conclusions.

Because form comes and goes. Class? That sticks around.

Some people are saying LIV Golf might not be the best warm-up for majors – and there may be some truth in that (see John Huggan's column this issue). Cam's had a few early exits on the biggest stages, but when we spoke to his longtime coach, Grant Field, the message was clear: he's not far off. His LIV form has been solid – he just hasn't clicked at the right time. Yet.

So we're backing him in. The great ones don't forget how to play. And, as they say, never write off the (Open) champions.

After all, Smith is still one of Australia's most accomplished modern golfers, bursting onto the world stage with a T4 finish at the 2015 U.S. Open (as a 21-year-old), but it was his 2022 season which etched his name into history. That year, he

won The Players Championship and then claimed the 150th Open Championship at St Andrews, becoming Champion Golfer of the Year. He was a multiple-time PGA Tour winner before joining LIV Golf in 2022.

So yes, he's still Cam. And he's still ours.

Now, on a completely different note – but a subject as close to our hearts – we want to tell you about a special event on September 5 this year. It's the Men for Menopause Golf Day, and we're very proud to be hosting it alongside *Prevention* magazine and the team from Aviana, a wellness platform supporting women through perimenopause and menopause.

The idea of it all? To help men better understand what the women in their lives are going through. It's about listening (which a lot of us blokes struggle with), learning – and yep, having a hit in the process.

Television legend and golf tragic Cameron Daddo is a huge supporter of the cause, and he'll be at Long Reef Golf Club in Sydney for the day, along with his wife Ali and a great bunch of people. Our own Matt Cleary caught up with Cam for a chat, the results of which you'll find inside.

It's shaping up to be a brilliant day – meaningful, memorable and just good fun. Scan the QR code on page 53 to lock in your spot. 📱



HE'S STILL OUR CAM AND WE'RE BACKING HIM IN.

golf
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COURSE REVIEW

ST ANDREWS BEACH

MORNINGTON PENINSULA • VICTORIA

Tom Doak's St Andrews Beach has been freshly ranked the 89th best course in the world. You'll hear no argument from our Deputy Editor, Matt Cleary, who, on his first go-round, describes the course as "more fun than both Luna Parks".

WORDS **MATT CLEARY** PHOTOGRAPHY **BRENDAN JAMES, SUPPLIED**

One of the tricks of the golf course review game (a stretch to call it "work") is to take notes on the way around using your phone's voice recorder. Less finicky than notepad and pen, accessible from your pocket, you flick it out, press record, and trot out observations. It even transcribes them into words.

After my first go-around St Andrews Beach, the Tom Doak and Mike Clayton collaboration

on the glorious golfing dune lands on the southern coast of Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, the memo bank was full to bursting.

Voice memo: "St Andrews Beach, eh? Heard a lot about you. Picturesque from the back tees on the first, you can see the pin in the distance and you best mark it because you won't see it from the fairway, is what they say. My drive shoots out over some heather and onto the wide, brown land below. Our Tom Doak, it appears, has channelled his muse [Dr Alister] MacKenzie with a

signature, friendly tickle first up: a 500-metre par-five with a fairway, might be 80-metres wide, most of the way down. The Beach isn't here to beat you up, not early, anyway. And why would it? We're here for fun, baby. Hard and fast fun. The best kind."

And on it went, gibber like that, with my phone, as with accusations levelled at myself, ever more full of it.

And, yet, I can honestly and unashamedly say – gush, really – that I loved St Andrews ►



THE 17TH AT ST ANDREWS BEACH SPORTS A SPECTACULAR TEE SHOT AND SEVERAL FUN OPTIONS AFTER THAT.



Beach from the get-go.

I had been told how good it was, but you still have to play it, right? It was still a blind date. But, over four hours, two balls and in a feisty nor-west wind, I had as much fun as I've had alone on a golf course since a first solo go-round Barnbougles Dunes in 2008.

There was a strong nor-wester, but I was glad for it. It was so much fun shaping the ball under it, across it, with it, fashioning shots on the breeze and watching it track around the curvature of the land.

I hit driver off the deck. I hooded the face of six-iron and bent it flat and low. I created a golf round. Created an adventure.

I didn't keep score. And I would urge everyone, in some rounds, perhaps even all rounds: do not keep score. Even in your head. Just play. I had such a fun round, on my own,

just playing. It was Barnbougles, Wickham, Kidnappers, Tara Iti adjacent.

Granted, this all might sound a little bare-foot hippy for some. See also: Mike Clayton. The *Golf Australia* magazine architecture editor worked with Doak on St Andrews Beach, has a home nearby, and drops in regularly to offer advice on an ad hoc consultancy basis to the management team.

Voice memo: "A mighty bunker is carved like a jagged whale's mouth from the left of five fairway and I admire it for the length, until finding my ball nestled against the sheer dirt wall of this abomination. But it's not my ball, hurrah, for that sits middle of the fairway. But it is a new Pro V1 with a kangaroo stamped on it, and onwards we roll, freshly in love."

With dormant couch fairways and firm, bentgrass greens, St Andrews Beach has the

look and feel of – let's call it – an Australian links. There is a rugged, gnarly aesthetic. Your golf ball will run and run, bouncing about according to the curvature of the land on a course they carved out of marvellous dunes. The couch is tight and fine. The native bush is largely decoration. Mobs of eastern grey kangaroos loll about. A reptile or two would not surprise in summer. As Gangajang sang, *This is Australia*.

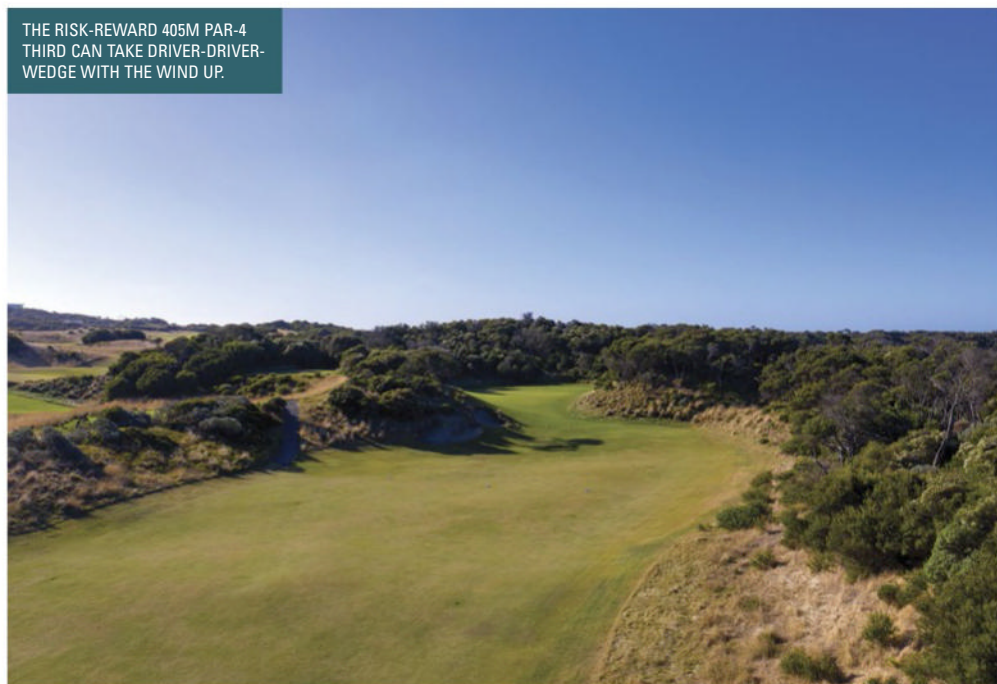
Voice memo: Hard and fast? Friend, I normally hit three-wood 200m tops. This baby, second shot on one, on the wind, across the dormant, tight turf, it's gone 250m... and some of that journey was uphill! The ball ran and ran and ran, and I found that I'd taken an unwitting Tiger Line and left myself 125m to the top of a largely blind pin set in a basin. I love this place already. Love it like first love Barnbougles."



THE BUNKER-FREE, UPHILL, INDEX-11 PAR-4 15TH.



THE FIRST TEE, NEW CLUBHOUSE AND PRACTICE CHIPPING GREEN.



THE RISK-REWARD 405M PAR-4 THIRD CAN TAKE DRIVER-DRIVER-WEDGE WITH THE WIND UP.

As is the way with golf on the fringes of our mighty island continent, wind is a factor. A hole that's driver-driver-wedge one day, might play driver-nine-iron tomorrow. It's the nature of the beast even if actually, perhaps counter-intuitively, it's relatively sheltered.

Not having water views works in the course's favour. When there are horrendous days with big southerlies, the higher a course sits, the more you can be blown away. But a lot of the holes at St Andrews Beach sit in gullies. Obviously, it can still get very windy. But on higher courses you could have your head blown off.

Regardless of the wind direction, St Andrews Beach offers a full array of golf shots. It would be a different course each time you play, even with slight shifts of breeze.

If it's drizzly and the course plays longer,

holes like the first aren't achievable in two. Play in the middle of summer and you can pump one down there, downwind, and you might be coming in with 5-iron. The ball can bounce around. There are subtle bowls around the greens. You can cop a couple of friendly kicks. Other times, not so much.

Voice memo: "Fairway bunker on two, short par-4, with the wind, 130m out, I nip a wedge, pure, back foot, just punch it out there, flat, a beautiful strike. It does everything I want it to do. It runs around the curvature of the land, rolls and rolls, I can't even see it, I know it's rolling. It ends up back of the green on the fringe. I couldn't have stopped it had I hit the green, so I envisioned running it up and it did that. How very cool. And there follows a second par. Two holes in and the nor-wester is up. And it's more fun than both Luna Parks."

Such lyrical waxing is no surprise to Ian Denny, managing director of Golf Services Management. Even on a Tuesday in June, after the course had been pounded by weekend warriors, after their busiest summer of golf ever, the Beach is always a delight for travelling players, as Denny will tell you.

"It's always playable. It's pretty rare, when you think about it, to have a course 12 months of the year, always dry, always with golf carts out. Even when the course should be at its 'worst', people walk in and say, 'I can't believe how good that was.' That consistency is a credit to the team who prepare it so well, year-round," Denny says.

Golf Australia magazine rates St Andrews Beach as the 13th-best in Australia and our fourth-best public access course. Certainly, it's up there for fun with Cape Wickham ►



THE SHORT PAR-4
SECOND IS REACHABLE
IN A NOR-WESTER.

and the Barnbougles. What did surprise and delight Denny and his team is when St Andrews Beach was recently ranked the 89th best golf course in the wooorrrld...

Denny says the team had no idea rankers from the respected website "Top 100 Golf Courses" had even been in the house. He knew there'd been accolades in Facebook groups. Architecture nerds love the place. Seems that some of their number assumed human form and turned up.

"We've had so much social media after being ranked in the top-100 in the world, which is quite bizarre, because we didn't even know anything about it," Denny says. "We just got this email saying, by the way, tomorrow we're releasing the top-100 in the world, and you're number 89. And we were like, wow, what are you talking about?"

Social media, in the way of social media, remains in something of a flap today because St Andrews Beach has been ranked ahead of Peninsula-Kingswood, Victoria, Lost Farm, Royal Adelaide and Royal Melbourne East, among others. They rank it sixth in Australia and seventh in Oceania.

Rankings are, of course, subjective. Yet clearly enough wandering rankers agreed that St Andrews Beach is world-class. "It's pretty unique and a great milestone for us," Denny says. "It shows what the golf course is because these people playing it for the first time, there's no political bias. They're just people coming out from America and worldwide,

playing it and loving it."

When the list was announced in May, almost immediately, those time-rich eccentrics who travel the world to play "Top 100" courses and notch them on a belt as bird-watchers might chronicle rare finches, began to descend on St Andrews Beach. Locals have always known what they have. Now the world does.

The Tom Doak brand has been a factor in the course's popularity. Denny says with that comes pressure to continue to trot out a world-class track.

"People's expectation is that it's going to be awesome, so there's pressure there. But everyone just walks up and says, 'That's one of the best golf courses I've ever played.' People playing it for the first time, they just come back and say, 'My God, I can't believe how good that golf course is,'" Denny says.

St Andrews Beach was once a private members course, but today, on the entry road out the front, there's a sign that reads: "All Players Welcome." There are no members. No parking spots for directors. No affectation. For \$125, people can book a tee-time for 9am on a Saturday. In terms of value for money, it's as good as it gets. Put it this way: were the course on the Monterey Peninsula of California or part of the Bandon Dunes group in Oregon, the green fee could be six, seven times as much, even – true story – a thousand Australian dollars.

While the course has always been a beauty,

the "clubhouse" was once a demountable, "donga" style affair with a corrugated iron roof and tiny barred windows. Today, there's a fine, modern and functional 19th hole with a view to a chipping green that could be a spare hole and/or post-round bet settler.

And things are about to heat up at St Andrews Beach, with a hot springs planned in the next stage of development. It will sit on the site of the old clubhouse building, which they're using as an office. There'll be more apartments for play-and-stay. And with the golf course trading and operating at a sustainable level, and then some, the progressive owner is investing money back into the business to ensure that it remains at the level they've attained.

St Andrews Beach is not constrained, or taken in manifold directions, by individuals on committees arguing for changes to certain holes, for parking spots for directors, and so on. Instead, there's a five-year plan.

Voice memo: "The third is a 405m par-4 into the wind, super-wide fairway, dog-leg right then left to a green raised in a saddle; it is very cool, my new favourite hole taking over from two which took over from one. I sting driver low into the wind, hit it maybe 170m, pure. Driver off the deck is toppy, but perfect, never more than six foot off the deck, slicing hard into the fan. I nip up wedge into the saddle and know it's close. There follows a par. Good times, baby."

St Andrews Beach has its quirks, which, for mine, add to its appeal. Fun, short par-4s



(FROM FOREGROUND)
HOLES SEVEN, EIGHT,
NINE AND TEN.

are complemented by par-4s so long into the wind, they play longer than some par-5s. The 13th is case in point: a 442m par-4 that, when played into the nor-wester, could be driver-driver-wedge – as it was the day I recorded a pretty cool bogey. The 13th could be the hardest par-4 in Australia. The last time Doak was in town, Denny asked him about it.

“The hole is over a hill to the fairway, and nigh-on impossible to hit it with a second shot in the nor-west wind,” Denny says. “Two woods, you still can’t get there. So, I said to Tom; ‘How do you make 13 a par-4?’

Doak, bless him, replied, “I couldn’t care less,” according to Denny.

“He said, ‘You either make 17 a par-four or a par-five, or 13 a par-four or par-five. They run opposite ways. So, they’re a par-nine depending on which way the wind blows.’ And I couldn’t argue with him,” Denny says.

I could not argue either, after reaching the fringe of the green on the par-5 17th with two-hybrid and, nearly, so very nearly, rolling in a big-curling bomb for an eagle for the ages. As you have may deduced, one’s memos sounded a little breathless.

Voice memo: “On to the sixth, par-three, uphill, into the wind, two mighty bunkers right, carved out of the hill, I hit a dud, fading three-wood that is not the shot-shape you want, like, at all; the ball going maybe 150m into a gnarly, fat front bunker. I’m well under the hole and can’t see the green, much less the pin, but clip out wedge-perfect; pure, centre-face, and I know it’s going

to be good, the feel off it off the face, know it’s up there, bouncing past the hole, coming back off the backboards in the bowl, sucking and spinning, dear god, but I love this game, I’m sitting 10 feet. When I curl in the putt, I have made, perhaps, the greatest sand save of my near three-score years upon the Earth. These are good times, baby.

Doak was equally lyrical when he spoke to our former editor, Brendan James, when the course opened in 2005.

“The land at St Andrews Beach was so good for designing a golf course that it became difficult to decide which holes we couldn’t build,” Doak said.

“There are natural golf holes laid out there of all shapes and sizes, but we could only use the two best combinations of 18.

“In some cases, we just had to find the right spot to put a green, locate the nearest high point near that green to put the next tee and the following hole would present itself.

“I can’t help but feel that Alister Mackenzie would be mad that he never got the chance to design a course on land this good.”

Voice memo: “Onto seven, a par-four for Australia, into the wind I hit driver and driver again, and am still short, 100m under the hole. I take 8-iron off the back foot, hood the face slightly and punch it, one hundred percent pure, hard, the ball sluicing up under the wind. It flies and sticks past the flag, sucks and spins off a ramp at the back, rolls out pin-high. Oh dear Lord in all the Heavens, whatever Andrew did, no wonder they made him a Saint.”

FACT FILE

LOCATION: 209 Sandy Rd, St Andrews Beach, Victoria, 3941.

COURSE: (03) 5988 6000.

WEBSITE:

www.standrewsbeachgolf.com.au

DESIGNER: Tom Doak (2005).

COURSE SUPERINTENDENT: Matthew Robilliard, Programmed Turnpoint.

GREEN FEES: \$125 (18 holes); \$62.50 (18 holes U/18). Motorised cart \$52. Premium hire set (\$60); standard hire set (\$30).

ACCOMMODATION: The St Andrews Beach Apartments are modern, double-storey, two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartments perched on the edge of the course and equipped to cater to a maximum of eight guests. Each apartment is air-conditioned with a fully equipped kitchen and luxury bedrooms with modern furnishings.

ACCOLADES: 2024 *Golf Australia* magazine Top-100 Public Access Courses, No.4; 2024 *Golf Australia* magazine Top-100 Courses, No.13; Top 100 Golf Courses, world No.89, Oceania No.7.

AUSTRALASIAN TOUR

PGA TOUR TURNS UP HEAT WITH \$7M PRIZEMONEY

The 2025–26 Challenger PGA Tour of Australasia is shaping up to be one of the most exciting yet, with a packed early season schedule and a record \$7 million in prizemoney up for grabs across 10 tournaments.

Both of Australia's biggest tournaments – the BMW Australian PGA Championship and the ISPS HANDA Australian Open – will dish out significantly bigger prize pools this year, further underlining their growing stature on the global stage. Co-sanctioned by the DP World Tour, they're drawing bigger fields, bigger crowds and now, bigger paydays.

Prizemoney for the BMW Australian PGA at Royal Queensland Golf Club (November 27–30) jumps to \$2.5 million, its richest purse in the event's 121-year history. That's a \$500,000 bump from last year. One week later, the Australian Open heads to the iconic Royal Melbourne (December 4–7) and will offer a minimum of \$2 million. With Rory McIlroy confirmed to headline, it promises to be one of the biggest Opens in recent memory.

The season gets rolling in Papua New Guinea in August, kicking off "The Chase" – the Tour's theme this year – with the PNG Open. From there, players will battle it out across Australia in a string of events leading into summer.

A couple of fan-favourite tournaments are making a comeback, too. The NT PGA Championship returns to Palmerston Golf Course (August 28–31), and Mt Lawley Golf Club is back on the schedule for the WA Open (October 16–19) for the first time since 2018, giving golf fans a look at its freshly revamped layout.

There's also a return to The Vintage in the Hunter Valley, with the Ford NSW Open (November 14–17) once again teeing off on Greg Norman's vineyard-side layout – its first hosting since 2010.

One of the Tour's most popular innovations, the Webex Players Series – where men and women compete together for the same title – will have one pre-Christmas hit-out. Willunga Golf Club in

South Australia will again host the Webex Players Series SA, with local cricket and golf legend Greg Blewett playing host. Four more Webex events will follow in early 2026, including a return to Royal Fremantle for the Webex Players Series Perth, hosted by Minjee and Min Woo Lee.

With the full schedule extending into March, the race to top the Order of Merit will unfold across a wide spread of top-tier venues – from tropical PNG to suburban Perth, wine country in the Hunter to the Sandbelt classics of Melbourne.

PGA of Australia boss Gavin Kirkman says the first half of the season is a golden opportunity for players chasing more than just trophies.

"This is what the Challenger PGA Tour of Australasia is all about – the chase," Kirkman said. "It's about chasing titles, chasing

exemptions, chasing chances to compete on the world stage.

"Elvis Smylie showed us last year what's possible – winning twice, topping the Order of Merit, securing his DP World Tour card, and getting into two majors. It can all change, and quickly."

Nick Dastey, PGA of Australia's general manager of tournaments and global tour relationships, added: "This season really stretches right across the map – metro and regional events, different states, different styles of courses. Each one brings something unique. The golf we saw last season was world-class. We are expecting more of the same in 2025–26."

The second half of the season – from January to March – will be revealed in the coming weeks. ●

– Paul Munnings



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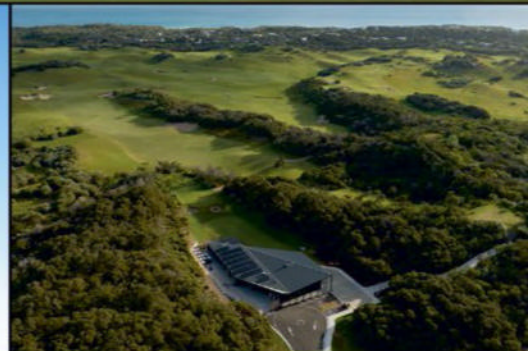
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TWO-TIME AUSTRALIAN OPEN WINNER JIYAI SHIN WITH THE PATRICIA BRIDGES BOWL IN 2024.

WOMEN'S PGA

ADELAIDE TO HOST WOMEN'S AUS OPEN FROM 2026

Women's professional golf is heading back to Adelaide, with the Australian Open locked in at Kooyonga Golf Club from March 12–15, 2026 – the first of at least three years in South Australia's capital.

The event will once again feature on both the WPGA Tour of Australasia and the Ladies European Tour (LET) calendars, marking a major boost for the local scene and reinforcing South Australia's growing reputation as a destination for big-time sport.

Kooyonga, just 15 minutes from Adelaide's CBD, is no stranger to the spotlight. A regular host of top-tier events, including the Open back in 2018, it consistently ranks among the best courses in the country and promises a stellar setting for a standalone women's major on the Aussie calendar.

Major winners such as Jiyai Shin, Ash Buhai, Inbee Park, Nelly Korda and Lydia Ko have all lifted the Patricia Bridges Bowl in recent years, but a homegrown winner has proven elusive. Karrie Webb remains the last Aussie champion, back in 2014 – a drought which will no doubt fire up the local contingent come March.

Golf Australia CEO James Sutherland

said the long-term commitment from the South Australian government will elevate what has always been one of the region's marquee women's golf tournaments.

"We are extremely excited by this partnership with the South Australian Government, who are showing a clear commitment to women's golf in Australia," Sutherland said.

"Securing South Australia as host for the next three years is a significant win for players and fans alike. Kooyonga is a world-class venue, and the field will feature our brightest homegrown stars, rising talent from the WPGA Tour and elite players from the LET."

South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas said the tournament's return to Adelaide would offer benefits far beyond the fairways.

"South Australia is ready to take the women's Australian Open to new heights," he said.

"Securing this championship for at least the next three years will drive global attention, deliver world-class fan and player experiences, and inspire more people – especially girls and women – to take up the game.

"This is an exciting time for our state, already reaping the rewards of hosting events like LIV Golf Adelaide. We're also

investing in North Adelaide Golf Course as the future venue for LIV Golf and other major tournaments."

For Karen Lunn, CEO of the WPGA of Australia, the move to a standalone format is a key moment for the women's game.

"Adelaide has a proven track record hosting major events and we're thrilled to be back," Lunn said.

"This platform lets us highlight the incredible talent we have in Australia – players who are not just competing, but contending on the LPGA and LET every week.

"There's never been a better time for women's golf in Australia, and I know our players will be determined to end the home drought and lift the Patricia Bridges Bowl in 2026."

Ladies European Tour CEO Alexandra Armas also welcomed the news.

"We're thrilled the Australian Open is returning to the LET schedule for 2026," Armas said.

"Kooyonga Golf Club will be a fantastic venue and our players are excited to compete for one of women's golf's most prestigious trophies.

"Thanks to the WPGA Tour, Golf Australia and the South Australian government for making it happen."

– Alanna Mullan

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COACHING

KIDS, CLINICS AND CAREER REVIVAL

Kids who had never previously picked up a golf club have helped reignite Jade Longstaff's passion for coaching and instilled a determination to advance the game in the Northern Territory, writes Tony Webeck.

Longstaff's transition from the PGA of Australia's Membership Pathway Program into a career as a PGA Professional has been a circuitous one.

Shortly after completing the MPP, Longstaff and her partner embarked on an eight-month trip around Australia, stopping to play golf along the way. She also offered golf lessons to locals, including those at Katherine Country Club, located three hours south of Darwin.

Yet when Longstaff's partner was offered a job in Alice Springs, she didn't immediately seek to return to the golf industry. There were challenges in completing the MPP which gave her cause to consider other potential careers. There followed stints as a flight attendant and working in the Northern Territory Police Force call centre.

But when the chance to work under Justin Speirani at Alice Springs Golf Club was offered late last year, Longstaff jumped at it. And, as she introduced herself to the Alice Springs members, it was an opportunity to conduct MyGolf clinics. Local girls have taken to it in droves.

"When the MyGolf Girls program came up, my boss, Justin, said, 'That's perfect for you,'" Longstaff said. "I've been doing those every week and we've actually been getting quite a few junior girls.

"Most of them are quite young – like five or six years old – but we've had about 15 to 20 kids rock up each week and we're like, 'Where have you come from?' A lot of them have never picked up a golf club before.

"The parents see free clinics during the school holidays on Facebook and they come down and we have to start from the very basics."

Longstaff says it's hard to tell if the kids will continue with golf, or if it's the lure of a free holiday activity. But the fun and golf improvement of the clinics has reminded Longstaff why she wanted to coach in the first place.

Yet it's not just the little ones who are inspiring Longstaff's coaching progression. As she establishes her presence at Alice Springs, she is still connected with those she worked with during her time at Darwin Golf Club, where she left a lasting impact.

"I feel like it's definitely brought me back," Longstaff said of her work with juniors. "Even the couple of Alice Springs members that I've coached, they've come back to me after they've won the comp a couple of times since then.

"I saw a member from Darwin who was playing the Alice Springs Open. I gave him a lesson probably two years ago and he said that ever since that lesson, he's been able to get out of bunkers first try.

"That sort of feedback is what is keeping me coaching and that's what has made my passion come back. The more I do it and the more positives I see out of it, the more I realise that this is where my heart is.

"I'm glad that I came back." 🍷



PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY PGA OF AUSTRALIA



JADE LONGSTAFF'S PASSION FOR COACHING HAS BEEN REKINDLED.

MEMBERS

FIRST WOMEN APPOINTED TO VOCATIONAL MEMBERS COUNCIL

The PGA of Australia has entered a new era with the first women appointed to the Vocational Members Council (VMC) at the 2025 Annual General Meeting.

Anne-Marie Knight (West Beach Parks Golf Academy), Nicole James (Coolangatta-Tweed Heads Golf Club) and Nicole Martino (The Western Australian GC) were elected by their fellow PGA Professionals and will now join the nine-person VMC to provide representation and direction on behalf of Vocational Members to the PGA Board.

The VMC has never had a woman Member in the 114-year history of the PGA of Australia and Geoff Stewart, General Manager – Membership, is excited about what their appointment represents.

"The Vocational Members Council performs a critical function in representing PGA Members to the PGA Board and I have no doubt these three PGA Professionals will fill these roles with distinction," said Stewart.

"Anne-Marie Knight, Nicole James and Nicole Martino are all decorated PGA Members in their own right, with a wide variety of experiences and expertise.

"Anne-Marie was an accomplished tournament professional before moving into coaching, Nicole James has risen through the ranks to now be the General Manager at Coolangatta-Tweed Heads Golf Club and Nicole Martino spent time as the PGA's Member Services Coordinator in Western Australia and is now the Golf Manager at The Western Australian Golf Club.

"I was thrilled that they nominated to join the VMC and am now equally excited to see how they contribute, having been elected by their fellow PGA Members."

After 13 years' playing on the ALPG (now WPGA Tour of Australasia) and the Ladies European Tour, Knight (pictured, centre) became a full Vocational Member of the PGA in 2009.

She was named South Australian PGA Teaching Professional of the Year in 2016 and South Australian Game Development Professional of the Year in 2019. Knight

hopes to further increase leadership opportunities for women in golf.

"I believe the PGA has come a long way to improve opportunities for female PGA Professionals, with many initiatives such as women on boards/committees, increased playing opportunities with the introduction of the PGA Women's Cup and the alignment with the WPGA Tour of Australasia," said Knight.

"I'm passionate about continuing to grow and explore further pathways for our female PGA Membership."

Like Knight, Nicole James spent eight years playing on tour before joining the PGA as a full Member in 2000.

Before moving into management, James (pictured, left) worked as a Tournament Coordinator for the PGA and wants to expand opportunities for Members in both of those areas.

"I have a deep understanding of the importance of providing playing opportunities for our Members," said James.

"I am passionate about creating and expanding these opportunities to ensure that more Members can develop their playing ability here in Australia.

"Having progressed to a General Manager role, I also recognise the importance of supporting our Members in advancing to managerial positions.

"This is vital for their personal growth and for the continued success and recognition of the PGA of Australia."

A PGA Professional since 2013, Nicole Martino (pictured, right) has been employed in a variety of roles across the golf industry over the past 20 years.

She has already served twice on the former PGA WA Vocational Committee and is passionate about member engagement and education.

"I feel that the time is right for me to give back and use my knowledge and experience to listen to our Members and to represent them well," said Martino.

"I have had some great PGA role models who encouraged and supported me to achieve my career goals and I would love to contribute to increasing opportunities for Members to engage with one another and continue their own personal and professional development."

PGA of Australia CEO, Gavin Kirkman, was delighted to see three such outstanding candidates added to the VMC.

"All three women are proud PGA Professionals who have already made significant contributions to the Australian golf industry," said Kirkman.

"As the first women voted onto the VMC, they will bring a fresh perspective which can only benefit the organisation and its objectives.

"I very much look forward to working with them and all members of the VMC in further advancing the career opportunities for all PGA Members."

– Tony Webeck



LEFT-RIGHT: NICOLE JAMES, ANNE-MARIE KNIGHT AND NICOLE MARTINO.



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19 HOLES WITH...

CAMERON DADDO





A NOTHING SHORT OF PURE MORNING AT MANLY GC FOR OUR LATEST "19 HOLES WITH..." ADVENTURE.

From Hollywood's sets to Manly's fairways, Cameron Daddo has gradually swapped scripts for scorecards. A 10-marker chasing single figures, the Aussie actor reflects on golf as therapy, storytelling and family glue. He's teed it up at Riviera, L.A Country Club and once shot 75 hungover in Vancouver. Now, alongside wife Alison, he's helping men into menopause awareness with a special golf day. As ever, there's more to Daddo than meets the credits roll, as our Deputy Editor Matt Cleary discovered.

For nearly 25 years, Cameron Daddo lived in Los Angeles and worked as an actor. And thus, to paraphrase the great Troy McClure, you might remember him from such shows as *The Mentalist*, *Boston Legal* and *Big Momma's House 2*.

He was Professor Michael Lovcraft in *Pterodactyl*. He was Reverend Daniel Cooper in *Love Island*. He was Matthew Gill, the mining engineer who helped rescue Todd Russell and Brant Webb in the hit film about Beaconsfield called *Beaconsfield*.

He was Jack Anders, an officer in the Australian Light Horse Brigade who, along with his horse "Phyllis," was first through the German lines in the successful cavalry charge and invasion of Be'er Sheva, gateway to Jerusalem. He and Phyllis were later helped with much-needed water by 14-year-old agent of the French intelligence, Indiana Jones.

And you think: sounds a touch fanciful. But also: how cool would that be – playing a daredevil of the desert in *The Adventures Of Young Indiana Jones: Daredevils Of The Desert*. You could hang a slouch hat on that, baby.

Oh? Not that impressed? Well, what

was your role in *The Adventures Of Young Indiana Jones: Daredevils Of The Desert*? In fact, what did you get up to last Tuesday? Put the bins out? Walk the dog? Pick a Dorito out your chest hair on the couch watching *MAFS*?

Never mind. For while the show business career of one of the estimated 137 Daddos on the box is all very interesting, what we would most like to know, of course, is how the man goes at golf and what flash courses he has played in his travels.

So, over a coffee in the 101-year-old clubhouse at Manly GC, we just up and ask him: *what sort of a golfer are you, Daddo? You any good?*

The man laughs. "Well, in my mind, I'm an absolutely brilliant golfer. In reality, I'm a 10-handicap. This year, I'm looking to get down to single figures. I've never actually played off single figures," he says.

Why not? What's holding you back, man? "Probably what holds everyone back – it's in the mind. I might be on the 14th tee or something and I'm going well, have a round going, and I'm thinking exactly that: *this is a good round, isn't it?*" Daddo explains.

"So, all of a sudden, it's all happening,

and I start to think too much. My challenge is to just stop thinking. Once I do that, I play better."

A lesson in golf and life for us all.

And so, to the first tee of Manly GC on a pure and dewy morning in June, and the Daddo golf swing is not the mangiest bit of kit. Tall and languid, a leftie, there is crisp connection and the ball sails into the morning light like a ... well, not a tracer bullet in the battle of Be'er Sheva. He's a 60-year-old actor, not Min Woo hitting stingers. But you would be happy enough, in the way of these things, with most of his action. It's surprising he's never been handicapped under 10.

Particularly given he did once shoot 75 on the set of *Happy Gilmore*.

"I was shooting a show in Vancouver and we played a round at Furry Creek, the course where Bob Barker beat the shit out of Happy Gilmore," Daddo recalls. "And I was quite hungover. I staggered onto the golf course and I guess that's how it goes. Like I was saying about thinking about things, I didn't think about things. Also managed an eagle that day, so it was a day of firsts."

Of his time in L.A, Daddo says his ►



DADDO FROM DOWNTOWN ON THE PAR-4 12TH HOLE AT MANLY GC.

neighbourhood course, Riviera Country Club, was his favourite. He wasn't a member, but knew a few people who were and would play five or six times a year. He also played L.A. Country Club, host of the 2023 U.S. Open won by Wyndham Clark, but wasn't a member there, either. He wasn't allowed.

"It's an interesting place, LACC," he muses. "They probably won't like me saying this, but they wouldn't allow actors to be members. Even Sean Connery couldn't join. He was rejected."

And so, we golf with a couple of friendly members, and talk of acting and golf and the other 136 Daddos, and golf again. We talk of *Golf Australia* magazine's podcast, *The Thing About Golf*, which attempts to drill into that elemental thing that we all love about the game. It's obviously the sum of many parts and there are many reasons we play. But, if our man Daddo had to, head on the block, describe that thing, what is that thing about golf for him?

"I think it's presence. I think it's being present. I love the metaphysical side of golf," he says.

Given my raised eyebrows and that I

will later have to Google that metaphysics is a "branch of philosophy that examines the basic structure of reality," according to the internet, Daddo goes on.

And makes a lot more sense.

"I love the feeling of envisioning a shot – its shape, how it feels off the club face, how it will run out or stick on a green – and then making that happen. When your mind and body are working as one to create an outcome ... that's golden.

"But I love so many things about golf. I love reading about golf. I like talking about it. I like writing about it. I've actually got a script in waiting called *Slice Of Heaven* about eight guys on a golf trip."

An L.A. actor with a script? Knock us down with a king-sized Tontine. It would seem remiss not to ask that he give us the pitch.

"These eight guys have been playing together for a year and they've each put money in for an end of year golf trip," Daddo explains. "But they only have enough for the best four to go. So, when it gets to the pointy end, it gets very tense.

"Anyway, the four top guys end up going to this resort in Palm Springs and the other four turn up. They end

up playing against each other. And it becomes like LIV versus PGA.

"All these guys think they know each other, but they really don't. One's a cheat. One guy's completely broke. One is fighting for his life but the others don't know he is dying.

"Another has been told by 10 psychics that he is going to be dead before he is 50. And his 50th birthday is that weekend. So, he thinks he's going to die and is living as if he's dying."

Another lesson in golf and life for us all, perhaps metaphysical.

Daddo's journey in golf began as many of ours did: watching the old man head off to play on Saturdays. His mum played on Thursdays. His grandma was Ladies Captain at Metropolitan on Melbourne's Sandbelt. His grandad taught etiquette with a kindly, iron fist.

"Golf was the family game," Daddo says. "They all wanted us to play and they'd come down to Peninsula [now Peninsula Kingswood] and we'd have a week with our grandparents and they'd put us in the golf clinics and things like that. I was about 10 or 11 and it just became what we did with Dad, what we



SMOOTH, LONG AND LANGUID, CAM DADDO'S GOLF SWING – PARTICULARLY THAT FINISH – IS NOT THE WORST BIT OF KIT, ACCORDING TO EXPERTS.



A SMOOTH SWING ON 13 AT MANLY GC FROM OUR SMOOTH FM DISC JOCKEY.

did with our Pop, with Mum, with the brothers. Golf was my happy place."

Daddo's brother, Andrew, who you might remember from such *Golf Australia* magazine articles as *Soundtrack To A Streak* from our June 2025 issue, is an inveterate creator of things. In his garage at home he makes putters. He makes trophies. He creates wedges from imported Japanese blanks.

Cameron quips that his brother makes things for less than selfless purposes.

"I've figured Andrew out," Cameron laughs. "He makes a trophy so he can win it. And when he doesn't have it, he gets quite upset. That said, in his older age he's becoming more gracious. The nieces and nephews are playing golf, so the game is growing within the family, which is really fun."

For those of us of a certain middle age, our man Daddo will be forever remembered as the host of *Perfect Match*, the blind-dating show with the robot from *Lost In Space* as co-host, in which one contestant asks questions of three potential suitors, before the one person picks one and they go to Fiji to decide they don't like each other.

A few years after they canned it – and several years before they worked out that it would draw far greater ratings if they just went straight to marrying the mad bastards at first sight – Daddo met and married Alison Brahe (now one of those many Daddos), with whom he shares three children.

Alison is the best-selling author of *Queen Menopause: Finding Your Majesty In The Mayhem* and runs a company called Aviana with her friend Mary Doube, which focusses on creating awareness around menopause. And, with the great *Golf Australia* magazine and in conjunction with our stablemate, the great *Prevention* magazine, Alison and Cameron and 144 of their closest friends will be holding a Men for Menopause golf day on September 5 at Long Reef Golf Club in Sydney.

But it's not just for men, as Daddo explains.

"The original idea Ali had was: *do you think we could get two women and two men playing together in a group?* I said, *Sure. Do whatever you want. It's your day.*

"So, it really is about bringing

awareness to menopause and perimenopause. And maybe there'll be a few conversations between players on the way around, as well as some cracking guest speakers at the function."

Knowing the difference probably wouldn't hurt men to learn, given there's every chance every one of us will be somehow affected by it.

"It's a unique opportunity to support the women in our lives by playing the game we love," Daddo says. "Menopause can affect everyone. Every woman on this planet will go through it, so there's a need to educate men about what women go through. Understanding what it is and the effects are key.

"When Ali went through it, I was as confused about her mental and physical state as she was. She bravely penned what has become a best-selling book about her journey. I found it compelling and couldn't believe I was so ignorant. No one was talking about it. Thankfully, this is no longer the case, although more can always be done."

Check out the advertisement on page 53 if you would come along.

– Matt Cleary

PHOTOS: MATT CLEARY



DADDO BLASTS ONE OFF THE TEE AT 18 AT MANLY GC.

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XANDER SCHAUFFELE WITH THE CLARET JUG AFTER WINNING THE 152ND OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP AT ROYAL TROON, SCOTLAND IN 2024. (PHOTO BY TOM SHAW/R&A VIA GETTY IMAGES)



“WHO WAS FEEDING TEMPTATION BY WHISPERING SWEET RIYALS IN SMITH’S EARS?”

At the time, it seemed like a strange decision; one easily viewed as ill-considered, nonsensical and ultimately flawed. Yes, it did make some kind of sense for the likes of Graeme McDowell, Lee Westwood and Ian Poulter.

Past their competitive best, the unappetising prospect of ever-diminishing incomes before reaching the financial haven of seniors golf understandably made them receptive to alternative employment offers. But for someone on the rise and playing with real distinction, that option made little sense.

But Cam Smith did it anyway. While holding two of the five biggest titles in the game. Having just won the most historic of them all, the Open Championship, at the most revered venue, the Old Course at St. Andrews, the then-28-year-old Australian joined LIV Golf. Okay, at the time it remained to be seen if the mulleted Queenslander was merely riding a bit of a hot streak, or was a bona fide champion in the early stages of a path to true greatness. It would have been nice to have found out the answer.

So it was a dubious choice to make at Smith's time of life and career, even if the short-term “benefit” was obvious – a large

amount of Saudi cash. But the suspicion (or the fear) was that such a switch would have a detrimental effect on Smith's level of performance, either immediately or more gradually. Whatever, to give up the possibility of immortality was disappointing to those who value such things over cash in the bank. History books, after all, tend to be way more impressed by glittering trophies than filthy lucre.

Still, Smith is an adult and so must be allowed to make his own mistakes, even if his silly hairstyle betrays a lingering immaturity in a man now in his early 30s. And it is there that this column pauses and wonders. Who exactly was feeding temptation by whispering sweet Riyals in Smith's ears? Who was influencing his thoughts; the devil on his shoulder? Who else stood to gain more from a short-term money-grab than a continuing accumulation of prestigious titles?

One of the least-analysed aspects of the LIV saga is the insidious influence of player agents. Lurking in the background, they are – too often in this observer's experience – the bearer of false tidings (or in this case, dodgy advice) designed to benefit themselves more than the players.

So how has it all worked out so far?

Proof, as ever, is to be found in the veracity of the numbers. Unlike so many agents, they rarely speak with forked tongue.

At first, all seemed to be going according to plan (if it can be claimed there was such a thing in place). In 2023, Smith recorded decent finishes in all four major championships. You know, the events that really matter to the truly great golfers. There were a couple of top-10s, at the U.S. PGA and the U.S. Open, alongside a couple of relatively mediocre finishes at the Masters (T-34) and in defence of the Claret Jug (T-33).

Not fantastic, but a record most players would surely look on as at least respectable.

Fast forward to 2024 and things didn't go quite so well, especially after a creditable T-6 finish at Augusta National. T-63 was the dismal result of four days of poor play at the U.S. PGA – a finish which made T-32 at the U.S. Open seem almost acceptable. Which brings us to the Open Championship. Two years on from his classic victory, Smith was asked to leave Royal Troon after two rounds, in one of which he failed to break 80.

In the first two majors of this year, Smith had played only 72 holes. No surprise there, given that he was a cumulative 12-over par for those four rounds.

Over on LIV, Smith's record also points to an insipid lessening of his once-proud abilities. Into what is now his fourth season of 54-hole, shotgun-start events, he can point to just three victories. The most recent of those happened almost two years ago. Since then, not once has he finished first in these limited-field tournaments.

Maybe all of the above would have happened even if Smith had decided to ignore advice to the contrary and stayed within golf's establishment. Even as he cut a briefly successful swathe through the game's most important events, there were doubts over his ball-striking ability. Was his almost peerless short-game covering up some sizeable cracks between tee and green? Perhaps.

Sadly, the signs are that we may never learn the answers to the various questions posed here. One can only hope that vast material wealth is enough to compensate for the inevitable regrets. ●



CAM SMITH SWITCHED TO LIV HAVING JUST WON THE MOST HISTORIC CHAMPIONSHIP OF THEM ALL.



INTO HIS FOURTH LIV GOLF SEASON, SMITH CAN POINT TO JUST THREE VICTORIES.





FLASHBACK

1975 OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP

Fifty years ago, Carnoustie delivered one of the great Open Championship finishes; a head-to-head duel between a young American making his Open debut and a gritty Aussie who wouldn't back down.

The year was 1975, the place was Carnoustie Golf Links in Scotland. The 104th Open had it all – wind, rain, drama and eventually, a new champion in Tom Watson, who edged out Jack Newton by a single shot in an 18-hole playoff to win the first of his eight major titles.

For three days, the conditions were unusually kind and the scores reflected it. South African Bobby Cole lit it up with consecutive 66s to lead after 54 holes. On Saturday, however, the wind turned up and the leaderboard turned inside out. Cole stumbled with a 76, Watson hung tough with an even-par 72 and Newton ground out a 74. It all came down to the final few holes.

Watson's round was a rollercoaster. He went out in 35, then three-putted three holes in a row – hardly ideal. American Johnny Miller looked like he might steal it late, but bogeyed the last. Cole had a chance to join the leaders but did similar at holes 15-17. And Newton? He had a 20-footer to win it outright on the 72nd, but it slid by. He tapped in for par, tying Watson at 11-under.

And so, under grey skies and steady rain, they returned on Sunday for the last-ever 18-hole playoff in Open history.

It was tight all the way. Watson twice pulled ahead, only for Newton to claw him back. Neither gave an inch. By the time they reached the 18th hole – their 90th of the week – the match was still square.

Watson found the green in two. Newton wasn't so lucky, his approach catching a greenside bunker. He played a solid recovery, but it left him a testing 12-footer to stay alive. Watson had a long birdie try to win it there and then. It missed, but he was safely in for par.

All eyes turned to Newton. One putt to keep the playoff going. It looked good the whole way ... but just missed. The Aussie hurled his putter into the air – part frustration, part disbelief and probably a fair bit of exhaustion.

Watson's 71 to Newton's 72 sealed it. He became just the third man since World War II to win The Open on debut, joining Ben Hogan (1953) and Tony Lema (1964). And Carnoustie? It wouldn't host The Open again until 1999.

For Newton, it was the closest he'd come to winning a major. For Watson, it was the beginning of something special. Five Open wins would follow, but it all started in the rain, shoulder to shoulder with Jack Newton, on one unforgettable Sunday at Carnoustie. ●

PHOTO: PA IMAGES VIA GETTY IMAGES

SORTING GOLF'S SACRED 10



With no two the same, the 10 links courses which host The Open are collectively golf's most sacred ground. Here, our brave columnist dares to rank them ... based purely on love and feel.

WORDS BY GEOFF OGILVY

A question I get asked a lot around this time of year is how would I rank the 10 links which make up the Open Championship rota? At least for me, part of the answer is straightforward and some of it not. All 10 are truly great courses, so it really comes down to a matter of opinion. I mean, they are all so different, which is a big part of what is so good about them.

If we get right down to basics though, it's the turf – my favourite thing about it and the best grass in the world from which to hit iron shots – and the bunkering which go a long way to separating an Open course from the rest. And the randomness. You never really know when and where the ball is going to stop. So there is little need for a range finder. Where your shots land is only the start of the equation you are trying to solve. Besides, hitting 3-irons from 150 yards out is a lot of fun.

Links is surely fun to play, but you don't fall in love with golf by the seaside until you've played, say, 25 of them. They are all so unique. And weird. Especially on the older links in the U.K and Ireland, where you

can find yourself hitting over the corner of a fence, or a wall, or over a hill on a blind par-3. There are no rules when golf is truly multi-dimensional.

One more thing. Because the greens are generally relatively flat, 20-30-foot putts are normally pretty straightforward. You can hit them hard and there is not usually much break involved. In other words, on a great links there is a much higher premium on ball-striking than there is on putting. It's harder to hit the ball well than it is to putt well. Which is a long way from soft, American-style courses, where the emphasis is typically on putting. On a links you have to do so much more than putt well.

Anyway, here goes with my own personal rating of the Open courses. That bit is important; this is just my opinion. You may think differently. Which is fine. So without further ado ...

NO.10 – ROYAL ST. GEORGES

It was Jack Nicklaus who once said Open courses get better the further north you go. I have to agree, in that I am placing Royal St. Georges (aka Sandwich) on the ►



CARNOUSTIE



MUIRFIELD



ROYAL ST. GEORGES

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES





south-eastern tip of England in 10th spot. Which is not to say I am not a fan. I am. It's great, but it is also annoying. All those hump-backed fairways mean the ball seems to be bounding into the rough on too many holes. That's aggravating, but also part of its charm. Then again, this is a course that feels desolate and bleak and barren out there. It just doesn't feel like a nice place to go for a walk. And hey, someone has to be last on this list ...

NO.9 – ROYAL BIRKDALE

At the risk of pissing off any English readers, this ranking came down to which out of Royal Birkdale, Royal Lytham and (Royal Liverpool) Hoylake I enjoy playing most, or least for the sake of this list. But I must admit any antipathy I feel towards Birkdale is predicated by the conditions when I was there. At the 2008 Open (pictured), the weather on the first day was incredibly bad. And of course I got the wrong end of the draw. It rained heavily and blew really hard all the way round.

You want an example of how bad it was? On the par-4 6th hole, I hit driver, 2-iron, 5-iron to the green. So maybe this rating needs an asterisk, because I can still remember how miserable I was that day.

NO.8 – ROYAL LYTHAM

Again, this relatively low ranking pains me a little. I have always enjoyed playing at Lytham. But I think Hoylake is more "linksy". One thing Lytham is not is easy. It feels

a bit like an old-fashioned "out and back" links, but the holes around the turn are truly memorable. As is the difficulty of the back-nine into a wind. On some links you can feel like you are somewhere unidentifiable. But at Lytham, where the road, railway line and houses are in such close proximity, it has a nice "homely" feeling to it. At Lytham, you are in the neighbourhood.

NO.7 – ROYAL LIVERPOOL

Just three weeks after winning the U.S. Open at Winged Foot, I was in England for the 2006 Open. The contrast could not have been greater. After a long spell of dry weather, Hoylake was almost yellow. The ball was bouncing and rolling long after landing; features which brought out the very best aspects of links golf. Yardages didn't mean much. And the best player in the world at the time, Tiger Woods, put on a clinic.

Only once in 72 holes did Tiger hit his driver. Never did it look like anyone else was going to win, which is a tribute to the course. It might not be too many people's favourite, but it allowed the greatest player of my generation to show off almost every one of his many attributes. As tributes go, it's hard to think of a better one.

NO.6 – ROYAL TROON

To my mind, the first five or six holes at Troon let the course down a bit. They are very basic and tend to play downwind. But I love the 7th hole, just before the epic par-3 that is

the Postage Stamp. All of which sounds bad when it isn't really. Troon has to start where it starts and it has to go where it goes.

The back-nine, on the other hand, is brutal and can have a huge impact on who wins and loses a championship. If you reach the turn at the wrong time, you are basically out of the tournament. Let's just say I have a lot of respect for anyone who finishes well at Troon.

NO.5 – TURNBERRY

I know the Ailsa course has improved a lot since I last saw it in the flesh. However, this is as high as I can place the course where Tom Watson could have and should have won the 2009 Open at the age of 59. On the other hand, if I am rating the land on which the Open courses are built, then Turnberry might be number one. As far as aesthetics are concerned, it is almost peerlessly beautiful. The stretch of holes along the coastline is just nuts, including the par-3 green, which now sits in front of the iconic lighthouse. Just a cool place to play.

NO.4 – CARNOUSTIE

Given what I had to say about Birkdale and the weather I played through there, ranking Carnoustie this high might seem a little perverse. I played my first Open there in 1999, the year the course seemed to be all but covered in thick rough. Which was no fun, believe me.

But this is a course which can rise above such absurdity. I had played there a few times before '99 and always loved it. It's not beautiful; far from it. But this is just a wonderful test of golf, all the way from the first tee to the 18th green. The last few holes in particular are an awesome test of any player's abilities.

Some tough courses you just hate to play, but Carnoustie is not one of them. Somehow it rises above its surroundings. The par-5 14th – the Spectacles – is one of the best holes anywhere in the world, and the prelude to maybe the most challenging finish in the game.

NO.3 – ROYAL PORTRUSH

I have to be honest here. I have never played Portrush. My rating here is based on opinions I respect. Everyone I have ever





THE OLD COURSE



ROYAL PORTRUSH



TURNBERRY



ROYAL TROON

talked to about this course (the place where the “British Open” is not actually played in Great Britain) has nothing but positive things to say. In particular, “Calamity,” a par-3, where missing the green on the right means dropping off the edge of what amounts to a cliff, gets rave reviews. I’m looking forward to seeing this wonderful course again when The Open returns this year.

NO.2 – MUIRFIELD

Home to the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, Muirfield is actually about 20 miles from Scotland’s capital and is probably the most “normal” links in the world. If there is such a thing. Here, there are 18 amazingly good holes. It has a perfect routing; the front-nine moving around the outside of the premises in a clockwise direction, before the back-nine moves inside counter-clockwise.

I have a hard time summing up Muirfield. It’s a “fancy-man’s” links. On every tee I always have the same feeling: “Oh, I get to play *this* hole now.”

Conditioning is always great, the undulations are dramatic enough, and it has one of my favourite greens in all of golf (the 15th), one which allowed a truly great player, Nick Faldo, to hit a truly great shot in the final round of the 1992 Open. To me, that sums up the mastery of the course and The Open as a whole. Muirfield ticks every box. Take a look at some of the names on the list of winners there, if you don’t believe me: Harry Vardon, Walter Hagen, Henry Cotton, Phil Mickelson, Ernie Els, Tom Watson, Jack Nicklaus, Lee Trevino, Gary Player and Faldo. Pretty strong.

NO.1 – THE OLD COURSE

Even if I am doing just that, the Old Course at St. Andrews should never actually be part of any ranking list. It belongs in a category by itself. It is the benchmark by which every course should be measured: does course X do anything as well as The Old Course does? And the answer is almost always “no.” The Old Course does the important things in golf better than anywhere else.

Look at the principles behind the design of Australia’s best course, Royal Melbourne. The same is true of Augusta National. Every principle which every great course architect has ever talked about has its genesis here. It is infinite fun.

Okay, I will acknowledge that it is perhaps not the best venue for an Open. The double greens and shared fairways mean play can be criminally slow, but you have to love the fact that it breaks every modern rule of design. I mean, if you came up with an 18-hole course that included seven double-greens, you would get run out of town. Or locked up.

And yet it is perfect. Look at the opening hole. No one misses the fairway. Everyone is happy. And the second shot involves just enough challenge to be interesting. Then it gets more serious. And wonderful. Picking no.1 on this list was not difficult. 🏌️





25

REASONS TO LOVE THE 2025 OPEN

Golf's oldest – and purest – major is a fan favourite in this part of the world. The Aussies' tremendous record at the prestigious event is just one of the many reasons we love The Open Championship, but how about a few more?

WORDS BY **CALLUM HILL**

1

TRADITION

Every time The Open rolls around, it feels different to the other three majors. It is the oldest and harbours an abundance of tradition dating back to the late 19th Century. We will cover more specifics throughout this feature, but it's the intricacies – such as the single-tee start (also seen at The Masters), the famous Silver Medal for the low amateur, the pot bunkers and the exclusive use of links courses – which make The Open unique. ►



4

2

THE ROTA

As you likely read in regular columnist Geoff Ogilvy's opinion piece earlier in this issue, the Open Rota is a unique aspect of the Championship (he ranked them from 10 to 1). What we love about the Rota is that, as fans, you're always looking forward to what course is next. You can't necessarily say the same about the other majors, which change venues each year and could be any one of hundreds of layouts. The embedded history of each Open course – and the small window in which we get to see the best in the world take on links golf – only heightens the excitement.

3

LINKS GOLF

As established, we don't see the best players take on links golf nearly enough, but perhaps that's what makes it so enjoyable. Look at what happened to Bryson DeChambeau at The Open last year. He came in as the reigning U.S Open champion and arguably the most in-form

player in the world at the time – and ejected himself from the tournament at Royal Troon. You have to play the course as it comes, be prepared to keep the ball close to the ground and, our favourite part, you will be rewarded for creativity if you do.

4

BUNKERS

More specifically, pot bunkers. How good are they? A genuine one-shot penalty – and there's always at least one horror show of someone having a complete meltdown in the sand. Love to see it.

5

PAST CHAMPIONS

All four of the men's major championships honour their past winners differently, but all do it well. The Open's past champions are revered for their adaptability, creativity and ability to handle the uniquely challenging test which only links golf offers. Past winners are invited back until they turn 60, and it's always great to see them return.

6

THE WEATHER

The weather at The Open is part of the show. Sunshine, wind, rain and the cold can all barrel through in a single round, forcing players to adapt, rethink and stay patient. It creates chaos and possibility; leads disappear in squalls, charges build on a clearing breeze. The conditions are raw, unpredictable and utterly tied to the Championship's DNA, turning every Open into something authentic, brutal and gripping to watch.

7

RORY'S HOMECOMING

There's genuine history here – from setting course records as a teenager to carrying the hopes of a golf-mad country. He knows the course's nuances and the unpredictable coastal wind better than most. The crowd will be overwhelmingly behind him, but the pressure is real – as we saw in 2019, when he missed the cut. It means so much to him, as he's been vocal about: The Masters, and an Open at Portrush. Seems a fitting fairytale. ►



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8

THE FANS

They respect great golf, understand the challenge and value tradition. They're there for the golf, not the spectacle – and their presence adds authenticity and history to the Championship.

9

ROYAL PORTRUSH

The setting is dramatic, the golf is fierce and the whole experience captures what makes The Open truly special. It's a raw, rugged test of golf. The course demands precision, creativity and guts. Every hole plays differently each day, shaped by the power of the Atlantic and the unpredictability of Northern Irish weather.

10

HISTORY

It's golf's oldest major; a link to the game's roots. It's where some of golf's greatest names and moments have surfaced – where traditions run deep, from links courses to the Claret Jug.

11

DUELS

We've seen great fights down the stretch at Opens gone by. Whether it be Rory McIlroy failing to hold off a surging Cam Smith at St Andrews in 2022, or the great battle at Troon in 2016 between Phil Mickelson and Henrik Stenson. More often than not, blows are traded late in the tournament.

12

THE CLARET JUG

The symbol of golf's ultimate achievement. Passed hand to hand

since 1873, it carries the weight of history and legends. Winning the Jug means joining a line of greats who've conquered The Open's toughest tests.

13

CHAMPION GOLFER OF THE YEAR

Whoever wins the Claret Jug is labelled the "Champion Golfer of the Year" – a great title to carry for the next 12 months.

14

BALL FLIGHTS

Whether it's a low, piercing drive battling the wind or a high, floating shot using the breeze to its advantage, every ball flight tells a story of skill and strategy. It's a masterclass in creativity and control, reminding us The Open isn't about power, but about thinking your way around a course.

15

MOMENTS

Take Cam Smith's famous putt at St Andrews – where nerves met precision on the Road Hole, leading to a hard-earned and historic victory at the Home of Golf. Or Adam Scott's heartbreaking collapse in 2012 at Royal Lytham and St Annes – a reminder that even the best can be undone by golf's cruel twists. These moments keep us hooked,

proving The Open is a stage where absolutely anything at all can happen.

16

BURNS AND GORSE

These natural features give the course character; they carve the landscape into something striking – blending raw beauty with obstacle. They remind us that The Open isn't about manicured perfection, rather embracing nature's canvas.

17

RISK VS REWARD

Strategy meets bravery. The resulting tension creates unforgettable moments – where a bold shot can vault a player up the leaderboard or see them punished by the unforgiving links.

18

OPEN QUALIFYING

From seasoned pros to hopeful amateurs – a shot at the big stage. The stakes are high and the stories that emerge are underdog tales. It's a reminder that The Open isn't just about the best going at it; it's also about grit, determination and earning your place the hard way if you have to.

19

REMEMBERING 2019

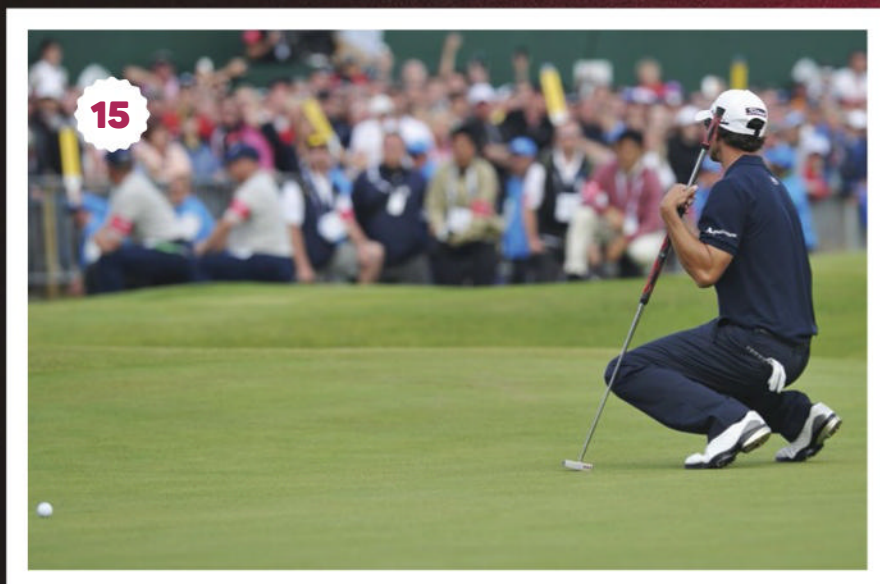
Shane Lowry's calm, steady play over Royal Portrush reminded us ▶



12



6



resilience beats flair more often than not. That win wasn't just a trophy; it was a genuine moment for Irish golf: honest and heartfelt. It showed that the most memorable victories often come from quiet determination, not the loudest hype.

20

PURITY

The focus stays where it belongs – on the golf and the tradition. It feels authentic, timeless and refreshingly genuine in a world full of over-the-top sports spectacles.

21

RUGGED BEAUTY

That rough, earthy canvas – dry fescue, windswept dunes, sunbaked fairways – shows golf in its purest form. These aren't polished, manicured courses; they're wild, natural grounds shaped by wind, rain and time. It's the authentic soul of seaside golf laid bare.

22

PETER THOMSON'S RECORD

Five Claret Jugs. Our greatest men's major champion.

23

THE AMATEURS

Celebrating pure talent and the spirit of the game – where anyone can step up and test themselves on one of the sport's biggest stages if they earn it. That mix of experience and fresh ambition enriches the whole event.

24

PGA TOUR OF AUSTRALASIA'S OOM WINNER PLAYS

We love that the PGA Tour of Australasia's Order of Merit winner gets into The Open – it keeps the door open for local talent and rising stars from Down Under. It's a nod to the global nature of golf, rewarding hard work on home soil with a shot at the biggest stage.

25

ALL-NIGHTERS

There's something electric about staying up through the early hours, tuning in as the world's best battle the tough links under unpredictable conditions. A few coffees, combating tired eyes at work the next day, all worth it to witness the next Champion Golfer of the Year with your own eyes. ●



THE OPEN

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8 MOLINARI ★

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6 ROSE

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6 McILROY

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6 KISNER

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5 WOODS

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5 PEPPERELL

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5 CHAPPELL

279



PLAYER

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ROYAL PORTRUSH

ROARS AGAIN

The Open returns to Royal Portrush, where Shane Lowry's stirring 2019 win still echoes. As this year's contenders prepare, a rich blend of history, heart and hard links golf awaits them all.

WORDS BY GARRETT JOHNSTON PHOTOGRAPHY BY GETTY IMAGES

The Open Championship returns to Royal Portrush, where Ireland's Shane Lowry captured an emotional win in 2019 on as big a stage as he could've asked for. Lowry put his arms out, fully extended in jubilation, responding to the challenge of his final approach on the 18th fairway and the crowd's electric energy as they celebrated their own champion.

Who will have their big moment at Portrush

this time around?

There are many contenders in good form, including some others who played the course well back in 2019. Of course, our Aussies will have a strong crop of players we'd expect to be in the hunt come Sunday afternoon.

But before we dig into the players' chances, it's worth understanding the significance of The Open returning to Portrush. The Open Championship has been staged outside of England and Scotland just twice in its 152 ►





LEFT TO RIGHT: THE 8TH, 5TH, 6TH AND 10TH GREENS ON THE DUNLUCE LINKS AT ROYAL PORTRUSH.

previous editions – in 1951 at Royal Portrush and 2019 at the same venue.

For Northern Ireland and Portrush product Graeme McDowell, who at time of print was desperately trying to earn his way into the field via Open qualifying, having The Open come to this small town along the country's northeast coast is a massive point of pride.

"The 2019 tournament was a celebration, but this year's going to be extremely special, mostly because of what Rory achieved at the Masters. I think it's going to really be a party atmosphere and a lot of fun," McDowell said. "I need to be there."

As for that crop of contenders, let's start with some of the Aussie favourites. The Open champ in 2022, Cameron Smith loves the layout of the course and always prefers firm and tasty conditions like he was accustomed to growing up. In 2019, he tied for 20th place and this year he's looking forward to going back for another crack.

"It's actually quite different from the others in the Open rota. I would call it a little bit more American in the way that it plays," Smith told *Golf Australia* magazine. "There are a number

“
IT'S ACTUALLY QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS IN THE OPEN ROTA. I WOULD CALL IT A LITTLE BIT MORE AMERICAN IN THE WAY THAT IT PLAYS.
”

– CAM SMITH

of elevated greens that you fire into from the fairway. It's still very links-like. You get a lot of low shots that are very up and down, which is very weird for links golf.

"Up and down into the green," he emphasised. "You get a lot of shots where you're definitely adding a club just for the uphill or downhill approach into the green. You don't have that as much at many of the other Open Championship courses. It's just very different. A cool golf course that has so many varieties of challenges to it."

Whereas Smith has experience to lean on heading into Portrush this year, Min Woo Lee has yet to play the course. Lee has played

in four Open Championships in his career, with his best finish a tie for 21st in 2022 at St. Andrews.

"I really like links golf," Lee said. "It's a fun test and gives you a lot of options on how to play your shots around the greens, which makes it more enjoyable."

Adam Scott will play in his 97th consecutive major championship at Portrush. His tie for 10th in the 2024 Open Championship at Royal Troon was his first top-10 result in a major in five years. Scott has always been a strong links player, and his close call in the 2012 Open Championship – when he finished runner-up to Ernie Els – is ►

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NORTHERN IRELAND'S MASTERS CHAMPION RETURNS TO NORTHERN IRELAND FOR THE OPEN. A SIMPLE BUT POWERFUL NARRATIVE.

no aberration. The Adelaide-born stalwart boasts 11 career top-25s in the game's oldest championship, though he missed the cut at Portrush in 2019.

Jason Day is another veteran Aussie who's found a lot of consistency at The Open over the years. Day has enjoyed five top-25s in 12 Open starts, including in 2023 when he finished tied for second with three others behind winner Brian Harman. Day will certainly look to improve on a missed cut from 2019 at Portrush.

Marc Leishman hasn't played in The Open since 2022 at the Old Course at St. Andrews, and he's thrilled to be back on the big stage playing one of his favourite styles of golf.

"I'm just expecting another great week of links golf, having to manage your misses," Leishman said. "Obviously, if you miss it in the wrong spot, you can't just plop it over a bunker and stop it easily. I think it's good to have to be able to really manage where you're hitting your approach shots. If you don't hit your best shot, you need to know the areas where it's going to be okay. I know you have to do that on the Sandbelt in Melbourne, when it's firm."

Does he have a sense of what to expect at Royal Portrush?

"I hope it's really firm at Portrush this year, but if it's not, then we get what we get," Leishman said. "I think the key will be to have a good attitude and mindset for each day, regardless of the weather dictating how the course will play."

The 41-year-old is expecting a good amount of wind to navigate during the week of The Open, and that sits just fine with the Victorian. "When it's windy, you've got to hit it in the middle of the face. If you do that, then the wind won't affect the ball as much, so that's a key there as well," Leishman said.

Last year at Royal Troon, American star Xander Schauffele got the job done on Sunday for his second major title, as Justin Rose and Billy Horschel made valiant charges.

"It was extremely validating last year to win; it was a dream come true," Schauffele ►



An aerial photograph of a golf course green and bunker. The green is a vibrant green, and the bunker is a light tan color. The green is surrounded by a dense line of trees and shrubs. In the background, there is a sandy beach and the ocean with waves breaking. The text is overlaid on the image, with blue quotation marks at the top and bottom of the quote.

“
MARC LEISHMAN HASN'T PLAYED IN THE OPEN SINCE 2022 AT THE
OLD COURSE AT ST. ANDREWS, AND HE'S THRILLED TO BE BACK ON
THE BIG STAGE PLAYING ONE OF HIS FAVOURITE STYLES OF GOLF.
”

THE APPROACH TO THE
GREEN ON THE 375-YARD
PAR-4 FIFTH "WHITE ROCKS".



IRISHMAN SHANE LOWRY'S
BEAUTIFUL MOMENT AT
PORTRUSH BACK IN 2019.



TONY FINAU FINISHED THIRD IN THE 2019 OPEN AT PORTRUSH.

“
IT'S ONE OF MY FAVOURITE LINKS COURSES IN THE WORLD.
IT'S NOT JUST BECAUSE I HAD SUCCESS THERE IN 2019. THE
AREA IS AMAZING. THE TEE SHOTS AND THE SETTING OUT
THERE ARE GORGEOUS.

”
- TONY FINAU

said. “That walk up 18 with that iconic leaderboard and the standing ovation was amazing. It's a different feeling that comes along with winning The Open Championship. That title of ‘Champion Golfer of the Year’ for this past year has felt amazing.”

Though Schauffele admits it's been quite a while since he last played at Portrush, he knows that playing links golf always puts a smile on his face. “All Open Championships have their own flair, I would say. The fans are awesome and the courses are always fun,” Schauffele said. “Me being a west coast kid, living in the States, I have such an appreciation of playing golf over there. It's something I always look forward to doing.”

Russell Henley finished fifth in last year's Open at Troon. The 36-year-old American has yet to play at Portrush, but he feels his game is translating well to links golf of late.

“I like that in links golf you have to hit it really straight. Very tough conditions. Anytime those two things are the premiums, as they are at Portrush, I feel like I can have an advantage,” Henley said. “I think recently I've learned to play links golf a little bit better. Maybe just having a better attitude on how to be creative when approaching those greens.”

Sepp Straka takes a positive outlook toward playing links golf at The Open Championship. He finished in an impressive tie for second in 2023 at Liverpool, so it makes sense he has an upbeat attitude

toward his game overseas.

“It's so much fun to play over there. You definitely need to use shots that we don't play on the PGA Tour,” Straka said. “Around the greens, the turf is so different. It gets very dry and thus it's hard to hit a high, soft one, so a lot of times you will hit bump-and-runs from 70 yards or a 40-yard putt that seems wild to try under conditions we're used to.”

The Austrian has never been to Ireland or Northern Ireland, so he can't wait to be a part of this year's Open.

Tony Finau finished third in the 2019 Open at Portrush, which is still tied for his best finish in a major championship. The American says he brought his wife Alayna over that week and got to explore the beautiful sights along Northern Ireland's northeast coast.

“It's one of my favourite links courses in the world. It's not just because I had success there in 2019. The area is amazing. The tee shots and the setting out there are gorgeous,” Finau said. “I love the test of the course and how you have to be dialled in with your irons to hold those greens and avoid the bunkers. It's one of the great links tests in golf.”

Tom McKibbin grew up in Northern Ireland and estimates he's played the course 50 times. He's most keen to see what players can do with their longer clubs to succeed there.

“You definitely need to drive the ball well there. That's the most important thing. Approach play is important because there are a few greens that are raised and have quite big runoffs and fall-offs, and it's hard to get up and down from there,” McKibbin said. “The par-3s are pretty strong as well. Weather is another big factor, and can make the course play even harder.”

CHASING GLORY

by the sea

From humble beginnings at Fulford to million-dollar paydays on golf's grandest links, the Women's Open has come of age. This year, it heads to Royal Porthcawl, promising high drama, tough weather, and perhaps history for Australia's finest.

WORDS BY JOHN HUGGAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY GETTY IMAGES

Charley Hull, veteran of seven Solheim Cup matches, multiple winner on the Ladies European Tour, the LPGA Tour and three times a runner-up in women's major championships, reckons this year's AIG Women's Open at Royal Porthcawl will be "the biggest-ever women's sporting event in Wales".

Which is surely true, even if some clarification is required. No, Wales isn't the biggest nation on Earth (population just over 3,000,000; area just short of 21,000 square kilometres). But the championship, recognised as a major since 2001, certainly has come a long way from its relatively humble beginnings almost half-a-century ago.

The year was 1976. The venue was the Fulford Golf Club near York in northern England. Professionals were allowed to play ►



AIG WOMEN'S
OPEN



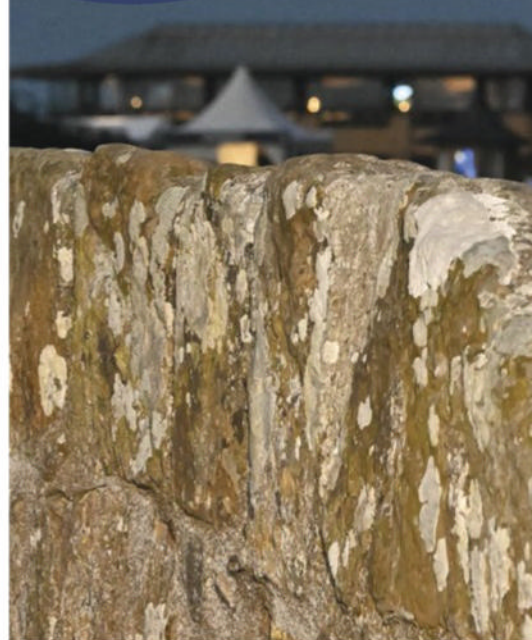
SUPERSTAR CHARLEY HULL IS EXPECTING THIS YEAR'S WOMEN'S OPEN AT ROYAL PORTHCAWL GC TO BE THE BIGGEST YET.



JENNY LEE-SMITH WON THE VERY FIRST WOMEN'S OPEN AT FULFORD GC IN 1976.

“
AT THE FIRST-EVER EVENT
IN 1976 AT FULFORD GOLF
CLUB NEAR YORK IN NORTHERN
ENGLAND, PROFESSIONALS WERE
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PRIZE FUND OF £500.

”



LAURA DAVIES, AN OPEN WINNER BACK IN 1986, PRAISES THE SHIFT TO TRUE LINKS VENUES FOR THE EVENT.

for the first time and five competed for a prize fund of £500. As it turned out, only one player, eventual champion Jenny Lee Smith (an amateur), broke 300 for the four rounds; the professionals first-place cheque of £210 going to Vivien Saunders, who tied for fourth. Which is more than a little ironic. Saunders, along with fellow pro Gwen Brandom, had actually put up £200 of their own money to boost the still-meagre purse.

“It was early September,” remembers Lee Smith, who after turning pro went on to top the Order of Merit on the fledgling WPGA Tour in 1981 and 1982. “The weather was decent and Fulford was my sort of course. I was never long off the tee, but I was always pretty straight. There were no leaderboards. I thought I needed a birdie on the last, a par-5, to win when a par would have been enough. But I did make four anyway and won by two. No one really knew what was going on.”

All of which is millions of metaphorical miles away from what the championship is today. Last year at St. Andrews, Lydia Ko picked up \$1,350,000 from a total prize fund of \$9m. Thousands turned up to watch the



LYDIA KO LIFTED THE TROPHY AT ST. ANDREWS LAST YEAR.

best female golfers on the planet play the most famous golf course in the world. And yes, more than one or two leaderboards dotted the premises.

None of the above happened overnight, though. The steady advance of what has been, since 2001, one of five major championships in the women's game, is ultimately spectacular. Three years after Lee Smith's low-key victory, the prize money was up to £10,000. Three years on again and the event was being played at Royal Birkdale, a long-established venue for the men's Open Championship. Seven years – 1990 to 1996 – at the prestigious Woburn club north of London followed before the elevation to Grand Slam level occurred.

Since 2002, the Women's Open (under a variety of sponsorships) has been played at Turnberry, Royal Lytham & St. Annes, Birkdale, the Old Course, Carnoustie, Royal Liverpool (Hoylake) and Muirfield. All are men's Open venues. Perhaps just as importantly, the championship has been an official stop on the LPGA Tour, thereby guaranteeing the presence of many if not all of the game's leading practitioners.

"Nothing against Woburn, but going to the links courses was a big step up for the Open," says former world no. 1, Laura Davies, whose sole Women's Open win came along in 1986, one year before her seminal victory in the U.S Women's Open. "We still go to non-links, but as soon as the R&A started taking the event to the seaside, we were looked at more like the men. Royal Porthcawl this year will be terrific, as long as the weather is half-decent and not too windy. You need big galleries to make anything a big deal and a big tournament. So the more our Open can look and feel like the men's Open, the better it will be."

It hasn't hurt either that many of golf's elite female stars have added their names to an increasingly impressive list of winners. As well as Ko, Karrie Webb, Lydia Vu, Anna Nordqvist, Georgia Hall, Aria Jutanugarn, Inbee Park, Stacy Lewis, Jiyai Shin, Yani Tseng and Lorena Ochoa have all finished first in what might be termed "the major years".

Still, amidst that talented array, one victory and story stands out. In 2009, only 11 weeks after giving birth to her second daughter, Sophie, Scotland's Catriona Matthew raised

the profile of the event – and brought it to the attention of an audience outside golf's traditional boundaries – both at home and abroad when she won at Lytham.

"I first played in the Women's Open as an amateur at Woburn on the Duke's course in 1992 or 1993," says Matthew. "My mum pulled my trolley. I made the cut, which was a big deal then; at least for me. There weren't that many high-profile women's events at that time, so it was a great thrill to play against the top pros. I didn't know that much about them back then."

"It's amazing how the event has evolved, with major status and an elevation of the venues the biggest factors in the rise of the event," Matthew confirms. "The R&A taking over [in 2017] was huge, too. Moving to Open rotation courses was a boost, as it attracted so many of the overseas players. It was just more prestigious than it had been before and gave the event a credibility it had lacked, certainly before it became a major. Things at the Women's Open now look more and more like the men's version. Again, that only enhances the event. The facilities and the infrastructure seem to grow and improve every year. Plus, ►



KARRIE WEBB REMAINS AUSTRALIA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL OPEN CHAMPION ... BY A LONG WAY.

there is so much women's golf on television now, that the public are more familiar with the names and personalities."

Ah, but amidst the rise and rise of this now ultra-prestigious event, one thing is all but missing – Australian triumphs. Although Karrie Webb (twice), Karen Lunn and Corinne Dinah all won pre-major versions of the championship, only Webb has added her 2002 victory to her tally of Grand Slam titles. It's an oddity, one which has recently been underlined by the various levels of frustration felt by Australia's two leading players, Hannah Green and Minjee Lee in the Women's Open.

In 11 appearances so far, Lee has totted up as many five top-10 finishes and three top-fives in succession between 2020 and 2022. Last year at St. Andrews, however, she missed the halfway cut. As for Green, her seven starts have strangely produced only a best finish of T-16 in 2019 at Woburn. In each of the last two years, she has missed the halfway cut. Clearly, the records of both Aussies do not gel with the high level of play both are capable of producing.

So what's going on?

"I get asked about this a lot," says Green, Australia's highest-ranked player and a major champion. "I really enjoy links golf because it is such a challenge, but my best performances

in the Open have come at Woburn, which is far from a links. So I have a love-hate relationship with the event. Last year, for example, I got the wrong side of the draw. That wasn't the only reason I played poorly; I definitely need to work on a lower ball-flight than I had last year.

"Having said that, I do embrace all that links golf is and 'feel' the shots more than most other players," Green continues. "Maybe I 'over-play' that aspect of the game, I'm not sure. It's an odd one, though. I have to think most Australians grow up playing the sort of game that has a fair bit in common with links golf. Certainly more than those who grow up in Asia or the States. So I am surprised that none of us have won the Open since Webby. All I can say is that I hope to improve my own record at Porthcawl this year."

As for the character of the event, Green is one who recognises that, despite its relatively short history compared with the men's version, "the Open" name carries with it a cache that goes beyond almost any other tournament.

"Everything that the R&A does for us off the golf course is a factor in the stature of the championship," says the Western Australian. "It is by far the best of the majors in the way we get looked after. I think if you asked most Australians, this would be the major we most

HANNAH GREEN IS LOOKING TO IMPROVE HER LINKS FORM AT ROYAL PORTHCAWL.





CATRIONA MATTHEW WON THE OPEN IN 2009, JUST MONTHS AFTER HER DAUGHTER'S BIRTH.

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”

want to win. It is certainly the best food we eat all year. So they have raised the bar for the other majors, especially in the quality of the courses we've been to in the last few years. Going to the courses on the men's rotation was a big boost for our game. It's just a special week.”

There have, of course, been other special weeks at Porthcawl over the years, many boasting a strong Australian flavour. The (British) Amateur Championship has been an occasional visitor since its first time in 1951. Five-time Open champion Peter Thomson won the Dunlop Masters at Porthcawl in 1961. Two-time major winner Sandy Lyle claimed the Coral Welsh Classic in 1980. Greg Norman was runner-up to Gordon Brand junior in the same event two years later.

Amidst such famous names, however, the 2023 Senior Open Championship stands out, if only because of the horrific weather which dominated the final day. In the end, Germany's Alex Cejka defeated three-time major champion Padraig Harrington in a play-off after the pair tied on 289, five-over par. As a measure of how difficult the conditions became during that final round, eight-time European no. 1 Colin Montgomerie shot 88. Former USPGA champion Rich Beem needed 84 shots to get round. And as many as 26 of the 70-strong field failed to break 80.

“Porthcawl can be brutal in a wind,” says Harrington. “It was miserable back in 2023; that last round a long day in really bad conditions. But it didn't rain constantly. Conditions will play a big part in the Women's Open. It can vary hugely. So it's a true links. I remember the first hole being an iron off the tee, then a 9-iron to the green one day. Then on another we couldn't reach in two shots.”

Still, for all that so many of the game's leading professionals have visited and enjoyed Royal Porthcawl, it is for an amateur event, the 1995 Walker Cup, that the course is perhaps most famous. It was there, three decades ago, that Tiger Woods played for the

United States against the team from Great Britain and Ireland. It wasn't the happiest week of Woods' amateur career, either. In a losing cause, the future 15-time major champion picked up only two points from his four matches.

“That was my first sighting of Woods,” says Harrington, a member of the GBI squad for a third time that year. “I had no idea who he was until I got there. Gary Wolstenholme beating Tiger one-up the first day was important for the team. I was there when Tiger lost his ball on his approach shot to the 18th. To this day, no one knows where it went. I'm not certain, but I think Gary shot 91 and Tiger 89.”

Given all of the above then, what can the leading ladies expect from Porthcawl, assuming conditions are what might be termed “normal”?

“The toughest part of Porthcawl is the doglegs off the tee,” maintains Harrington. “Some of them go against the slope of the fairways and against the wind. Most famous for that are the early holes by the sea. The out-of-bounds on the left is well in play on all of them. I know that to my cost. So good driving is a must to set up low scores. Great drives break the back of the course. But you need to shape them both ways to really take advantage. If you can't do that, you have to ►



THEY'RE HIDDEN HERE, BUT ROYAL PORTHCAWL'S SHORT 7TH HOLE (FOR MAJORS) BOASTS MANY SCARY BUNKERS.

play-up to the corners of the doglegs. Then you have long approach shots.

"So there are risks to be faced on the tees. Do you go for the big drive round the corner? Or do you kick the challenge down the fairway to the second shot? There are a few holes where a choice has to be made. The long way is safe, but the second shot is tough. Driving great and aggressively will make players look like great iron players. But it will be the drives that have set them up."

Another who is impressed with Royal Porthcawl is Grant Moir, the Executive Director - Governance at the R&A and the man charged with course set-up for the Women's Open.

"The course is beautifully situated and has a great variety of holes, especially the par-3s," says the Scot. "There is a great blend there, including a really short one. But they all offer something completely different."

Ah, but one hole in particular stands out.

Tucked away in the corner of the premises sits the 122-yard par-3 8th (normally the 7th for the members). Like its close cousin, the infamous Postage Stamp at Royal Troon, this is a place where a huge range of scores are possible. Avoid the six bunkers which guard the tiny green and a makeable birdie putt will almost certainly be the result. But miss the target and bad things can happen.

"Some of the bunkers will be in play every day, no matter where the hole is cut," says Moir. "The two furthest from the tee are left and right of the narrowest part of the green. When the flag is at the back, you have to take them on. It's almost like two different holes, depending on whether we have a front pin or a back pin. Invariably, it will play into or across the wind. Hardly ever downwind. So there are questions about ball-flight in the mix, even with such a short shot."

Indeed, how tricky the hole actually plays on a given day is largely down to the pin

positions. There isn't a lot of scope for change as far as yardage is concerned.

"The tee doesn't have a lot of variation when it comes to the length of the hole," admits Moir. "But it is wide and has even been extended a little to the left. We won't use the far right section, but centre or far-left will make a difference to the shot. We will be able to alter the angle of attack a bit, which will help us play to the strengths of certain hole locations. We are basically trying to get into the heads of the players. I'd like to see some wind. Without that, it should be straightforward for players of tour quality playing from a flat lie. They should be able to hit the green. We can spice that up with the hole location, with any wind an added bonus."

As far as a winning score is concerned, all of the above makes it clear that almost anything is possible, depending on the prevailing meteorological conditions. But none of that will bother Moir unduly.

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”
- LAURA DAVIES

“We never aim for a specific winning score,” he claims. “It never concerns us. We want the course to present a challenge in different ways. It could be difficult or great weather, which makes the course firm. Sometimes links play easier. We accept that, even if we aim to provide a real challenge. But we won’t adjust the set-up to achieve a certain score. We adjust to provide a certain challenge.”

The last word, however, must go to Davies. As ever, the 61-year-old Englishwoman - now a regular commentator on both the men’s and women’s games for Sky Sports - gets right to the point, emphasising the modern-day stature of the Women’s Open in her characteristically, slightly-tongue-in-cheek manner.

“All in all, our Open rota is incredibly good now. Once we started playing the very best courses, even the blokes started taking us seriously.”

And nowhere is that more true than at the Women’s Open. ●



JENNY LEE-SMITH WITH
2023 WOMEN'S OPEN
CHAMPION LILIA VU.

JENNY LEE SMITH: MY SECRET SISTER

The book is called *My Secret Sister*, a tale of two girls who were born together but grew up apart. Jenny Lee Smith, winner of what was then the Women’s British Open and is now the Women’s Open, is one of those. The other is her twin sister, Helen Edwards.

At first, the pair had no idea the other existed. Jenny, who is now 76, did not know she was adopted until she was a teenager and ultimately met her birth-mother only once, much later in life. But her childhood was happy. An only child, she enjoyed great support from her adopted parents, who helped her greatly with the early part of an amateur golf career which would see her play twice for Great Britain and Ireland in the Curtis Cup against the Americans. Later, she won 12 times as a professional on what was then the Women’s Tour in Europe and is now the Ladies European Tour. As she says herself, she was something of a trailblazer in the women’s game

in the United Kingdom.

Helen, on the other hand, was not so fortunate. Suffice to say, her adopted mother was neglectful of her needs; her adopted father physically violent towards her. She suffered years of abuse that is difficult to imagine.

Neither girl knew of the other’s existence until Jenny went looking for her real mother and found what she originally thought was her younger half-sister. Later, DNA tests would prove that they are actually full sisters. And later still, further tests showed that they are, in fact, sisters. At a stroke, Helen was suddenly almost two years older than she thought she was.

It is a story that provokes a range of emotion, from horror to ultimate happiness. And it is one that goes far beyond the life of a mere golfer. For more detail, listen to Jenny tell her touching story on an upcoming episode of this magazine’s *The Thing About Golf* podcast.



THIS MUCH I KNOW

I SULKED FOR TWO WEEKS AFTER THE '95 OPEN – THEN WENT AND WON THE PGA'

Steve Elkington

WORDS BY GARRETT JOHNSTON, MICHAEL CATLING PHOTOGRAPHY BY IMAGO, GETTY

Steve Elkington was a brilliant golfer, but he might just be an even better after-dinner speaker. Search his name on Google and there are as many stories about his nights out and escapades with fellow players as there are about his PGA Championship victory 30 years ago.

He tells one tale about John Daly giving rugby a go for the first time in a casino, just hours before he's due to play in a million-dollar event in South Africa. "Daly goes down into a three-point stance," recalls Elkington. "He comes out of his stance and these three guys absolutely poleaxed him into the wall behind. They knocked a couple of paintings down. I thought he might have had a concussion or broke his shoulder, that's how hard they hit him."

There are other stories he tells, such as the time Ernie Els started drinking beer out of his shoe in a St Andrews pub. Or the day he

beat Collin Montgomerie in the 1995 World Match Play at Wentworth after the Scot had consumed half a clubhouse made of custard.

The story, as The Elk recalls it, is that Wentworth had provided a buffet for the players that included a castle-style clubhouse made of set custard. The Aussie watched as Monty helped himself to half of the custard clubhouse, assuming he would share it out among the 25 people on his table, only to witness, in shock and awe, as the Scot devoured it all himself. "He wiped out the whole west side of the clubhouse, an entire custard wing, including maybe part of the locker room," the Aussie laughs.

Time spent in the 62-year-old's company usually results in some interesting and at times ridiculous revelations, but today he's in a more reflective frame of mind. He looks back on a PGA Tour career that spanned 25 years. He covers his rise up the rankings, his many near-misses, and that famous day, 30 years ►



LEFT: CELEBRATING HIS MAIDEN MAJOR CHAMPIONSHIP VICTORY WITH HIS FAMILY. **TOP RIGHT:** IF ELKINGTON WAS PART OF THE WORLD GOLF HALL OF FAME COMMITTEE, HE WOULD INDUCT MONTY. **BELOW RIGHT:** IN DISBELIEF AFTER HOLING A BIRDIE PUTT IN THE FIRST PLAY-OFF HOLE TO WIN THE 1995 PGA CHAMPIONSHIP.



ago, when he beat the Custard Kid to land his first and only Major. But first, he goes back to the beginning ...

Jack Nicklaus was always my guy. He still is. I once took a 20-hour train ride to see him play the Aussie Open. In 1976, I worked the range as a volunteer. Jack was there and he asked me, "How old are you?" and I said, "14." He asked, "Are you a good player? What's your handicap?" I said, "Scratch." He told me, "Keep on practising your game and you'll be in good shape." Not many people get to meet their heroes, but I obviously did and I told him that story at the 1996 PGA Championship dinner. I told him that story because he and the whole episode changed my life.

I stayed in Britain for two weeks after the 1995 Open Championship because I was so down. I missed out on the play-off by two strokes and I knew that I probably blew my best chance to win a major and that I may not ever get another chance. So I sulked for two weeks. My wife and I stayed at Gleneagles and I flew straight to Riviera (for the PGA Championship). And I won the very next major.

People never forget that I won a major.

That's the big advantage about winning one: people may forget what I won and where I won it, but they don't forget that I won.

The final-round 64 I shot at the Riviera to win the U.S PGA was an accumulation of disappointments and experience from all the other things which had happened to me up to that point. I was determined during that round to get the most out of it and not get myself worrying about what's going to happen at the end.

There was a lot in the mix to bake that cake. I had everything available as far as my swing was concerned. I really could hit the ball either way and I was hitting it so close to the hole and my game was in full flight. There was no way I could have scored better or played better. Every shot was exactly where I wanted to hit it. So there was absolutely no way I was going to let that round get away from me. It just wasn't going to happen. I was just so determined that day.

The Riviera owner had my scorecard made up for me in sterling silver and I have it in my bar at home in Houston.

Not many people know that after I won the PGA in '95, I actually wrote Colin Montgomerie (who lost to Elkington in the play-off) a letter. I sent it to him and I told him how well he'd played. He could quite easily have been where I was and I could have been where he was. He appreciated that.

A lot of people give Monty flack about being in the Hall of Fame because he never won a tournament in the US. I don't get to vote, but he was a Hall of Fame player when he played. I thought he was awesome for about 10 straight years there.

I really don't like thinking about the 2002 Open Championship at all. It still bothers me to this day. I had a good final round, a 66, and I hit every green from the fairway. It was one of the great rounds of all time, but no one knows much about it because nobody interviewed me afterwards. Obviously it got me into that four-man play-off (won by Ernie Els). But I didn't do any interviews afterwards. I went to the pub room and had a couple beers and then I snuck out the other way, which was great. Losing out in that one hurt, but then all those major losses sting equally.



JUMPING FOR JOY IN 2012, THREE YEARS BEFORE HIS PGA TOUR CAREER CAME TO AN END.

“
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”

Some majors you just don't get a feel for winning. I never really envisioned myself winning the Masters, to be honest with you. I felt like I hit the ball a little too low to ever win that one. I'm much more of a driver of the ball with driving shots. Some people said that was perfect, but it didn't seem that perfect for me. It's funny now. Augusta was pretty much a putting challenge until I really got the hang of what was going on there. I remember misreading putts for about 10 years in a row until I went around with a couple of those local caddies. I should really have done that from the outset.

The U.S Open is different. The thing about that tournament, more than any other, is if you get off to a bad start the first day, you never go on to win. If you're five over then you can't get back to even hardly ever. I never did anything good in the U.S Open at all. I remember getting my ass kicked big time on more than one occasion. I don't know why. It was so intimidating when you played them. I just didn't have an act for it. U.S Opens are speciality events. The PGA was more my event. I just felt more settled in it.

I was the guy that made Nick Price.

Remember that run of his in the early '90s, those back-to-back majors and that unbeatable spell he had? Well, that was down to me. I kick-started that run.

Not many people know this story, but in '92 we were in a play-off at the Texas Open. I was just a kid and I gave him the tournament when I missed a two-footer. That moment put him back on the winning track. I told him I was the one who put him back to No.1 because he was doing nothing until then. I'm saying that in a fun way. But, you know, look at what he

did – he won 13 times in the next 10 months or something like that.

It's funny that all these players on tour kind of subcontract their swing out to somebody, in the same way I would for a lawn guy or a pool guy. You've got to take ownership of your own swing. These swing coaches say "If you can do this, in six months you're going to get better." It's just not very good teaching. They just really don't know golf at that level. Anybody can be a coach today if you nominate yourself as being one. ●

THE ELK CV

A 10-time PGA Tour winner, Elkington spent more than 50 weeks inside the top 10 of the Official World Golf Ranking from 1995 to 1998. In 1995, he holed a 25ft birdie putt to beat Monty on the first play-off hole at Riviera and claim his maiden major. He finished '95 with the lowest PGA Tour scoring average.

A decade later, he came close to winning the PGA Championship for a second time, but finished in a tie for second behind Phil Mickelson.

After years battling various allergies, notably to grass, The Elk retired from professional golf in 2015, aged 52.

BUDGET

60

BEST REGIONAL COURSES YOU
CAN PLAY FOR \$75 OR LESS

COFFS HARBOUR GC

GOLF

One of the most commonly used phrases these days is “cost of living”.

For many of us, that requires making our golfing dollar stretch a lot further than it did even five years ago. Australia has plenty of affordable, fun and testing

golfing options, particularly if you know where to look. Last month we revealed the best-value metropolitan courses; now we spread our sights further afield to our regional courses where the green fee won't break the bank, and you will love the experience.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BRENDAN JAMES**

\$75 to \$61

CLUB CATALINA

Batemans Bay, NSW

Green fees: \$65 (Sun to Fri); \$75 (Sat)

The 27-hole layout at Club Catalina has some of the finest playing surfaces in regional New South Wales, with its bentgrass greens being a highlight.

Catalina's signature hole is the 140-metre par-3 14th. This is a pretty hole with a large pond flanking the entire right of the fairway and putting surface. A sliver of fringe grass separates the green from the water, so there is absolutely no room for error missing the green right or short. The green is not very deep so club selection, particularly when the wind blows, is the main priority here.

www.catalinacub.com.au

COFFS HARBOUR GC

Coffs Harbour, NSW

Green fees: \$70 (seven days)

Coffs Harbour is not only a lot of fun to play, but it allows you to follow in the footsteps of legendary past players.

The club hosted the North Coast Open for many years when it was predominantly a professional event. The likes of centenary Open Championship winner Kel Nagle, nine-time major champion Gary Player and the great Norman Von Nida were all winners of the event during the '50s and '60s.

Today, Coffs Harbour is a first class 27-hole layout in terms of design and presentation. PGA Tour winner Craig Parry has been working with the club on upgrades to aspects of the course in recent years.

www.coffsharbourgolfclub.com.au

PORT MACQUARIE GC

Port Macquarie, NSW

Green fee: \$70 (seven days)

Golf at Port Macquarie has been played on its present site near Lighthouse Beach since 1953 across holes based on a design by ex-pat Scotsman James Herd Scott.

The kikuyu fairways are densely lined by melaleucas, mixed in with some pines and gums, but are generally wide enough for most to navigate successfully. Perhaps with the exception of the sharp dogleg right par-4 8th hole, which is short enough to tempt better players into cutting the corner with their tee shot to leave a chip shot approach ... that is if they find their ball.

www.portmacquariegolf.com.au

TOOWOOMBA GC

Middle Ridge, Queensland

Green fee: \$70 (seven days)

The Toowoomba course impresses with its range of colours. Beautifully manicured rolling kikuyu fairways and Pennecross bentgrass greens lay between the wide variety of old growth trees including jacarandas and camphor laurels that add vibrant splashes to the layout.

The club has undertaken improvements to some green complexes in recent times, but one hole that has not changed remains one of the layout's most exciting. The downhill par-3 ►

might be short at 123 metres, but the lake hard up against the front edge of the putting surface and out-of-bounds through the green makes this little hole a potential beast.

www.toowoombagolfclub.com.au

PORTARLINGTON GC

Portarlington, Victoria

Green fee: \$60 (weekdays); \$70 (weekends)

Acclaimed designer Tony Cashmore oversaw the redesign of much of the Portarlington course during the early 2000s.

All of Cashmore's extensive changes certainly improved the quality of golf at Portarlington. But it is the subtle design tweaks carried out since 2020, overseen by consulting architects Neil Crafter and Paul Mogford, as well as the ever-improving presentation of the course that has seen Portarlington reach new heights and push for inclusion in national rankings.

Once you get into a round here, it's easy to see why some believe it has a Melbourne Sandbelt feel. Several bunkers would look right at home at Kingston Heath or Metro, while the green complexes and occasional stands of imposing pine trees are Sandbelt-esque.

www.port.golf

YARRAWONGA MULWALA GC RESORT

Mulwala, NSW

Green fee: \$66 (seven days)

Yarrawonga Mulwala hosts hundreds of visiting golfers every week. They come for the great facilities and the quality of its layouts – the Murray Course, the Lake Course and the nine-hole Executive course.

The Lakes and Murray Courses are mainstays of *Golf Australia's* Top-100 Public Access Courses ranking, but it is the Murray you will want to play more than once.

The Peter Thomson and Mike Wolveridge-designed Murray layout is one of the best courses along the big river, with its towering river gums dominating edges of every fairway, which remain wide enough to provide more than one strategic playing to line to each green.

www.yarragolf.com.au

FORSTER TUNCURRY GC

(TUNCURRY COURSE)

Tuncurry, NSW

Green fee: \$66 (seven days)

One of the great delights of the Tuncurry course is that it is literally hidden away in the bush just north of the mid-north coast township.

The Kel Nagle and Mike Cooper-designed layout was opened in 1984 and covers rolling sand dune terrain just a short pitch from Nine-Mile Beach. Each hole is isolated and has been carved from thick ti tree, gums, banksias and melaleucas.

Obviously inspired by the great courses of the Melbourne Sandbelt, Tuncurry impresses with tightly trimmed couch fairways leading to smooth bentgrass greens, crafted to blend so well with their rolling surrounds.

www.forstertuncurrygolf.com.au

RICH RIVER GC

Moama, NSW

Green fee: \$66 (seven days)

Rich River has long been one of the best ►



TOOWOOMBA GC



PORTARLINGTON GC



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FORSTER TUNCURRY GC (TUNCURRY COURSE)

value golf destinations to be found along the Murray River.

The club boasts two contrasting layouts – the West and East Courses – both of which have undergone design improvements in recent times.

The East Course has benefitted from significant remodelling of several holes, like the par-3 16th and par-4 17th, which now present a stronger, more memorable, test at the end of the round.

On the West Course, some of the best “new”

work can be found on the short par-4 12th, where the green was moved forward from its previously elevated position to now lie at the base of the hill alongside the lake inside the dogleg right fairway. It's a cracking hole which could prove too tempting for big hitters from the tee.

www.richriver.com.au

MURRAY DOWNS G&CC

Murray Downs, NSW

Green fee: \$65 (seven days)

Murray Downs has been consistently ranked the best course on the Murray River for more than three decades, an achievement which was rewarded with hosting duties for the 2024 Ford NSW Open won by Lucas Herbert.

Course design brothers Geoff and Ted Parslow created a magnificent layout with undulating Wintergreen couch fairways as well as large, true rolling Pennncross bentgrass greens. While some greens have subtle breaks, others feature more dramatic slopes to combat what may have been a seemingly easy journey to the green. Man-made lakes were included to help with irrigation and drainage, but they also add some difficulty to the journey, with the long par-3 5th and its 190-metre water carry from the tee a fine example.

www.murraydownsgolf.com.au

OCEAN SHORES CC

Ocean Shores, NSW

Green fee: \$65 (seven days)

Set in an area of natural flora with tidal lakes, rivers and the Koonyum mountain ranges as a backdrop, Ocean Shores offers spectacular scenery as well as fun and challenging golf.

Designed by Bruce Devlin and Robert von Hagge in the late 1960s, the layout, which is ranked in the nation's Top-100 Public Access Courses, features some of the biggest greens in New South Wales.

A course masterplan by architect Richard Chamberlain will see all 18 greens ultimately ►



RICH RIVER GC



MURRAY DOWNS G&CC

The Mount Gambier Golf Club

The Mount Gambier Golf Club at the edge of the city of Mount Gambier, is the regions Top-rated course on the spectacular Limestone Coast of SA. Open daily to the public and visitors with 18 holes of pristine fairways and greens to entice all levels of golfing.



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WARRNAMBOOL GC

converted to the smooth rolling Tifeagle grass, while many of the original bunkers will be upgraded.

www.oceanshorescc.com.au

WARRNAMBOOL GC

Warrnambool, Victoria

Green fee: \$65 (seven days)

This is the golfing home of one of Australia's finest golfers, Marc Leishman.

To look at the strengths of his game – long hitting, precise iron play with a variety of shots in all conditions – you need look no further than the holes covering the varied terrain surrounding the clubhouse to see how the foundations of his enviable swing were formed.

Most of the layout covers landscape formed by sand dunes, while the routing is predominantly lined by ti-tree. The front nine where the terrain is more dramatic will certainly impress and you won't forget the trio of interesting short par-4s – starting at the 4th hole – that wind between massive dunes and are known as Shipwreck Bend.

www.warrnamboolgolf.com.au



QUEENSCLIFF GC

QUEENSCLIFF GC

Queenscliff, Victoria

Green fee: \$55 (weekdays); \$65 (weekends)

The term “hidden gem” is sometimes overused to describe golf courses, but in the case of Queenscliff GC, it is more than apt.

The club sits on Department of Defence land on Swan Island. Before you are allowed to cross the one-kilometre bridge to the course, a security guard will take note of your car registration and ask for identification. The formalities are all worth it, though.

This is a links-sandbelt hybrid featuring gentle undulations perfect for golf. But above all, Queenscliff is a bloody fun course to play.

www.queenscliffgolfclub.com.au

COBRAM BAROOGA GC

Barooga, NSW

Green fee: \$55 (Summer/Autumn/Spring, Mon-Thu), \$65 (Fri-Sun); \$50 (Winter, Mon-Thu), \$60 (Fri-Sun)

Cobram Barooga is typical of the big Murray River golf clubs ... there's plenty of good golf and great facilities to enjoy.

There are 36 holes to play across the West and Old Courses, but it is the latter that is the star attraction. Originally created by Vern Morcom, but redesigned in recent times by Ben Davey of Contour Golf Design, the Old Course is ranked in the Top-100 Public Access Courses in the country and is the annual host of the Webex Players Series tournament on the Australasian PGA Tour. Its heavily tree-lined fairways, smallish greens and rolling landscape have combined to produce a testing course for all players.

www.cbpgc.com.au



COBRAM BAROOGA GC

SHELLY BEACH GC

Shelly Beach, NSW

Green fee: \$60 (weekdays); \$65 (weekends)

The views from this NSW Central Coast layout are worth the green fee alone.

Perched high above the beach of the same name, the views are accompanied by some



ALBANY GC

impressive holes that hug the oceanside terrain.

One such hole is the 361-metre par-4 5th, with its semi-blind tee shot to a fairway that plays along the back of the beach as it trundles toward the slightly elevated green. It is a delicious entree to the following hole – a short par-4 that continues the trek southward by the edge of the beach and usually into a breeze. www.shellybeachgolfclub.com.au

\$60 to \$51

ALBANY GC

Albany, Western Australia

Green fee: \$60 (seven days)

Albany is not only the oldest town in Western Australia; its golf club was one of the first formed in the state. From nine-hole beginnings in 1898, Albany did not become an 18-hole layout for more than 50 years and today is one of only a few links courses found outside Britain and Ireland with such a long history.

Thick woolly-bush and peppermint trees line most of the naturally undulating fairways, which run predominantly in a north-south direction parallel to Middleton Beach. It is not a hard course in sublime weather conditions, but it really bares its teeth when the wind whips in across King George Sound. www.albanygolfclub.com.au

BRIBIE ISLAND GC

Woorim, Queensland

Green fee: \$60 (seven days)

Bribie Island is one of three major sand islands

on the edge of Moreton Bay, so it shouldn't come as any surprise that the golf course of the same name has all the outstanding qualities of any layout built on sand.

The rolling terrain gives rise to some wonderful holes, while the deep sandy loam profile not only encourages beautiful grass growth (the couch fairways are terrific to hit off), it also drains exceptionally well, which is important in this part of the world. www.bribiegolf.com.au

CAPEL GC

Stratham, Western Australia

Green fee: \$60 (seven days)

Laid out on relatively flat terrain, Capel – like so many courses in the southwest of Western Australia – features fairways heavily lined with mature Tuart, Jarrah, Banksia and Peppermint trees.

Designed by Murray Dawson, Capel has nicely presented playing surfaces and is widely regarded as being one of the best layouts you will find in regional WA.

There are a few holes, however, which offer elevated views of the fairway in front, with the 154-metre par-3 12th being one of the standouts. The downhill one-shotter has bunkers left and right and is surrounded by trees, which can make judging the wind deceptive. www.capelgolfclub.org.au

PAMBULA MERIMBULA GC

Merimbula, NSW

Green fee: \$60 (18+ holes, seven days)

Overlooking the beautiful Merimbula Bay at its highest point, the challenging Pambula Merimbula 27-hole layout offers a good variety of tight driving holes, interesting dogleg fairways and huge, true-rolling greens.

Each nine has its own playing character, despite the rolling landscape being dominated by massive gum trees, which line most of the course's fairways.

One of Pambula Merimbula's most memorable is the 465-metre par-5 15th hole, which winds between tall timbers before snaking right and then left around a lake to reach the green. Long hitters can find the green in two hits if they are willing to hit over the water for their second shot. www.pmgcgolf.com.au

COROWA GC

Corowa, NSW

Green fee: \$60 (seven days)

Corowa Golf Club has been on its present site since the late 1920s, when it moved from a nine-hole layout to an 18-hole creation on the northern banks of the Murray River.

The club expanded to 27 holes in the late 1970s and as a result, there is a fabulous variety of old-fashioned-designed holes mixed in with more modern creations. However, six of the club's oldest holes are currently out of play, having been extensively damaged by flood waters a few years ago.

The East course (holes 1-18) remains in play and is widely regarded as having the lion's share of the most memorable holes on the property. www.corowagolfclub.com.au ►



PAMBULA MERIMBULA GC

LEONGATHA GC

Leongatha South, Victoria

Green fee: \$60 (seven days)

The highest nationally ranked course in Victoria's Gippsland is arguably the best-value 18-hole round of golf showcased among these pages.

The "must-play" Vern Morcom-designed course is laid out through natural bushland and is made up of a collection of unique holes, featuring wide couch fairways and subtle-breaking greens.

Lukas Michel, from the course design firm Clayton, DeVries & Pont, has been working with the club in recent years to replace all the greens with a new super bentgrass. There are also plans to enlarge and recontour several greens. www.leongathagolf.com.au

MARGARET RIVER GC

Margaret River, Western Australia

Green fee: \$60 (seven days)

Set on 65 hectares of beautiful natural bushland near the mouth of the Margaret River, the layout winds its way up and down the slopes of the coastal ridge. This gorgeous setting is complemented by an abundance of indigenous bush and trees.

Although not heavily bunkered, the course features several water hazards on the front nine holes, which is relatively flat and easy to walk. The more undulating back nine requires careful shot consideration and execution to negotiate the sloping fairways and large trees which line most holes.

www.margaretrivergolfclub.com.au

TURA BEACH CC

Tura Beach, NSW

Green fee: \$60 (seven days)

Designed by Peter Thomson and Mike Wolveridge, the journey at Tura Beach opens

with a trio of holes leading away from the clubhouse and down to the beach, where two of the layout's most memorable holes await.

The 4th hole is one of six par-5s at Tura Beach and is separated from the back of the beach by a thick wall of scrub that covers lightly grassed sandy rough. From the middle of the fairway, you can't see the ocean, but you can hear it and smell it, and the sandy lie you will find if you miss the fairway here leaves no doubt the beach is close by.

The lake bordering the right of the 4th hole really comes into play at the next – a tough 181-metre par-3 played across the edge of the hazard to a bunkerless green.

www.turabeachcountryclub.com.au

CLUB TOCUMWAL

Tocumwal, NSW

Green fee: \$60 (seven days)

Along the length of the Murray River, between

Albury and Mildura, there is one club which can be referred to as a "sleeper" when it comes to quality for your golfing dollar.

Tocumwal has a spread of 36 holes incorporating the Presidents and Captains Courses. Both offer different experiences, while the combination of old and new designed holes across the property creates a great deal of diversity from one nine to another.

The Presidents Course features the lion's share of older holes, with more heavily tree-lined fairways and marginally smaller greens, all of which places a greater premium on accuracy from tee-to-green.

www.clubtocumwal.com

BUNBURY GC

Australind, Western Australia

Green fee: \$60 (Sun to Fri)

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BRIBIE ISLAND GC

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Sail aboard the 6-star discovery yacht Scenic Eclipse II on a fully escorted golf cruise through New Zealand's South and North Islands in 2026. Play Queenstown's premier courses and the spectacular new Te Arai Links, all while enjoying the comfort of unpacking once. This all-inclusive voyage offers a seamless way to explore New Zealand's dramatic coastlines—paired with world-class golf and Scenic's signature luxury hospitality.



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LEONGATHA GC (PHOTO: HENRY PETERS)

Bunbury's fairways are heavily tree-lined and prove a real test for average golfers, as well as the elite players who tee up in the annual South West Open.

Bunbury's most renowned, and picturesque, hole is its shortest test – the 124-metre par-3 10th. The tee is perched about 40 metres above the level of the green and affords players, heading into the back nine, a spectacular view out to the estuary. Judging the wind here is crucial, as the green lies diagonally away from right-to-left with bunkers short and long of the putting surface. www.bunburygolfclub.com.au

MALENY GC

Maleny, Queensland

Green fee: \$55 (weekdays), \$60 (weekends) This year marks the 10th anniversary of the first nine holes of the Maleny course opening, a little over a year after construction began by a team of volunteers and local contractors. The second nine came into play in 2020.

Designed by renowned architect Graham Papworth, the par-68 layout opens with a treacherous-short par-3, which was the undoing of 2013 Masters Champion Adam Scott, who made a double bogey here en route to setting the course record of 62.

It's easy to see how Scott could have stumbled, as the 136-metre opener is played from an elevated tee over a deep gully to an angled green, which slopes markedly from right-to-left. The green is terraced into a hillside and a rock wall beneath the low side of the green creates a steep drop-off. Any ball

finishing at the base of the wall will leave an almost-impossible recovery shot.

www.malenygolfclub.com.au

GISBORNE GC

Gisborne, Victoria

Green fee: \$50 (weekdays), \$60 (weekends) Originally designed by Vern Morcom in 1946, Gisborne still features much of his work, despite some remodelling across the course in the past decade or so. Two aspects of a round which have remained a constant over the years are the impressive presentation of the playing surfaces and the wonderful view of the Macedon Ranges.

Gisborne boasts a terrific set of par-3s, with the best them being the 145-metre 16th hole, where you hit over a lake in front of the tee to a receptive green protected by three bunkers right and a large trap to the left.

Construction has begun on a new clubhouse after the century-old clubhouse was destroyed by fire in April last year. www.gisbornegolf.com.au

MOSS VALE GC

Moss Vale, NSW

Green fee: \$50 (weekdays), \$60 (weekends) Located in the heart of the picturesque Southern Highlands, Moss Vale Golf Club has developed a reputation for fine playing surfaces and one of the prettiest settings for golf in regional New South Wales.

Originally designed by Carnegie Clark in 1908, Moss Vale's big test is being able to keep your ball in play between the endless rows

of mature pines, elms, eucalypts and claret ash trees lining every fairway. There is also a creek snaking through the course, which must be crossed a dozen times during a round.

From the 1st tee, the course appears hilly, with several holes sweeping down from a nearby hill to greens near the clubhouse, but much of the course is gently undulating and makes for a pleasant walk in between shots. www.mossvalegolfclub.com.au

SECRET HARBOUR GL

Secret Harbour, Western Australia

Green fee: \$50 (weekdays), \$60 (weekends) Graham Marsh's design at Secret Harbour is first-class.

It features well-manicured rolling fairways, flanked by fescue grass rough, while strategically placed pot bunkers punctuate your journey from tee-to-green on each hole, all of which places a premium on good course management and accurate ball-striking.

Couple these facets of any round at Secret Harbour with the constant sea breezes and the golfing experience becomes a memorable one. www.secretsgolf.com.au

VICTOR HARBOR GC

Victor Harbor, South Australia

Green fee: \$45 (weekdays), \$60 (weekends) There are few better 1st tee views in Australian golf than what you will experience heading out for a round at Victor Harbor.

For a century now, every golfer who has teed it up here has been greeted by an uninterrupted view of Granite Island and

Encounter Bay off in the distance beyond the 1st green below.

This is not just a pretty hole, though. At 402 metres, this par-4 is heavily tree-lined on both sides of the fairway. While the hole plays shorter than the scorecard suggests, the breeze here is also a factor on your length and accuracy. www.victorharborgolf.com.au

ULVERSTONE GC

West Ulverstone, Tasmania

Green fee: \$40 (local players), \$60 (interstate players)

Northwestern Tasmania features vast tracts of wilderness, with some of the biggest and oldest eucalypts in the state. Venture too far off the fairway at Ulverstone and you might just find your ball stuck behind one of these ancient trees.

This picturesque par-72 course is a superb Al Howard design that lies across an undulating landscape and is renowned for its well-groomed playing surfaces.

If you like mixing a nature walk with a round of golf, this is the place for you, as Ulverstone is a wildlife haven. www.ulverstonegolfclub.com.au

TOWNSVILLE GC

Rosslea, Queensland

Green fee: \$35 (unlimited golf, Mon), \$60 (Tue-Sun)

Townsville is Queensland's oldest golf club,

having been established in 1893 and on its current site on the banks of the Ross River since 1924.

But this layout is far from having an old-world look about it, after all 18 holes were redeveloped to a masterplan conceived by World Golf Hall of Famer and North Queenslander Karrie Webb and acclaimed course designer Bob Harrison.

The course now features large, undulating greens, well-grassed couch fairways and spectacular century-old rain trees on many holes, the toughest of which might be the 178-metre par-3 18th that demands a long all-or-nothing water carry to the green that lies in front of the modern clubhouse. www.townsvillegolfclub.com.au

QUEANBEYAN GC

Queanbeyan East, NSW

Green fee: \$49 (weekdays), \$59 (weekends) Queanbeyan has evolved into a seriously good option to play for the golfer visiting the nation's capital, with the CBD just a 20-minute drive across the border.

Laid out on the eastern shore of the Queanbeyan River, major upgrades prior to successfully hosting the Women's NSW Open and a series of Golf NSW Regional events has raised the standard of presentation to fully complement the tight-driving design.

The closing three holes along the edge of the river make for some tense moments

heading back to the clubhouse. The toughest of the trio is the dogleg right par-4 18th, with the river left of the fairway and out-of-bounds to the right. It is not a hole where you can afford to be adventurous from the tee. Find the fairway and choose your club wisely to find the correct level of the tiered green. www.queanbeyangolf.com.au

BAY VIEWS GOLF COURSE

Rosebud, Victoria

Green fee: \$56 (seven days)

Situated on steep, sloping land, Bay Views rises above the surrounding residential area of Rosebud to provide golfers with views of Port Phillip Bay and the bay beaches all the way to Sorrento.

The acclaimed Vern Morcom created the original Mornington Peninsula layout in the 1950s and his routing across the dramatic terrain certainly extracted the best possible holes out of the landscape.

There are plenty of interesting holes across the property, but the opening hole is one you're unlikely to forget. Played against the backdrop of the bay in the distance, this downhill par-5 features fairway bunkers on the left of the wide fairway and several greenside sand traps. But the well-manicured Santa Ana couch fairway provides plenty of run to make this green reachable in two blows for many players, raising expectations of an early birdie. www.bayviewsgolf.com.au ►



MARGARET RIVER GC

YAMBA G&CC

Yamba, NSW

Green fee: \$55 (seven days)

Yamba is probably better known for its delicious prawns than its delightful golf course.

But the word is out on the golfers' grapevine about Yamba and for good reason. This is a terrific layout, with two loops of nine holes stretching out from the clubhouse and several holes lying within pitching wedge distance of nearby Pippi Beach.

Several holes of the back nine are cut through thick stands of melaleucas and patches of semi-tropical rainforest. The short par-3 12th, par-4 16th and long par-3 17th are simple designs and virtually isolated from the rest of the layout. This outstanding trio is certainly a highlight of the round.

www.yambagolf.com.au

GERRINGONG GC

Gerringong, NSW

Green fee: \$45 (weekdays); \$55 (weekends)

If you're looking to play a course offering million-dollar views accompanying every shot, enjoyable challenges and, most important of all, affordable green fees, Gerringong ticks all the boxes.

The course lies on undulating, natural terrain between two headlands and, at its lowest point, runs alongside the back of the scenic Walkers Beach.

Gerringong's star attraction is the 562-metre par-5 4th hole, where the tee is



perched high above the beach and the fairway doglegs left in an arc following the back of the beach. Thick scrub is all that separates the fairway from the sand, while three dams also come into play before you get to the beachside green. Birdies here are extremely rare.

www.gerringonggolf.com.au

TANUNDA PINES GC

Rowland Flat, South Australia

Green fee: \$45 (weekdays), \$55 (weekends)

For more than 85 years, golf has been played across the current site of Tanunda Pines. It

has only been in the past two decades where it has started to realise its potential as a fine golf course.

The course was purchased by a syndicate of some of Australia's best known local vignerons in 2003 and they immediately invested in improving the design and presentation.

In 2022, the course was sold again and the new owner, Balmoral Resort (Australia), has announced a long-term works program to further upgrade the layout.

In the meantime, there is plenty to like about Tanunda, particular across the back nine, with



BUNBURY GC

the downhill par-3 11th and the 460-metre par-5 15th being memorable standouts.
www.tanundapines.com.au

\$50 to \$46

BALLINA GC

Ballina, NSW

Green fee: \$50 (seven days)

Ballina Golf Club is evolving into a modern, challenging parkland layout, with course designer Craig Parry overseeing a staged masterplan, which will see some selected greens and bunkers rebuilt.

The course will remain 18 holes during stages of the rebuild, with spare holes coming into play.

One hole which won't be affected is one of its most memorable. The 314-metre 11th is a terrific short par-4, where your drive must be threaded into a narrow neck of fairway between gum trees left and two large bunkers right of the fairway. The ideal line into the green is from the left half of the fairway, as the green is set on a slight diagonal left-to-right. The Richmond River is a picturesque backdrop to the green that is guarded by five bunkers cut well into the edges of the putting surface.
www.ballinagolfclub.com.au

NAMBUCCA HEADS ISLAND GC

Nambucca Heads, NSW

Green fee: \$50 (seven days)

Locals simply refer to this unique golf course as

"The Island". The clue to its uniqueness is right there in the name, as it is the only course in Australia which occupies an entire island.

The par-69 course covers all of Stuart Island in the Nambucca River, upstream from where the river meets the sea. It is a picturesque layout, which is evident from the moment you step up on the 1st tee.

The 354-metre par-4 opener throws down the challenge at your first tee shot. Although the fairway is generously wide, the beautiful Nambucca River laps at the shore only a few metres from the left edge of the hole.

www.namgolf.com

BAIRNSDALE GC

Eagle Point, Victoria

Green fee: \$50 (seven days)

Bairnsdale is one of country Victoria's best courses and can be found adjacent to the tranquil Gippsland Lakes. High-quality playing surfaces combine with holes designed to ask questions of all players to create a memorable experience.

The two par-4s leading away from the clubhouse ease you into the round, before the first significant challenge presents on the 491-metre par-5 3rd hole. There is out-of-bounds well off to the right of the fairway, but of greater concern are the fairway bunkers – one right of the driving zone and another on the left of the popular lay-up area. Keep away from the sand and an early birdie beckons.

www.bairnsdalegolf.com.au

HORSHAM GC

Horsham, Victoria

Green fee: \$50 (seven days)

Widely regarded as one of Victoria's finest country courses, Horsham has many of the appealing attributes of a big city private course without it costing you an arm and a leg to play.

The course was devastated by the horrific Black Saturday bushfires nearly 16 years ago, but has since bounced back and once again is pushing for inclusion in nationally ranked course lists based on the quality of the design and its very good playing surfaces.

Horsham boasts a wonderful collection of par-4s, ranging in intensity from the drive and pitch birdie chances at the 1st and 18th, to the difficult dogleg left 17th, which requires two solid, accurate blows to entertain making a par within view of the clubhouse.

www.horshamgolfclub.com.au

KING ISLAND G&BC

King Island, Tasmania

Green fee: \$50 (18 holes, seven days)

King Island's original links course is one of Australia's best nine-hole courses.

Set amidst coastal dunes alongside the Southern Ocean, the links covers world-class seaside golfing land and offers million-dollar views, as well as a host of challenging and memorable holes.

There are few prettier or harder (when the wind is blowing) par-3s in this country than King Island's downhill 3rd, played against ►

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TOWNSVILLE GC

a backdrop of waves breaking onto rocks. Simply beautiful!

American golf writer, the late Steve DiMeglio, was impressed when he visited the layout a few years ago and wrote: "It's a bit rough on the edges, a tad scruffy here and there. Sort of like a 5 o'clock shadow. But it's a 5 o'clock shadow on Brad Pitt."

www.golfkingisland.com

RATHO FARM

Bothwell, Tasmania

Green fee: \$50 (seven days)

"Ratho" is the birthplace of Australian golf. The nation's oldest course dates to 1822 when Scot, Alexander Reid, played on Ratho with featheries and clubs brought from the home country.

Greg Ramsay's great-grandfather purchased Ratho in 1936. For more than 15 years, Ramsay has restored the entire property, including working with course designers Neil Crafter and Paul Mogford to return the course to its true origins.

It is as if time stood still here. Sheep graze across the fairways and tees, while fences keep them from venturing onto the square-shaped greens found on some holes.

www.rathofarm.com

MURWILLUMBAH GC

Murwillumbah, NSW

Green fee: \$45 (weekdays), \$50 (weekends)

It's not hard to be distracted by the panoramic bushland views when you play at Murwillumbah. Thousands of hectares of national park cover the Great Dividing Range

and Mt Warning to the west, with large tracts of sugarcane fields lying in between.

Mt Warning provides the distant backdrop to Murwillumbah's best par-3, the 138-metre 10th, where the slightly elevated green is perched atop a hill surrounded by bunkers and steep drop offs ready to turn mis-hit tee shots into bogies and double-bogies.

www.murwillumbahgolfclub.com.au

SANDY CREEK GC

Sandy Creek, South Australia

Green fee: \$40 (weekdays), \$50 (weekends)

Formerly known as Gawler Golf Club, Sandy Creek lies at the gateway into the Barossa Valley, which often provides a beautiful backdrop during a round here.

This isn't the longest course, at 6095 metres, but it seems to protect itself with undulating fairways that can throw out your distances and club selection. Toss in the gusting winds that sweep through the valley, and you're suddenly playing a very challenging golf course.

Sandy Creek has a stable of very good par-3s, with the diminutive downhill dropshot 13th hole being memorable among them. For a hole barely 100 metres long, playing even shorter from the elevated tee, the putting surface here is massive. Bunkers ring the green, so the best play is to the middle of the green and you might just get close.

www.sandycreekgolf.com.au

LANG LANG GC

Lang Lang, Victoria

Green fee: \$35 (weekdays); \$50 (weekends)

Lang Lang is another South Gippsland gem which flies a little under the radar of travelling golfers in search of quality.

Built on sandy terrain in 1963, the layout offers year-round playability, as well as hints of what you might find in the Melbourne Sandbelt.

Designed by former Australian Open champion George Naismith with club pro Bill Walker, Lang Lang is not a long excursion and, as a result, features some excellent short holes, like the risk-and-reward 298-metre par-4 3rd hole.

www.langlanggolfclub.com.au

CAIRNS GC

Woree, Queensland

Green fee: \$49 (seven days)

The Cairns Golf Club has been on its current site for 95 years, but it wasn't until the early 1990s that the course began to earn a reputation for its high quality.

This came on the back of a major redesign by Ross Watson, which significantly improved the layout, as well as enhancing the tropical landscape set against the backdrop of the Great Dividing Range.

An impressive feature of the Cairns layout is the quality of its par-3s, with the 2nd hole being the most challenging of them all. Water plays a starring role on the 151-metre one-shotter, with a lake lying between the tee and the front edge of the green, which is about 35 metres wide. There is a narrow "good miss" area near the right edge of the putting surface, but tee shots must fly over all or part of the lake, depending on the pin position. The club's



BAY VIEWS GOLF COURSE

signature pandanus palms form a typically tropical backdrop to a memorable hole. www.cairnsgolfclub.com.au

HAWKS NEST GC

Hawks Nest, NSW

Green fee: \$49 (seven days).

Carved from thick seaside bushland just a pitching wedge from the beach, the Hawks Nest course ebbs and flows across ideal sandy terrain for golf.

Originally created by Kel Nagle and Mike Cooper, the layout is deceptively tough from the back markers, while offering an enjoyable challenge to the high handicapper or novice from the other tees.

In recent times, course designer Craig Parry has been working with the club on the redesign of several holes to help the course fulfil its enormous potential, with an emphasis on encouraging a variety of shots and playing lines on each hole. www.hawksnestgolfclub.com.au

HERVEY BAY GC

Pialba, Queensland

Green fee: \$48 (seven days)

Golf has been played at Hervey Bay since the end of World War II and over the ensuing 80 years, this has evolved into one of the standout courses of the Fraser Coast region.

Designer Richard Chamberlain has overseen the remodelling of several greens in recent times, with the short dogleg left par-4 8th and the downhill par-4 16th seeing the most significant changes.

The downhill 377-metre par-4 11th hole remains Hervey Bay's most memorable hole. A wide fairway encourages you to really have a crack with your tee shot, and it is the approach where caution is required. A lake cuts into the fairway from the left, about 60 metres short of the green, and there are three bunkers surrounding the large pear-shaped green. It is a tough second shot, but you'll feel pleased with yourself if you have a birdie attempt here. www.hbgcc.com.au

DEVONPORT GC

Spreyton, Tasmania

Green fee: \$48 (seven days)

Devonport has been ranked among the best courses in Tasmania for decades.

Regarded as a stern but fair test, the Vern Morcom-designed course has regularly hosted the Tasmanian Open and Amateur Championships.

In recent times, the club invested in a new clubhouse, as well as bowling greens and croquet courts, which required a remodelling of the par-3 10th hole, which was undertaken by architect Graeme Grant.

The new hole plays shorter than the original, while covering the same terrain, and still has the tidal Mersey River as a backdrop to the hole. Grant created a new green complex, with a pear-shaped putting surface protected by three small pot-like bunkers and a more expansive sandy hazard. It's a gem. www.devonportcountryclub.com.au

\$45 and under

BATHURST GC

Bathurst, NSW

Green fee: \$45 (seven days)

Bathurst is the third-oldest golf club in NSW, dating back to 1894 (behind The Australian and Royal Sydney) and play has been on the current course for the past 91 years. Not surprisingly for a course of this vintage, the well-manicured fairways are densely lined by mature gum trees, which certainly assist the player who can consistently find the fairway.

This might explain the exceptional ball-striking skills of two of Bathurst's finest players – Peter O'Malley and Gavin Coles – who won club championships here before winning professional tournaments in Australia and abroad.

For decades, Bathurst has had a well-earned reputation for its consistently high level of presentation, with strip-cut couch fairways and neatly trimmed and smooth rolling bentgrass greens being the standard. www.bathurstgolf.com.au

LAKES ENTRANCE GC

Lakes Entrance, Victoria

Green fee: \$45 (seven days)

Lakes Entrance covers a beautiful sandy landscape, with a narrow band of scrub-covered high dunes all that separates it from the waters of Bass Strait.

The club moved to this site in 1958. The land was a combination of swamp and ►



GERRINGONG GC

undulating sand ridges covered with coastal banksias, wattle and ti-tree – the perfect canvas for designer Vern Morcom to lay out a course, much of which remains in play today, despite a Ted Parslow redesign in the 1990s.

The best hole is also Lakes Entrance's toughest. The 418-metre par-4 7th follows the direction of dunes to the right and doglegs left around a small lake that lies on the inside corner of the fairway. On final approach to

the green, the fairway narrows dramatically between the ti-tree and the locals have dubbed this part of the hole "The Khyber Pass" because it is tight and treacherous. www.lakesentrancegolf.com

MT GAMBIE GC

Mt Gambier, South Australia

Green fee: \$45 (seven days)

Mt Gambier is a testing course that is widely

regarded as being the best-conditioned layout on South Australia's Limestone Coast.

The course was completely rebuilt in 1977 under the design guidance of Brian and Murray Crafter. In more recent times, bunkers have been upgraded, Cypress pines removed and fairways converted to Santa Ana couch – all of which have improved the experience here.

There are plenty of good holes where the elevation changes from tee-to-green to either test your skills of club selection or shot making or both. Perhaps the most memorable of these is the 150-metre par-3 8th hole, where the tee is a lofty height above the peanut-shaped green, which is protected on both sides by bunkers.

www.mtgambiergc.com.au

SHEPPARTON GC

Shepparton, Victoria

Green fee: \$45 (seven days)

It was on the fairways and greens of "Shep" where the late, great Jarrod Lyle honed his game to take to the PGA Tour.

Designed by Sam Berriman, who created highly rated courses like Cranbourne and Horsham, the routing weaves across rolling terrain, with many doglegging holes simply following the lie of the land.

This has given rise to some really interesting holes, like the quartet of holes from the short par-4 6th through to the par-5 9th hole. The 6th is a definite highlight as you ►



BAIRNSDALE GC (PHOTO: HENRY PETERS)



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CAIRNS GC

face a blind tee shot, preferably into the right half of the fairway to catch the camber of the fairway and leave an unobscured view to the well-bunkered green.

www.sheppartongolfnet.au

TRENTHAM GC

Trentham, Victoria

Green fee: \$45 (seven days)

Trentham used to be considered a hidden gem. Not anymore. It's still a gem, but the word is out about just how good this small country layout is.

The club has benefitted from a 16-year redevelopment program, which saw all 18 greens rebuilt to USGA specifications and covered in smooth-rolling bentgrass. That program ended in 2012, and the course has been impressing ever since.

The greens aside, Trentham is a beautiful course, offering a superb mix of holes, with the closing quartet providing a suitable climax to a challenging round.

www.trenthamgolf.com.au



HERVEY BAY GC

THURGOONA CC RESORT

Thurgoona, NSW

Green fee: \$44 (seven days)

The challenging Thurgoona course, on the north-eastern outskirts of Albury, is one of the most underrated layouts along the Murray River.

Designed by Peter Thomson and Mike Wolveridge, the par-72 layout has gained wider acclaim in recent times as the host of the NSW Senior Open, which has seen exceptional players including Peter Lonard, Peter Senior and 1991 Open Champion, Ian Baker-Finch, compete.

The good design is complemented by its great year-round condition. In winter, it is possible to see the white peaks of the Snowy Mountains while walking the manicured couch fairways and putting on some of the best bentgrass greens in the region.

www.thurgoonaresort.com.au

MARYBOROUGH GC

Maryborough, Queensland

Green fee: \$42 (seven days)

Maryborough has claims on being the most underrated course between Brisbane and Townsville.

The course has wonderful pedigree, having originally been laid out in 1927 by Dan Soutar, who also designed revered layouts including Kingston Heath, Elanora and Concord.

Maryborough covers wonderful golfing terrain, with enough undulation to make for plenty of interesting shots, but not too much to make the walk a grind.

The holes bordering the heritage-listed Ululah Lagoon – the demanding par-4 8th and the short par-3 9th – are as tough on your golf game as they are easy on the eye.

www.maryboroughgolfqld.com.au



MARYBOROUGH GC

MILLCENT GC

Mt Burr, South Australia

Green fee: \$40 (seven days)

In the 54 years since Millicent opened on its present site at Mt Burr, it has evolved into one of South Australia's finest regional layouts.



SHEPPARTON GC

Its fairways – bounded by bracken ferns, string bark gums, wattle trees and surrounded by pine forests – have been routed to make the most of the undulating topography, while its conditioning is consistently very good, which is incredible when you consider so much maintenance work is undertaken by volunteers. www.millicentgolfclub.com.au

NARACOORTE GC

Naracoorte, South Australia

Green fee: \$40 (seven days)

Naracoorte Golf Club will celebrate its centenary in 2027, so it should not come as any great surprise that the holes here are densely lined by towering mature gums.

The green complexes are predominantly simple in terms of slope, but the bunkering on most has obviously been inspired by the great sandy hazards of the Melbourne Sandbelt. The landscape profile here is all sand, which is ideal for bunkers, while the practice of cutting the putting surfaces right to the edges

of some greenside traps is a great feature. www.naracoortegolfclub.com.au

YARRAM GC

Yarram, Victoria

Green fee: \$40 (day ticket, seven days)

Yarram is widely regarded as Australia's best volunteer-operated and maintained course. The superb bentgrass greens and Santa Ana couch fairways are testament to the incredible work of the small membership.

Yarram has some very good short holes, with one of the best being the 256-metre par-4 9th. Long hitters can blaze away at the green, which is slightly obscured from view to the left when standing on the tee. The conservative play, leaving an approach from the bottom of the hill about 50 metres from the front of the green, is quite difficult because the depth of the green, and a tier running through it adds guesswork to the shot.

You can play here all day, as many holes as you can, for just \$40. What a steal! www.yarramgolfclub.com

LANCELIN GC

Lancelin, Western Australia

Green fee: \$20 (seven days)

Here is a genuine Australian links course you probably have never heard of.

Lancelin is a beautiful nine-hole (with alternate tees) links course about 140km north of Perth. Developed by former pro and PGA of Australia President Jock Borthwick, Lancelin plays across, through and alongside the big sand dunes that dominate the coastline in these parts. The undulating fairways are lined with ti tree and other coastal scrub, while the rough is typically a natural fescue mixed with exposed sand.

Don't make the drive north of Perth expecting manicured playing surfaces. The fairways and greens are tended by volunteers. What you will find is a wild, fun layout that is undoubtedly reminiscent of how the game was played in a long bygone era ... all for \$20 (which you can pay in advance online or drop cash into the honesty box). www.lancelingc.au

THE BIG LAP

A photograph of a paved road curving through a landscape with tall grass and trees under a clear blue sky. The road is in the foreground, curving from the bottom left towards the right. The middle ground is filled with dense, tall grass and shrubs. In the background, there are several trees, including a prominent one with bare branches on the right and a cluster of green trees on the left. The sky is a clear, bright blue with a few wispy clouds. The overall scene suggests a rural or coastal setting.

Buckle up for an epic Aussie golf road trip. From coastal gems to outback oddities, we're chasing the fairways which map the perimeter of the mainland. With a full tank onboard and your clubs rattling in the boot, this is golf by the main highways and off the beaten track.

WORDS BY **JAMES SMITH** COURSE PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BRENDAN JAMES**

New South Wales

MID-NORTH COAST: BONVILLE GOLF

Just over five hours north of Sydney, Bonville Golf Resort winds through subtropical rainforest near Coffs Harbour. Often called "Australia's Augusta", it's lush, scenic and full of surprises – a fun, challenging track where bold plays can pay

off. A laid-back, unforgettable stop on any great Aussie golf road trip.

Queensland

**SUNSHINE COAST:
PELICAN WATERS GOLF CLUB**

The 490km journey from Coffs Harbour to Caloundra takes about six hours, following

the A1 and M1 through scenic coastal towns, bypassing Brisbane, with plenty of great stops along the way.

Pelican Waters is classic Sunshine Coast golf – relaxed, scenic and seriously playable. Designed by Greg Norman, Pelican Waters offers top facilities, a fun layout and something for every golfer, from short- ►





BONVILLE GOLF

game grinders to mini-golfers. Add in great food and relaxed vibes and it's a perfect Big Lap stop.

NORTH QUEENSLAND: TOWNSVILLE GOLF CLUB

The 1150km trek from Caloundra to Townsville follows the Bruce Highway north through scenic Queensland towns. It takes 13–14 hours, so an overnight rest in Rockhampton or Mackay is ideal.

Founded in 1893, Townsville is Queensland's oldest golf club and is full of character. With a fresh redesign underway, the layout here blends history with smart shot-making, rewarding strategy over power. A welcoming vibe, true greens and varied holes make this a fun, must-play course.

Northern Territory TOP END: DARWIN GOLF CLUB

The drive from Townsville to Darwin via Mount Isa covers around 2500km of remote, rugged beauty. Expect big skies, red dirt and long stretches – a true outback adventure worth pacing out.

Darwin Golf Club, with its quirky Frilled Neck Lizard emblem, is a laid-back spot in the city's northern suburbs. The tropical 18-hole course, great practice facilities and welcoming clubhouse make it a top choice for golfers and families looking to enjoy good golf and a relaxed vibe.

Western Australia

KIMBERLEY COAST: BROOME GOLF CLUB

From Darwin, drive 320km south to Katherine for a fuel stop and to check out the hot springs. Then head west on the Victoria Highway through stunning Top End landscapes, crossing into Western Australia, past Kununurra and the Kimberley, all the way to Broome's turquoise shores.

Founded in 1967 as Roebuck Bay Golf Club, Broome GC offers stunning views from said Roebuck Bay to the Indian Ocean. With a high-quality course, strong community programs and top-notch facilities, it's a premier WA destination known for hosting major amateur and professional events.

GASCOYNE REGION: CARNARVON GOLF CLUB

Driving from Broome to Carnarvon covers 1220km of remote outback along the Great Northern Highway, passing iconic stops like Port Hedland and Karratha. Expect rugged landscapes, classic outback roadhouses, and optional coastal detours to Ningaloo Reef before reaching Carnarvon's coastal welcome.

Where the sun shines daily and the wind keeps you fresh, Carnarvon Golf Club laughs at grass. With huge sand bunkers covering most fairways and super-slow greens, it's a wild, unique test which might

just change how you think about golf. Don't knock it 'til you try it.

PEEL REGION: MEADOW SPRINGS G&CC, THE CUT GC

Driving 900km from Carnarvon to Mandurah along the North West Coastal Highway offers stunning coastlines, charming towns like Shark Bay and Geraldton, and great spots for wildlife, seafood and beach breaks – a relaxed, scenic journey best enjoyed over a few days.

Just an hour south of Perth, Meadow Springs Golf and Country Club is a stunning, strategic course praised as a hidden gem in WA's Peel region. Consistently ranked among Australia's top 100 public access courses, it offers golfers a memorable challenge and a warm, welcoming atmosphere.

Just 20 minutes down the road at Dawesville, The Cut Golf Club is a chilled-out spot on WA's Golf Coast. With amazing ocean views, great golf, tasty food and even room for weddings, it's the perfect place to unwind and enjoy the good life.

GREAT SOUTHERN REGION: ALBANY GOLF CLUB

Driving from Dawesville to Albany takes 4–5 hours along scenic highways, passing charming towns, rolling farmland, towering forests and yet more epic coastline. With ►



PORT FAIRY GOLF LINKS

Port Fairy Golf Links is a classic 18 Hole natural links course that winds its way through unspoilt sand dunes and provides spectacular views of the Southern Ocean.

Port Fairy is one of only a handful of true links golf courses on mainland Australia.

Ranked #9 for public access and #28 for golf courses nationwide, Port Fairy is consistently voted the best value for money golf in the country.

The Port Fairy Golf Club was established in 1899 and is now situated on the outskirts of the picturesque Port Fairy township. A little more than a 3-hour drive from Melbourne, Port Fairy Golf Links is fast becoming one of Australia's must play golfing destinations.

Former European Tour Player, Port Fairy Golf Links Developer & *Golf Australia Architecture* Editor Mike Clayton - a round at Port Fairy "is one of the best value for money rounds in the world."

A genuine links golf experience doesn't require a 24 - hour flight to Great Britain or Ireland as there's an absolute beauty in our own backyard. - *Golf Australia Magazine*

"Playing 18 Holes at Port Fairy is the best value golf you can play in Australia."
- *Golf Australia Magazine* (October 2020)

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PELICAN WATERS GC

plenty of stops and detours like Denmark or Valley of the Giants at hand, it's a relaxed, rewarding journey through WA's diverse south coast landscapes.

Albany Golf Club ticks all the boxes for a true links experience. Nestled between the sea and farmland, its two loops of nine holes offer a perfect mix of two-shot holes, strategic drive-and-pitch challenges and varied, undulating greens – all without a hill in sight. Each hole feels unique, with natural beauty blending seamlessly into the landscape.

GOLDFIELDS-ESPERANCE: KALGOORLIE GOLF COURSE

The 600km drive from Albany to Kalgoorlie takes you from lush coastal forests to WA's rugged goldfields. Passing through country towns like Mount Barker, Kulin and Norseman, it's a scenic, remote adventure best enjoyed at a relaxed pace, with wildflowers, outback charm and plenty of mining history along the way.

Kalgoorlie Golf Course is a top-ranked 18-hole Graham Marsh design open daily to the public. Home to Goldfields Golf Club, it offers a driving range, twilight rounds and fun deals like "Nine and Dine". With a well-stocked pro shop and great facilities, it's a must-visit in WA's Goldfields.

NULLARBOR PLANE: NULLARBOR LINKS

Travelling from Kalgoorlie to Ceduna while

playing the epic Nullarbor Links isn't just a road trip in itself, it's a rolling outback adventure. This 1200km stretch is home to the world's longest golf course, with holes scattered through outback towns like Norseman, Balladonia, Cocklebiddy and beyond. You'll play one hole at a time, fuel

up on stories, spot the occasional roo, and soak in the wild beauty of the Nullarbor. After all of that red dirt and fairway fun, you'll roll into the Nullarbor Links finish line (or starting point if you're heading in the other direction) at Ceduna – beaches and a much-appreciated sea breeze await. ►



MEADOW SPRINGS G&CC (PHOTO: JOEL INNES)



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RICH RIVER GC



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South Australia

FLEURIEU PENINSULA: LINKS LADY BAY, MT COMPASS

Driving from Ceduna to the Fleurieu Peninsula takes you across South Australia's Eyre Highway and through Adelaide, blending outback scenery with coastal charm. Expect sealed roads (woo hoo), small towns and big skies.

Links Lady Bay, 75km south of Adelaide at Normanville, dishes up a true links test. Its two nine-hole loops twist with the wind, demanding shot variety and creativity. Strategic bunkers, rolling terrain and ever-changing breezes keep things interesting.

Only a short drive away, Mt Compass Golf Course proves that great golf doesn't need dramatic landscapes – just sand, smarts and vision. Built on an old sand mine, this clever, links-style design blends strategic bunkering, natural movement

and firm, fast conditions. It has recently bounced back into *Golf Australia* magazine's Top 100 thanks to smart investment and a standout design.

Victoria

GREAT OCEAN ROAD AND BELLERINE PENINSULA: PORT FAIRY GL, WARRNAMBOOL GC, LONSDALE LINKS

The trip from Normanville to Port Fairy is a scenic one through coastal and rural southern Australia. Enjoy ocean views, historic towns and natural wonders along the way, including Mount Gambier's famous Blue Lake.

Once a little-known links, Port Fairy has grown into one of Australia's top 50 courses. Nestled among natural dunes, its challenging layout features ever-changing wind, strategic bunkering and stunning ocean views. Redesigned by Mike Clayton,

this course offers a true links experience with a unique, rugged charm.

Just a short dash along the coast is Warrnambool GC. Marc Leishman, the hometown star, has well and truly helped put the golf club on the map. Designed by George Lowe Jr, the course has improved over the decades with cleared dunes and redesigned greens. The challenging Shipwreck Bend holes and a \$2 million clubhouse upgrade have presented the club with a bright future.

A tick over 200 kays further along the Great Ocean Road is Lonsdale Links, a Bellarine Peninsula classic blending "Golden Age" template holes with modern character. Redesigned by Ogilvy, Cocking and Mead, it features square greens, coastal dunes and strategic challenges. Inspired by the work of famed American golf course architects Charles Blair Macdonald and Seth Raynor, it



PORT FAIRY LINKS

offers a unique, strategic links experience of national acclaim and lasting appeal.

**MURRAY RIVER: RICH RIVER GOLF CLUB;
BLACK BULL GOLF CLUB**

Driving from Point Lonsdale to Rich River Golf Club near Moama, which sits on the banks of the mighty Murray River, covers about 270km and takes roughly three hours via the M1 and B75 highways. It's a smooth, scenic journey all the way.

Rich River is one of regional Australia's top golfing destinations. With two championship 18-hole layouts – the East and the West – the club hosted the 2023 NSW Open and continues to impress visiting golfers of all abilities.

A \$6 million course redevelopment has added new water hazards, smarter bunkering, wider landing zones and a high-end irrigation system, all designed to elevate

playability and course conditions year-round. The result? Two beautifully presented courses offering a fun mix of challenge and reward, no matter your skill level.

Rich River is also made for those looking to stay and play. The resort-style accommodation includes 63 rooms, ranging from standard and deluxe to an executive spa room and a large apartment which sleeps eight. Set among manicured gardens and close to the clubhouse, guests can enjoy the outdoor pool, spa and barbecue areas between rounds.

With flexible golf packages tailored to groups big and small, Rich River is also the perfect base for a Murray River golf getaway. Just two and a half hours from Melbourne, it's a peaceful escape with everything you need ... no need to leave once you've arrived.

Nearby Black Bull Golf Club, five kilometres from Yarrowonga, opened fully

in 2015 and quickly became an Australian Top-100 course. South of the Murray, it features wide fairways, big greens, strategic bunkering and open space, with breezes from Lake Mulwala and water hazards adding challenge to this Peter Thomson-designed standout.

New South Wales

**FAR SOUTH COAST: PAMBULA MERIMBULA
GC, TURA BEACH GC, NAROOMA GC**

From Yarrowonga, head east through Albury and Wodonga, then follow the Murray Valley and Snowy Mountains Highways via Tumbarumba and Cooma. Continue southeast to reach Merimbula on the stunning Sapphire Coast. Pambula-Merimbula Golf Club is home to the region's only 27-hole championship layout. Nestled between natural bushland, Merimbula Lake and the Pacific Ocean, the ►



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THE SAPPHIRE COAST'S ONLY 27 HOLE CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF COURSE

AUSTRALIA'S HIDDEN GEM

Nestled on the stunning Sapphire Coast of NSW, Pambula Merimbula Golf Club offers a unique blend of championship golf and untouched natural beauty. With 27 picturesque holes surrounded by native bushland, wildlife, and sea breezes, this coastal course is a true sanctuary for golfers of all levels.

Whether you're seeking your next tournament destination or an unforgettable weekend round, discover why PMGC is Australia's best-kept golfing secret.





TURA BEACH

club offers an unforgettable experience for golfers of all levels.

The course is ranked among Australia's Top 100 public access layouts and is open to visitors every day. With three distinct nine-hole loops, players can enjoy uninterrupted play even during club competitions – simply start on the alternate nine and follow the field.

Golf at Pambula Merimbula is as much about the setting as the challenge. Kangaroos are regular spectators, lounging beside fairways year-round, while native bird calls echo through the trees. In the warmer months, don't be surprised if a goanna wanders past; it's all part of the natural charm.

Always immaculately maintained and consistently praised for its conditioning, the course is both scenic and strategic. The club also offers modern GPS-equipped carts for hire to help you navigate the rolling fairways with ease.

Located just minutes from the heart of Merimbula, this coastal gem is ideal for a weekend away or a longer golfing escape. Whether you're chasing birdies or just soaking in the serenity, Pambula Merimbula has you covered.

A little further north and almost next door to Pambula Merimbula GC is Tura Beach Golf Club – a fun but fair test, with a great mix of holes that'll have you using nearly

every club in the bag and playing from all kinds of lies. It's a course which keeps you interested and entertained, showing off Peter Thomson and Mike Wolveridge's smart design.

You start off from a clubhouse which looks out over the ocean, with the first holes heading east toward the beach – some of the best on the course. The downhill par-5 2nd hole really makes you think, with a fairway that narrows around bunkers and a creek wrapping right around the green. You can go for it in two, but you'd better have your approach spot on.

The par-3 5th is another coastal hole where the wind and bunkers keep you honest. The 4th hole swings south, with scrub and sandy rough edging the fairway and a big bunker that comes into play, especially when the wind picks up.

The 6th takes you inland, lined by tall eucalypts. And just before the turn, you'll face the toughest hole: a tricky uphill dogleg left with out-of-bounds on one side and thick scrub on the other. Accuracy is the name of the game here.

An hour and a half further north again is Narooma GC. If you're looking for a hidden gem, this one is a must-visit. Having survived the devastating bushfires of early 2020, this stunning course bounced back better than ever. The club even served as an evacuation centre, sheltering over 500

people and their pets during the crisis.

Narooma offers a unique blend of coastal and forest golf across 18 holes. The front nine features breathtaking cliff-top views and challenging holes like the famous 3rd – a short par-3 played across a cliff with ocean views and tricky wind conditions. The back nine moves into heathland and forest, demanding accuracy and strategic play.

The course is not long, but is packed with variety, featuring six par-5s and plenty of natural hazards like creeks and cliffs. Players appreciate the mix of open seaside holes and tighter, more technical inland shots.

ACT FEDERAL GOLF CLUB; CANBERRA

Our final destination course is located just seven minutes from Red Hill and features superb couch fairways praised by Peter Thomson. Its challenging, undulating layout winds through native bush with kangaroos and towering eucalypts. Despite some early resistance, the couch grass thrives in Canberra's climate, offering pure lies and a true playing surface year-round.

Thanks for coming along on The Big Lap – an epic journey across some of Australia's finest golf courses. After thousands of kilometres and unforgettable rounds, we've also experienced breathtaking landscapes. Now back to work, your families and other general reality, all of you ... 🌐



NAROOMA GC



naroomagolfclub

The Jewel of NSW's South Coast

Perched atop the breathtaking cliffs of the NSW South Coast, Narooma Golf Club is a golfer's paradise and a premier destination for events and celebrations. With accolades that speak volumes about its excellence, the club is ranked as the #1 Public Access Course in NSW/ACT and #9 among Australia's 50 Favourite Courses, as voted by the public. Renowned for its superior conditioning and thoughtful design tweaks, Narooma Golf Club offers an unparalleled golfing experience.

A Golfer's Dream

Nestled between the stunning Pacific Ocean and lush inland forests, Narooma Golf Club provides a unique blend of coastal beauty and challenging gameplay. The course's front nine holes offer a links-style layout with wide, undulating fairways that hug the ocean cliffs, while the back nine meanders through a serene forest setting, complete with a tranquil lake that adds a strategic challenge. Among its many highlights is the iconic 3rd hole, known as "Hogan's Hole," where players must navigate a dramatic shot over the ocean to reach a clifftop green.



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play

The COMPLETE PACKAGE



New Zealand has some of the best golf courses on Earth and is becoming one of the most attractive tourist destinations for travelling golfers worldwide. Experiencing Aotearoa and the riches of golf is one thing, but to do it in style is the kind of luxury that turns a great trip into the journey of a lifetime.

WORDS BY **CALLUM HILL** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **LOCAL FILMS**

Spectacular is going to be a word overused throughout this feature. Overused, but accurate.

There isn't a term which describes playing golf at some of New Zealand's finest – and globally ranked – layouts any better; what comes alongside the golf is even more of a representation of the adjective.

Regardless of how often you are lucky enough to pack your bags and get ready for a golf trip, there is always that excitement when getting the clubs clean, organising the polos and watching the flyovers online of the courses you and your mates will combat over the coming days.

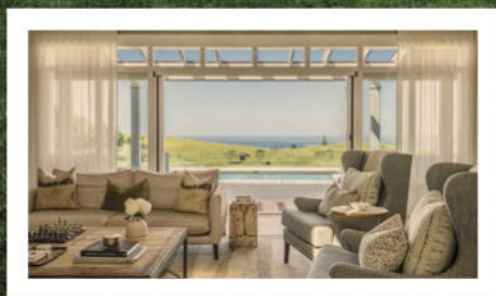
Golf trips are fantastic regardless of

how they look in the brochures.

Within the role this writer calls "work", I have been lucky enough to experience my fair share of great golf to report back to this shiny journal. When *Golf Australia* magazine received the invite for a seat on Luxury Adventures' Ultra-Luxe tour of New Zealand's North Island, the entire office was salivating ►



KAURI CLIFFS IS ONE OF A KIND.



THE 18TH AT KAURI CLIFFS.
INSERT: THE WORLD-CLASS
ON-SITE ACCOMMODATION.

at the itinerary which Steve, Dee and the team from Luxury Adventures had provided.

It was, again ... spectacular.

Putting the golf to one side for a second – because the golf courses coming up do the talking for themselves. – the itinerary's attention to detail, depth and care was second to none. There were no holes in the program; it was a perfect balance of organisation and the freedom to enjoy your own time.

Get me on the plane.

I was greeted by Steve and Dee at Christchurch Airport and the trip began with a flight to Auckland. Joining us on our travels was the team from Local Films, based the Sunshine Coast, and Luke Brown, star of the upcoming documentary *Going Pro*.

Te Arai Links has made headlines globally over the past couple of years. The 36-hole complex is a sister destination to the ultra-exclusive Tara Iti, a tick over an hour north of Auckland Central.

The Tom Doak-designed North Course and Coore and Crenshaw-designed South are the talk of the town in the area, and why wouldn't they be? It is the who's who of golf architecture on one property.

You feel the suspense when you drive into Te Arai. Towering pines line the road into the North – the only one we played this time. To say you are well looked after would be an understatement. The service is, as expected, first-class.

This writer's advice would be to get there early, as our itinerary ensured we did, because you need the time to soak in all this bucket list

destination has to offer. Enjoy a bite to eat, a coffee or something a touch stronger at Ric's Restaurant, overlooking the massive practice green, which is dramatic and undulating. The green boasts its own 18-hole circuit, which gives you a great taste of what you might expect on the North Course. Or if you are a range rat, you can bang balls until your heart's content.

You jump in a shuttle and are whisked away to whatever course has your name on the tee sheet.

First impressions when you step foot on the first tee at the North are a combination of things. As far as the eye can see along the right is one of the most incredible beaches you'll ever lay eyes on.

Playing the North is an experience painted by the Pacific wind and shoreline. You will find yourself playing on shifting dunes. Doak's minimalist approach is evident until you get to the putting surfaces, which are wavy and breathtaking; the perfect fit for a creative mind around the greens. Using the contours to access flags is a significant part of the North.

We felt like we had the course to ourselves; our own little slice of paradise. The most pristine and tight fairways I have ever seen were borderline impossible to differentiate from the greens.

I struggle to remember having more fun on a golf course than at Te Arai North; every shot was different from the last, with the whole experience entertaining for all abilities.

Staying on the course is always a neat experience. The suites organised by Luxury

Adventures were the definition of luxury.

With plenty of options outside of the golf, the Ultra-Luxe package can be specifically tailored as an itinerary catered for couples; this would be a tremendous spot to take the wife, husband, or partner. The suites are scattered all over the property. Ours overlooked the range, where you could see the sunrise from behind the Pacific in the morning; a lovely touch and genuine first-class living. There will be some raving food reviews throughout this report (written by someone massively underqualified as a food critic, especially regarding fine dining).

The Ocean restaurant is beside the 18th on the South Course, just a lob wedge from the rolling waves of the Pacific.

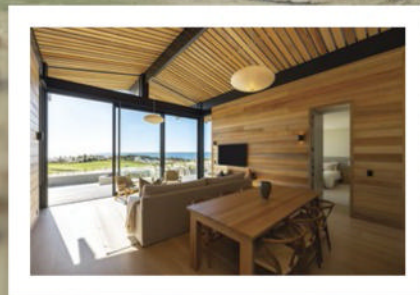
The interiors blend native timbers, soft lighting and dunes-inspired textures. The menu leans into the brilliance of local and seasonal seafood, meat and produce: tender paua ravioli, snapper crudo and delicate kumara puree spring to mind. Each dish arrives plated with care and class, but the view and the quiet seaside hush make you feel as if you have been whisked away to another universe. Dinner feels like part of the landscape – beautiful and unforgettable.

After enjoying breakfast at Ric's, it was time to get on the road to Kauri Cliffs in the Far North. For Ultra-Luxe travellers, a charter flight is typically on the cards; for us, it was a scenic drive through New Zealand's rural North.

The drive is a relatively long commute by car, but it gives you a fantastic chance to soak



THERE IS SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT TE ARAI NORTH.



in an authentic taste of New Zealand. I would recommend stopping in at one of the local bakeries along the way (if you don't opt for the charter flight) to enjoy some rural New Zealand's premier pastries.

Cruising into Kauri Cliffs reminds me of driving into an old farm. The gravel road which stretches for kilometres is surrounded by paddocks on both sides. I will be honest, I thought we had taken the wrong turn.

Arriving at the main building at Kauri Cliffs after a bumpy trek is like finding the pot of gold at the rainbow's end. It is simply breathtaking.

For a golf sicko which this reporter clearly is, the replica of Michael Campbell's 2005 U.S Open trophy stationed in the pro shop is a nice touch and enough to combat a bit of thick rough like Cambo did at Pinehurst *en route* to taming Tiger Woods.

Out of all the golf courses which this phenomenal Ultra-luxe journey took me on, the views at Kauri were the most incredible, especially on the eastern side of the property. The golf starts slow, meaning you are still able to soak in the panoramic views of the Pacific glistening in the distance.

The course is phenomenal and one of our tougher accuracy tests on the tour. The closing holes, notably 15, 16 and 17, are fantastic golf holes that give you plenty to think about. The short par-4 16th measures 319 metres off the regular men's tees with a fairway that sweeps right to left. The hole weaves downhill, so it plays slightly shorter than your yardage book tells. The astounding natural backdrop of the Pacific Ocean, Cavalli Islands and the ►



PUTTING SURFACES REWARD CREATIVITY AT THE NORTH COURSE.



HOW ABOUT THAT FOR A VIEW?

CAPE KIDNAPPERS, WOW.

unique offshore rock stacks and reefs is one of the more picturesque canvases for a golf hole. Longer hitters can try to bite off some extra meat and attack the green. Don't miss left ... Bunkers line the entire left side of the fairway and green. Miss further left and you'll find a watery grave some 100 metres below the cliffs.

Both Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers fall under the Rosewood banner.

Since 2023, Rosewood Hotels and Resorts has taken the reins at Robertson Lodges. Iconic coastal estates, originally crafted by the Robertson family in 2001, pair world-class golf with sprawling farmland, conservation-minded luxury and that unmistakable New Zealand sense of place.

The golf was a fantastic and deeply unique experience, supported by the visual extravaganza which Kauri's rolling terrain and panoramic vistas offer. But the luxury goes to another level once you've shaken hands on the 18th green and returned to your suite to prepare for a fireplace, five-star, four-course dinner underneath the northern stars.

The suites are immaculate, with polished native woods, homely bathrooms and floor-to-ceiling windows framing the escarpment and Pacific beyond. Private terraces can be enjoyed with a coffee or evening nip of whiskey.

Beneath a velvet sky, your fire glows with quiet brilliance. The pork belly comes crisp-skinned and tender, rich but balanced with pickled stone fruit. Local seafood follows, perfectly poached, the ocean still clinging to it, before a lamb rack so well cooked it barely needs a knife. Each course is opulent,

seasonal and as Kiwi as it comes.

The Ultra-Luxe package offers a rich mix of experiences beyond the golf: unwind at the luxury spa tucked into native bushland, explore private beaches like Pink Beach, or the itinerary can be tailored to include guided estate tours through rolling farmland and forest, nature walks, fishing and horse trekking. Or, while in the area, check out the world-famous Bay of Islands on a chartered Super Yacht. The outdoors comes to life in the North, while curated cultural encounters and wine tastings can round out the stay. Whether you're chasing serenity, scenery, or something uniquely Kiwi, you'll find it at Kauri, that's for sure.

A private charter to Kauri Cliff's big brother in the Hawke's Bay, Cape Kidnappers, is next on the menu. If you're a keen reader of this publication, you'll have read the ins and outs of Tom Doak's masterpiece, which is golf at the edge of the Earth.

Kidnappers takes your breath away the moment you arrive. The drive in, along a winding gravel road through native bush, is an authentic taste of New Zealand, and if you're lucky enough to time it with sunset, you might even spot a Kiwi. The property is home to thousands. In 2001, the late Julian Robertson commissioned Doak to design a world-class layout along the dramatic Hawke's Bay cliffs. Doak, known for working with the land rather than against it, delivered a visually spectacular and revered course.

The golf is sensational, and you can see why it is so critically acclaimed.

The bunkering is a classic feature. As The

Kiwi Caddy wrote in his online review:

"The trademark Doak bunkering is fantastic, both visually and strategically; the varieties in size and shape seem to have a gravitational pull much greater than their stature. The greens are as good as anywhere you will find – running fast, firm and pure; the diversity in complexes makes many approaches a guessing game the first time around, and shots around the green become far more interesting."

Doak believes it is one of a kind.

"It is so much higher on the cliffs than any other course. It just gives you a different perspective on how big the world is. In the end, I've had the privilege to build several links courses, but there is only one Cape Kidnappers," Doak told *Golf Australia* magazine.

The lodge at Cape Kidnappers sets the standard for any on-site accommodation.

When you enter, it feels beyond exceptional. Set among dramatic cliffs, you feel removed from the world. The design leans into farmhouse charm: weathered wood, wide verandas and open-plan living spaces which spill effortlessly into the landscape. It is all impeccably done; every view is framed. A retreat leaning into an escape.

Spacious suites and The Owner's Cottage are all designed with warm wood, soft textiles, and coastal-inspired decor. The culinary experience at Kidnappers' Restaurant is the finest dining experience I have ever had, period. The seasonal menus are crafted from the best local meats, seafood and produce and paired with acclaimed Hawke's Bay wines,



KINLOCH MANOR.



PUT THE FEET UP AFTER YOUR ROUND AT CAPE KIDNAPPERS.



which are served in the lodge's dining room or more intimate settings.

Beyond the 18 holes, the Ultra-Luxe includes activities like farm tours, spa treatments, hiking, clay shooting, mountain biking, or exploring the world's largest mainland gannet colony on the property. It is the complete package and, in all honesty, was a hard place to leave. Until we arrived at the next ...

Taupo is one of New Zealand's most popular tourist destinations. It has something for everyone. With hot Springs, adventure and first-class lodges, luxury is at your fingertips and comes from every angle.

Before we discuss the phenomenal golf, which slides slightly under the radar on the broader scheme of the Kiwi golfing landscape, I'd like to talk about the aspect of the itinerary which made me shake in my boots a bit.

I have never been an adrenaline junkie. I enjoy driving the speed limit and staying at ground level. Boring? Maybe.

Steve had locked this resident journo in for a 47-metre bungy jump at AJ Hackett Taupo Bungy and Swing.

It was the only thing on this list of luxury which made me squirm a bit. I had lived lavishly and the life of a high roller for several days. It was time to get out of my comfort zone.

I jumped. Would I do it again? Probably not, but I definitely did something I wouldn't have otherwise. Extracurriculars like this feel endless on the Ultra-Luxe; no stone is left unturned.

Kinloch Manor, wow.

First of all, it is emphatic as a facility away ►



THE KINLOCH CLUB IS ONE OF JACK NICKLAUS' FINEST DESIGNS.

from the golf course.

Kinloch Manor blends architectural drama with refined rural luxury. Built to echo the form of a modern-day castle, the manor stands boldly above Lake Taupo with a mix of schist stone, steel and natural timber. Inside, it's all deeply considered elegance – soaring ceilings, statement fireplaces and communal spaces which feel both grand and grounded. The restaurant leans into local produce with seasonal degustation menus, while the spa, gym and outdoor hot tub add polish to a stay that feels both indulgent and deeply connected to its setting.

Kinloch's villas offer a more private take on luxury – self-contained, quietly elegant and echoing the same architectural character as the manor itself. With one or two bedrooms, each villa features generous living spaces, fireplaces and deep soaking tubs, all framed by lake or fairway views. The kitchens and heated stone bathrooms add comfort, while private terraces and optional in-room dining allow guests to switch off without losing touch with the lodge's refined service.

Kinloch was a course of which I had heard rave reviews. I am historically not a massive fan of Jack Nicklaus-designed courses, but they do put a premium on accuracy. I think some aspects of his golf courses lack a bit of creativity and are very "American", which just doesn't tickle my fancy.

The Kinloch Club made me eat my words and some. Set on dramatic, undulating terrain overlooking Lake Taupo, it blends rugged, links-style features with strategic bunkering and fescue grasses. It pays homage to some of the great links courses across the globe.

Just a fantastic layout. It leapt into the top courses I've played in the country. I loved all aspects of the challenge provided.

Our visit here would round out our Ultra-Luxe tour; we all knew it was our final round of

the trip. Mother Nature must have known, too, because she produced an absolute stunner. An early morning tee time in New Zealand hits slightly differently than anywhere else. There is a crispness in the air and the native birds hum as you use the practice facilities.

Golf at the Kinloch Club is a proper test of precision and strategy. It is a phenomenal championship ballpark that can tip the scales at 7363 yards off the championship tees.

The par-4 6th hole was a favourite here. It is one of the best short-fours in the country. A decision-making tee shot is on the cards, like with all great short par-4s. Hit an iron up the right where the fairway banks from right to left, leaving a wedge or low-iron into an undulating green guarded by bunkers and uneven rough. Bombers can have a dip; a small landing area on the direct line could help if you don't quite catch your drive. I advise the

former to allow yourself to use the contours.

Local beer was enjoyed at the clubhouse afterwards, while we reflected on our favourite tour moments.

The Ultra-Luxe tour explores New Zealand's golf and beyond in first-class form. A golf trip, but elevated beyond my wildest fantasies. Every stop, from cliff-top fairways to fireside fine dining, is curated to deliver the country's natural drama and hospitality with a polish of pure excellence. Luxury Adventures has struck the perfect balance: world-class golf, five-star living and a true immersion into what makes Aotearoa unforgettable. It's not just about ticking off bucket list escapes; it's about diving into them and the country which hosts them at full volume and in total luxury. 🌟

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THE KINLOCH CLUB.



PHOTO: SUPPLIED



KAURI CLIFFS IS LIKE PLAYING GOLF IN ANOTHER UNIVERSE.



PIRATE'S PLANK AT CAPE KIDNAPPERS.



MIDDLE: KINLOCH MIXES RAW WITH EXCELLENCE. BOTTOM: THE ULTRA-LUXE DINING EXPERIENCE.



GOING PRO

Luke Brown admits the idea began over beers. A mate once boasted he could go pro in golf within four years. Brown doubted him, then realised the real challenge lay with himself. "I reckon I could do it. Not him, but I could," he recalls.

What started as a thought in the pub, became the seed for *Going Pro*, a raw documentary series tracking Brown's unlikely journey from suburban dad battling alcohol and old habits to hopeful Australian Open qualifier.

"Ultimately, I needed a goal that would stop me drinking and give me a chance to repair my nervous system," he says. "Who knows what's possible if I could do that."

Brown joined Luxury Adventures on the Ultra-Luxe along with the talented crew from *Local Films*.

Season One of *Going Pro* launches in October, documenting Brown's first year chasing a goal many would dismiss as fantasy: making the field for the Australian Open. Even he knows how outrageous that might sound.

But for Brown, qualifying isn't the only win. "A hundred percent, mate," he tells *Golf Australia magazine*. "The main focus is the underlying themes ... transforming your life is the main purpose of this doco."

That transformation is personal. Brown speaks candidly of the toll alcohol took on his health and family, and his fear that his daughters would grow up seeing him as the individual he became on the booze.

Filming was accountability. "I actually need the film crew on it because I need that accountability piece," he says. "Hopefully, the gains would be massive so that other men ... could possibly lean into it themselves."

Brown's goals in year one were modest on paper; get his handicap down to three, stay sober and build the daily habits of a professional athlete. But they carried an even bigger purpose: to break cycles, build belief, and show his daughters – and himself – what real change looks like. "I've never really liked the person I become when I'm drinking," he says. "I've always hoped that being sober would suit me."

As he eyes year two, Brown is considering taking a sabbatical from work and going all in on the dream. "Hopefully, the manifestations can change once you get into the new territory," he says.

For now, Brown's story isn't about the destination, but the transformation along the way. And when *Going Pro* premieres on YouTube in October, he hopes it can spark something bigger. "If we're not chasing something down ... we're probably going to battle more often than not," he says. "But if we are ... we're closer to the better version of ourselves."

REVERSE THE CLUB, HEAR THE SWOOSH AND SWING THROUGH THE BALL

BY
TOM LINSKEY

Founder, Australian
Golf Schools
australiangolfschools.com.au



What I would like to explain here is the fundamental difference between average golfers and good ones. And I will start by saying that the term “average player” isn’t exactly apt in this context, because 95 percent of golfers are average and just five percent are good.

The difference between the average player and the good one is that the former has never grasped the concept of swinging *through* the golf ball. While as far as the good player is concerned, the ball is irrelevant.

A good player does not hit *at* the ball or even think of hitting it. They *swing* the club from the top of their back-swing (image E) to the top of their follow-through (image J) on a plane where the ball happens to be. The ball is effectively *in the way* of their clubhead. Striking the ball on the way through is a byproduct of their golf swing.

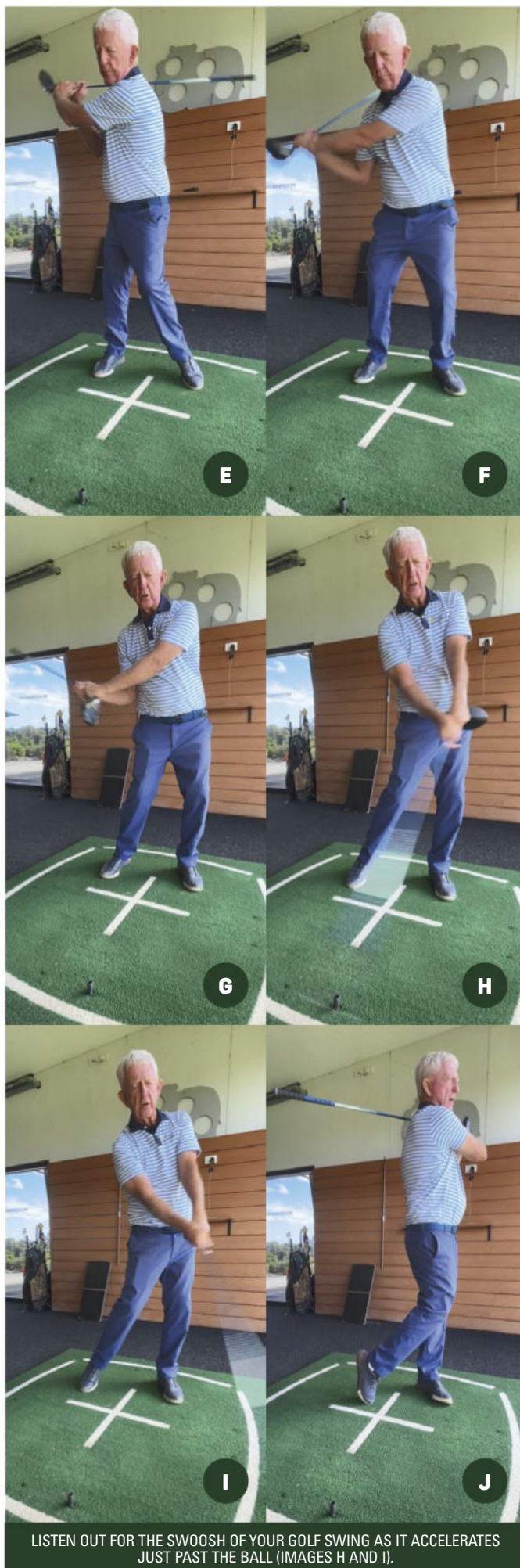
One key to this swing-thought is that when the good player’s clubhead goes *past* the ball, it is *accelerating*. The maximum swing speed attained by good players occurs about half-a-metre after the ball (images H and I).

A great way to feel this sensation, and to feel like you’re *swinging* the club rather than hitting at the ball, is to turn your driver upside-down and grip the shaft at the top near the head. And then make your golf swing.

What you’re doing from here is *listening* to where the “swoosh” noise is. The average player makes the noise before they get to the ball. The good player steps into the shot first and then accelerates, and the noise happens after contact. *Swoosh*.

When you can actually take that step and concentrate on swinging *through* the ball to the target, and stop worrying about the ball itself, you will have made a gigantic movement towards being a good player and going forward in your golf career. 🏌️

PHOTOS: MATT CLEARY



LISTEN OUT FOR THE SWOOSH OF YOUR GOLF SWING AS IT ACCELERATES JUST PAST THE BALL (IMAGES H AND I).



SCAN HERE TO SEE
THIS TIP IN ACTION

TURNING THE CLUB UPSIDE-DOWN AND GRIPPING IT UNDER THE HEAD IS A METHOD FOR DEVELOPING A GOLF "SWING" MINDSET RATHER THAN A "HIT".



GRIP IT (IMAGES A, B AND C) BUT DON'T RIP IT. RATHER, SWING THE GOLF CLUB AS IF THE BALL IS IN THE WAY OF YOUR CLUBHEAD.

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RORY MCILROY

DRIVING LESSON

At 36 years old, Rory McIlroy is still setting the standard when it comes to driving the golf ball. Whether it's distance, consistency or sheer power, the Northern Irishman continues to lead the way, as highlighted by CBS commentator and former Masters champion Trevor Immelman during this year's broadcast at Augusta.

"We have the best driver in the game right here," Immelman said during the coverage, alongside fellow major winner Ian Baker-Finch. It is not just opinion – McIlroy consistently ranks near the top in strokes gained off the tee and driving distance on the PGA Tour.

So what makes him so effective?

According to Immelman, it all starts with McIlroy's mechanics: "He has a beautiful, full shoulder turn; he sets the club just a little across the line," Immelman said.

That full turn generates incredible torque and sets McIlroy up perfectly at the top of his backswing.

But it's how Rory delivers the club at impact which really sets him apart. "He hits up on the ball about as much as any player on the Tour; we're talking a full five to six degrees up on it with the driver," Immelman explained. That positive angle of attack helps maximise launch and carry distance, allowing McIlroy to bomb it past most of the field.

Then there's the signature move which ties it all together: "He straightens his lead leg to try to send the energy down into the club head. It's a weapon in his game right there, isn't it?"

That motion – a combination of athleticism and timing – unleashes tremendous clubhead speed while keeping McIlroy balanced and in control. The result is a driving game blending raw power with precision; a combination few can match.

McIlroy's driver remains one of the most formidable tools in his arsenal. Via insights like these from someone who's been there – Immelman won the Masters in 2008 – it's clear McIlroy's long game is still in a league of its own. ●

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DISCIPLINE AND PREPARATION ARE KEYS TO COURSE MANAGEMENT

BY

CHRIS HYNES

Mindset coach, head teaching professional at Sanctuary Lakes and author of *Beyond The Fairways To Fulfilment*



When Tiger Woods won the Open Championship at Royal Liverpool in 2006, he went in with a clear strategy. The course was hard, fast, brown, in a drought. And to avoid the pot bunkers, he hit driver once in 72 holes.

Yes, hitting two-iron stingers was the work of a genius. But it was tactical genius, too. And all golfers can learn from the man's discipline. Tiger made sure to play within his capacity. He planned his round, planned each shot, and then set his mind to executing. And he stuck to it.

Course management and pre-round planning is something commonly lacking among club golfers, who can tend to blaze away with the same club every week on each hole. It's not an approach for consistent scoring.

Like Tiger, you need to know your capacity. You need to collect data. Next time you're on the range, take out a wedge and hit 10 shots

towards the 100m sign. Then walk out and see where they landed. Some will be 10 metres right, some will be 10 metres left. Some will be long, some will be short.

Then, mentally, draw a big circle around the perimeter of those 10 shots. Then, take that mental circle onto the course. And when you have a shot that's a hundred metres to the pin, overlay that shot dispersion pattern onto the fattest part of the green.

For example, if the pin is dead centre of the green, you can go at the flag, and your shot will likely end up somewhere in your circle around it. But, if the pin is cut right with a water hazard on the right of the green, you should aim for the fattest part of the green, which would be well left of the flag. Your target line, meaning the middle of your shot dispersion pattern, might be just inside the left edge of the green. Even a miss left is better than the alternative.

Where the discipline comes in is not changing strategy due to emotion. Whether you're up or down, or somewhere in the middle, the plan remains the same.

For example, you play a par-four, dog-leg right, your plan is hybrid to middle-left of the fairway, eight-iron in. But you turn up at the hole after double-double and you may be thinking you have to catch-up. *Go at the hole with driver, cut it around the corner.* And then

you hit it in the crap and make another double and things go from bad to worse.

On a long par-four, into the wind, hitting it in regulation might be the preserve of low single-figure players only. The best play for you could be three-wood, six-iron, wedge. There are times to leave your ego in the bag. Discipline is key.

You don't need to get carried away with position on the fairway. You needn't necessarily be on the extreme edges of a fairway to go at certain pins. You don't want to compromise narrowing your fairway target because that could bring bunkers or out-of-bounds into play. Yes, there are ideals of where to come in from. But, statistically, centre of fairway is a very good place to approach any pin.

Obviously, conditions are a factor. You might see where the wind's coming from and if it's downwind, hit rescue. If it's into the wind, you might hit three-wood or tee driver low. Your strategy stays the same, though: get the ball to the pre-ordained target area.

It's about staying within your strategy, executing according to that strategy, and just trusting that pars and birdies will come. Because, sure enough, as soon as you chase birdies with a risky strategy, you're bound to make bogies.

You need to be disciplined, trust the plan and process, and eke out the best score you can. ●



TIGER WOODS' WIN IN THE OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP AT A DRY ROYAL LIVERPOOL IN 2006 WAS A MASTERCLASS IN DISCIPLINE, TRUST IN PROCESS AND PLAN EXECUTION.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

BUILD A BETTER GAME!

Major winner Matt Fitzpatrick shares his secrets to hitting more greens and holing more putts

WORDS BY MICHAEL CATLING
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGUS MURRAY

At the U.S Open three years ago, Matt Fitzpatrick produced a masterclass in ball-striking to win his first major championship. That week he ranked first in the field for scrambling, hit 17 of 18 greens in regulation during the final round and made more than 80ft of putts over the final nine holes to get the better of Scottie Scheffler and Will Zalatoris. Afterwards, he described it as one of his best ever approach rounds, having hit seven shots inside 20ft on greens that called for absolute precision.

So when we were invited to a playing lesson with him during a day at Hertfordshire's Centurion Club, we leapt at the chance, with the hope that some of his valuable tips might rub off on us.

The afternoon gave us the amazing opportunity to quiz Matt about some of the tips, techniques and strategies that have worked so well for him over the years ... his insight might just do the same for you, too. ►



IRON PLAY

LOWER YOUR FLIGHT TO ADD CONTROL

Learning to keep your irons under the wind will make you a better all-round player

One of the reasons I hit the ball a bit lower than most pros on tour is that I have a little more forward shaft lean at address. I grew up playing on quite a windy course in the UK (The Hallamshire in Sheffield), so that probably has something to do with it. The more the shaft leans forward, the more you deloft (or close) the clubface, so it stands to reason that the ball will launch lower. The easiest way to do this is to move the ball back in the stance, keeping your hands in line with your lead pocket. Bear in mind that you will be hitting the ball earlier in your swing arc, on more of an in-to-out path, so you'll need to play for a draw with your alignment.

MAKE THE CONNECTION

Quality of strike affects the height of the ball and the strength of its flight – in other words, how straight and long it flies – in windy conditions. The key to a good iron strike is compression at impact. Most amateurs don't do this well enough because they attack the ball from out-to-in. I attack the ball from the inside by keeping my swing compact and my upper left arm connected to my body in the downswing.

1



HOW TO BUILD CONSISTENCY WITH A COMPACT SWING

Swinging slower and shorter like this helps to take spin out of the shot, which will stop the ball from ballooning in the air. I've worked hard over the years to shorten my backswing a little, even on full shots, because it's a lot easier to get out of position with a longer backswing. I used to get my left arm almost vertical at the top of the backswing because I picked the club up too quickly

with my arms. I'd then drop my hands behind me on the way down, meaning I'd have to re-route the club in the downswing to get it back on plane. Now, I use my body and arms in unison in the backswing.

This has enabled me to get into a more neutral position at the top, with my left arm close to a 10 o'clock position, which has improved my synchronisation on the way down. ►



BUNKER PLAY

MY GREATEST SHOT

This fairway bunker shot changed my life – and led to a brilliant piece of advice from a former Ryder Cup captain

Three years on, people still talk to me about the bunker shot I hit on 18 at Brookline and ask me how I did it. It's by far the best shot I've ever hit and the truth is I was really struggling with my fairway bunker play in 2022. It's never been a shot I'm completely comfortable with and I'd be lying if I said I expected it to come out that well and to finish that close to the hole. I actually spoke with Paul Azinger about it afterwards and he was trying to educate me about how, when you're in the sand, the heel digs and the toe glides. That's great advice.

If you think about it, hitting out of the toe is going to help you clip the ball off the sand. If you watch me hit fairway bunker shots now, I'm setting up with the ball in line with the toe – rather than in the centre of the face – and trying to return the club to the same position at impact. I'm probably a better fairway bunker player now than I was in 2022 because of that one tip.



DON'T GET TOO GREEDY IN THE SAND

My theory in the bunker is that it's better to be safe than sorry. I didn't have to worry about the lip of the bunker here, but if you've got a bad lie or a steep face to deal with, go with the 9-iron rather than your 7-iron and concentrate on getting the ball out. Even if you come up 30 yards short of the green, there's still a chance of getting up and down – there's no chance of that if you're hitting the same shot 150 yards away in the bunker.





THE SHORT GAME

MY FIVE RULES FOR BETTER WEDGE PLAY

Solid basics, set distances and special grinds are my secrets to becoming pitch perfect

1. NARROW YOUR STANCE TO GAIN MORE FEEL

When I'm hitting a pitch shot, I set up with a slightly narrower stance than with my full swing because I'm looking for more feel and a less robotic action. Obviously, you've still got your positions, but you're feeling the flight you want to hit. Flaring your front foot out a little can help you turn through better, but ensure your heels stay square to the target line.

2. MINIMISE WRIST HINGE FOR MORE CONSISTENCY

I try not to use as much wrist action because it can make the way you deliver the clubhead – and therefore your flight and spin – quite inconsistent. It's easier to get the strike and spin the same every time with

a more 'straight arm' action. You power the swing by simply turning the shoulders away from the target and then back through.

3. ALTER THE BACKSWING FOR TRICKY DISTANCES

I like to use my body turn to hit set distances when pitching. I have five different lengths of backswing: hands to hips, hands to abs, hands to chest, hands to shoulder, and full. I know exactly how far the ball will carry with all my wedges on each swing. The more you practise by swinging to those positions, the better the feel you'll get for distance control.

4. PLAY IT LIKE A DRAW TO MAXIMISE SPIN

The more time the ball is on the clubface,

the more spin you can generate. A lot of people cut across the ball to get backspin, but it's easier to do with a draw because it stays on the face slightly longer. If you can almost feel like you're hitting a draw – attacking the ball from the inside – with an open face that is closed to the swing path, then you can really get it spinning.

5. FIND THE BOUNCE AND GRIND FOR YOU

I've had a special set of grinds since I turned pro, with the clubhead rounded off at the back to glide through the turf more easily. Bounce and grinds are very individual and you can use them to enhance how you attack the ball and even counteract some flaws in your technique. There's lots of variety out there, so it's well worth trying all the options to see which works for you. ►

PUTTING

ADD PURPOSE TO YOUR PRACTICE

*Restore confidence to your
long and short putting by
copying these drills*

These are two examples of drills I use to work on my holing out and lag putting. I make sure I do them most weeks, for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I can measure my scores to monitor progress and ensure I keep improving. This also builds consequence into practice, so I'm used to feeling and dealing with pressure when I'm in a competitive round. And secondly, doing this at the start of a tournament week gets me tuned to the greens at a venue that I'm not likely to have played before.

DRILL 1

HOLING OUT: THE CLOCK FACE

This is fantastic for increasing your understanding of how slope affects the break around the hole. Find a hole on a slight slope and place tee pegs at three, six and nine feet from the hole on the line of 12 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 6 o'clock and 9 o'clock – 12 pegs in all. Use one ball and putt from the shortest to the longest on each line in turn – 12 putts in total. Award yourself one point for every holed putt and zero for every miss. As you learn how much the slope affects the break on different lengths and angles, you will improve your ability to read these kind of putts on the course.





DRILL 2

PUTTING FROM DISTANCE: THE LADDER

Find a relatively flat putt and place a tee in the ground every three feet, from six feet to 18 feet – and even further if space allows. Then place a tee 18 inches behind the hole. Hit one putt from each tee, working from the shortest to the longest, and award yourself two points for a holed putt, one point if the ball finishes between the hole and the back tee, and zero if it finishes short of the hole or past the tee peg. You'll be amazed how much easier you'll find judging the pace on the long putt after gradually working up to it.



DON'T FRET OVER SHORT PUTTS

Putts between four and 10 feet are vital. Most people hole most putts inside four feet and relatively few go in outside 10 feet, but I think increasing your success in that middle range is very achievable. ●

FIVE DRILLS TO... SHAPE YOUR SWING

Work through this collection of golf's best movement-training exercises ... and watch your scores tumble

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB ATKINS

As long as there has been golf tuition, coaches have used swing drills or exercises to help train desirable movement patterns. Drills work because they allow the student to set the success of the shot to one side for a while, and instead focus solely on the new swing move or feel they are trying to develop.

Though some of the drills here involve hitting shots, it's important to remember that as long as you are employing a drill, the result of the shot is irrelevant. Unless you are prepared to accept that, your execution of the exercise will be compromised and its effectiveness will suffer.

The best drills are, of course, both effective and easy to execute – two attributes you'll find in every swing drill here, personally selected by our team of elite coaches. Put together, they cover every major element a sound action needs.

That makes this article a fantastic resource for your swing work as you move forward with your game. Make them a regular part of your practice and a simpler, more reliable technique will be your reward.



IN A NUTSHELL

Hit shots with your feet together. Trimming excessive movement from your swing – sway or throw your weight around and you'll lose balance – is an excellent way to simplify your motion.

DRILL I. EFFICIENCY: ANKLES TOUCHING



YOUR COACH



SIMON PAYNE

UKCC Level 3 coach
and PGA fellow pro.

HOW TO DO IT

ADDRESS: Take a lofted iron and set up to the ball, with your heels touching and the ball centred between your insteps. Flare your lead toe 30-40°.

BACKSWING: Make a three-quarter move away from the ball. You'll be forced into making a more 'stacked' turn, upper half coiling over that narrow base.

THROUGH SWING: Turn down and through, finishing with your hands in front of your

chest. Your sole objective is to make solid contact while retaining balance. With no option to slide laterally, you will start to feel a more rotational delivery of the club and a better-sequenced downswing. Hit 10 shots with your feet together, followed by two from a regular stance. ►

DRILL 2. IMPROVED TIMING: BACK- TO-TARGET DOWNSWING



IN A NUTSHELL

Swing your arms down while leaving your back facing the target for as long as possible. This puts golf's true power source – the swinging clubhead – back in charge.

YOUR COACH



ADRIAN FRYER
solidgolf.co.uk
Fellow of the PGA.



HOW TO DO IT

1. In this no-club drill, begin by taking your regular address position, with your arms hanging and palms facing each other. Now swing to the top, with the feeling that your back faces the target.
2. Keeping your upper body turned and back facing the target, swing the arms down and through as far as they will go. Do this twice.
3. Do the same on the third swing, but now let your swinging arms pull you through to a finish.

By training a more active role for the hands and arms, golfers who overuse their body are better able to sync the club's release with their core rotation ... leading to better timing and more power. Try this process five times before repeating with a club.

IN A NUTSHELL

Start the swing with the club ahead of the ball. This will help you develop early backswing pressure shift into the trail foot, while teaching you how to coordinate the start of your swing.

DRILL 3. WEIGHT/ PRESSURE SHIFT: FORWARD START



HOW TO DO IT

1. Take your normal address position, before lifting the clubhead up and moving it forward until the clubhead is a little above ankle height. Allow your shoulders to rotate with this forward move, and feel a slight increase in pressure under your lead foot.
2. Sweep the club back over the ball to begin your backswing. Feel like you are stepping down into your trail foot to execute this move, and allow an element of lateral motion into your trail side. As early as this 8 o'clock position, you should already feel pressure settling under your trail foot.
3. We need weight shift in the swing to build momentum, rhythm, sequencing and speed. This exercise encourages you to shift weight at the right time – early – to set up a more effective backswing. Make five forward-start swings before hitting two from your regular start position. ►

YOUR COACH



CHRIS RYAN

Founder of the HIT Golf Academy
chrisryangolf.com



DRILL 4. SWING PATH: SPLIT HANDS

IN A NUTSHELL

Swing with your trail hand near the base of the grip. This naturally lowers your trail shoulder through the strike, helping you attack the ball from a strong, inside path.

YOUR COACH



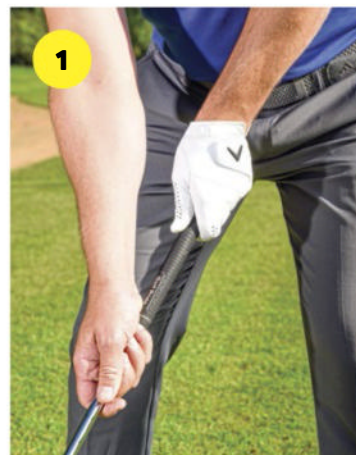
**GARETH
JOHNSTON**

PGA Head Professional
garethjohnstongolf.com



HOW TO DO IT

1. Use a 7 or 8-iron. Place your lead or gloved hand in its regular position, near the top of the grip, but drop your trail hand lower, even on to the shaft just below the grip.
2. Now take your regular stance and hit balls ... but with a three-quarter swing length and power. Timing and results will suffer, but focus on the growing feeling of the trail shoulder working more down and 'under' through the strike.
3. As the lead shoulder rises, the club is pulled up and away from the ground. This tends to quieten or delay the opening of the chest and shoulders before impact, helping the chronic out-to-in swinger sequence their downswing better and deliver the club on a more neutral path.



IN A NUTSHELL

Stretch your bag towel from chest to lead hand and swing to develop a feel for the ideal swing width. A good swing arc delivers natural width, effective attack angles and low point control, while allowing you to rotate within your posture and in balance.

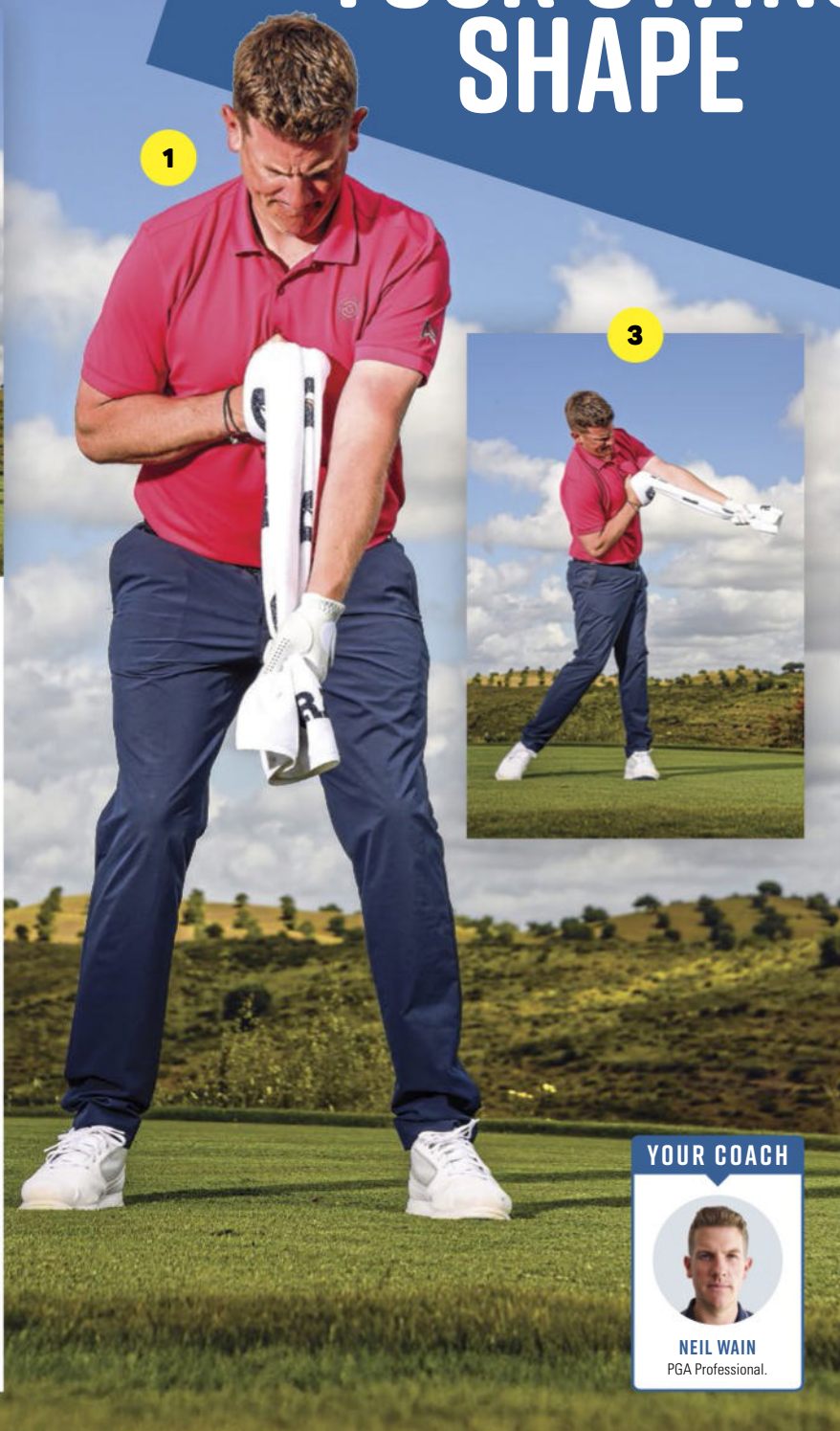


HOW TO DO IT

1. Find your bag towel and take your regular posture. Hold one end of the towel against your chest with your trail hand, and stretch it out away from you through an extended lead arm.
2. Keeping the towel in place, swing back until your lead arm is horizontal. Work to maintain the towel's length. If it crumples, your arc is narrowing; if you feel it wanting to stretch, you're trying to add excessive and unnecessary width.
3. Swing through, pivoting around the point you are holding the towel against your chest. Again, your sole focus is on keeping that towel extended.

A few swings back and through and you will start to gain a feel for that chest-to-lead hand distance, and how maintaining it is the key to creating the ideal shape to your swing. Make 10 towel swings before hitting two 7-iron shots. ●

DRILL 5. ARC/RADIUS: CONTROL YOUR SWING SHAPE



YOUR COACH



NEIL WAIN
PGA Professional.

gear

REVIEWS & NEW RELEASES



WHAT'S IN THE BAG

MINJEE LEE'S LETHAL CALLAWAY SETUP BEHIND HER WOMEN'S PGA GLORY

Australian Minjee Lee's full bag lineup from her third major win included the Elyte Driver, Chrome Tour X ball and Odyssey Ai-ONE putter.

Minjee plays a Chrome Tour X Golf Ball, part of the Chrome Family which continues to excel in professional golf and in the market.

Callaway's Chrome Tour X is engineered for the best players who want outstanding distance, workability and spin so they can experience their best performance from tee-to-green.

Lee's victory at the Fields Ranch East course at PGA Frisco in Frisco, Texas was the fourth major victory for the brand's Chrome Tour Golf

Ball lineup – Xander Schauffele earned two major wins in 2024 with a Chrome Tour, and Yuka Saso won the 2024 U.S Women's Open with a Chrome Tour X.

Lee's driver is the Elyte standard model featuring Callaway's most advanced face to date, the new Ai 10x, which is designed to produce exceptionally fast ball speeds across the face.

A new refined shape provides enhanced aerodynamics for elite speed throughout the entire golf swing. This improved shape is designed to maximise swing speed with improved forgiveness, while an all-new aerospace grade Thermoforged Carbon crown enables fast head speeds while optimising high launch and low spin.

Lee enjoyed a strong week off the tee in Frisco, averaging more than 260 yards per drive in the windy conditions.

One of the key additions to Minjee's bag in 2025 is her Odyssey Ai-ONE Square 2 Square Broomstick #7 Putter, which has helped improve her performance on the greens, particularly from inside 15 feet.

Her gamer is engineered with a modern centre-shafted design, which makes the putter stroke balanced to stay square throughout a golfer's stroke. It is ideally suited for players who are looking to minimise their face rotation when they putt and includes Callaway's Ai-ONE insert for more consistent ball speeds across the face.

Minjee joined her brother and fellow Callaway staffer Min Woo Lee in the winner's circle for 2025; Min Woo won the Texas Children's Houston Open earlier this year with an Elyte Triple Diamond Driver, Odyssey Putter and a Chrome Tour X Ball. ●

MINJEE LEE'S WITB: 2025 WOMEN'S PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

- Elyte Driver (10.5°) – Diamana WB 53R Shaft
- Elyte Fairway Wood (16.5°) – Ventus Red 6R Shaft
- Elyte Fairway Wood (21°) – Ventus Red 6R Shaft
- X-Forged Irons (5-PW) – Aerotech Steelfiber i80 Stiff Shafts
- Opus Wedges (52°, 56°, 60°) – Nippon 950 Regular Shafts
- Odyssey Ai-ONE Square 2 Square Broomstick #7 Putter
- Chrome Tour X Golf Ball



“RORY MCILROY MIGHT DOMINATE THE HEADLINES, BUT PORTRUSH WILL STEAL THE SHOW.”

Rory McIlroy arrives at Royal Portrush as the reigning Masters champion and Northern Ireland's favourite son. However, as soon as patrons step onto the Dunluce Links, they'll realise the real star of the show is the course itself.

Harry Colt sculpted these dunes in the 1930s, and Mackenzie and Ebert have since fine-tuned them – adding two dramatic new holes and repositioning bunkers, further confirming Portrush truly belongs on golf's grandest stage.

This year's Open Championship will be a clash of star power versus stage presence, and for my money, those towering dunes and wild fairways always steal the limelight.

Royal Portrush is one of the best links tests on Earth. Every hole feels epic – from the cliffside vistas off the 5th (White Rocks), to the devilish twist of the uphill 16th, or “Calamity Corner.” The course demands absolutely everything from a player.

Those Colt-style greens are at once artful and brutal, with false fronts and hidden tiers set amid fairways which twist and fade through towering sandhills. You can't muscle your way around Portrush; even the very best get humbled by swirling sea breezes and savage bunkers. It's strategy wrapped in sand.

I'll never forget 2019, when Shane Lowry walked into that Irish sea of fans carrying him to victory. His final day at Portrush was sporting triumph with a splash of block party. From the 16th green to the 18th tee, that wild crowd surged around him, roaring “Ole, Ole, Ole” in the mist.

Portrush felt electric that week; every fairway and bunker seemed to cheer on the home hero.

It was a reminder that this course doesn't just host champions; it inspires them. To win at Portrush among your own people? That was pure poetry. Since that night, the club hasn't tinkered much with the magic

– they've simply sharpened it. You'll see a new back tee on the 4th hole, stretching the famed “Cow's Nose” into a 500-yard monster, while Calamity Corner has been nudged so that it truly lives up to its name.

The par-5 7th green was rebuilt into more Colt-like contours, and here or there, a bunker lip has been raised. All told, Portrush's historic skeleton remains intact, just buffed and polished into a meaner, leaner version of the same beautiful beast – and ready to bite.

Let the buzz begin. Rory McIlroy might dominate the headlines, but Portrush will steal the show. The Dunluce Links is a theatre of turf and sky, its dunes and fairways writing the script for July.

I can't wait to see how the next chapter unfolds. The green jacket is just the prologue. Northern Ireland's wild west coast is primed for another unforgettable week, and if Portrush has anything to say about it, we're all in for a show. ●



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ONE LOOK SAYS IT ALL.

ENGINEERED FOR DISTANCE. At first glance, there's a lot to like about the new G440 irons, mainly the premium, players-style design. But that's just the beginning of what sets them apart. The thinner, more flexible face – backed by the next generation of PurFlex technology – combines with a lower CG to deliver faster ball speeds and the forgiveness you need to hit shots that fly farther and stop closer to the hole. All designed to make you look even better.



PREMIUM PERFORMANCE

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THINNER, SHALLOWER FACE

Face-height reduction helps lower the CG and thin the face for more flexing to increase ball speed and ensure forgiveness.



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