

Approach Zone Tip  
 Don't "Hit Down on the Ball"

There are many areas where I take issue with common instructional tips, but the thought behind "Hit Down on the Ball" is near the top of the list. If you look at the players on tour hitting divots and hear announcers declaring how they are hitting down, it is easy to see how this whole issue has been brought forward.

The problem is how golfers "interpret" the information. There are many moves in a professional swing that allow players to take a divot, but the main thing we should note is that they take a divot with the clubhead coming into the ball "On Plane." As you can see in the photos, my body is rotating ahead of the clubhead with the club coming on a path that was established at my address position. With the club behind the body and on plane a tour player will

reach impact with the right arm still bent and under his left arm. As the tour player is applying power "through the ball" the right arm extends and the club will take a slight divot.

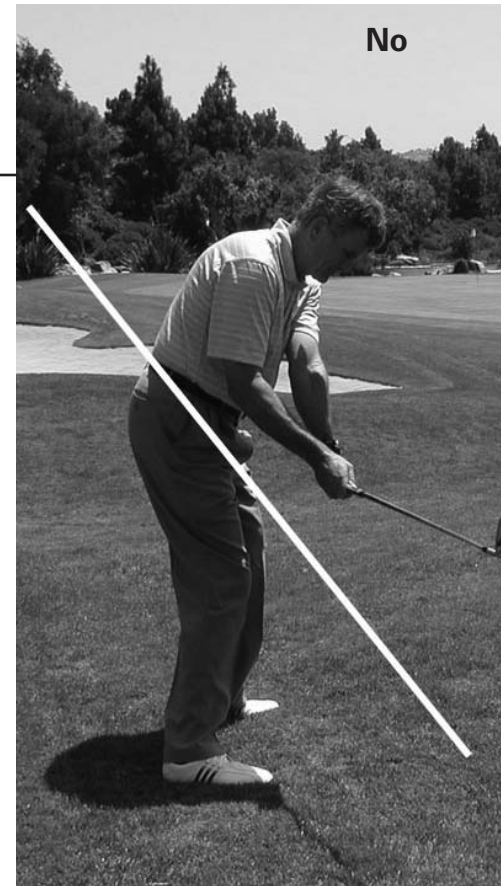
You'll hear that 70 percent of amateurs hit the ball with cut or slice spin, and I believe that figure is correct. The main culprit is that the amateur swings the club from a more outside-in swing path. This outside-in path is usually caused by the upper body, mostly the hands and arms, starting down to the ball too quickly, producing a path that is now above swing plane. If you look at the photos you can now note that a club coming into the ball from above swing plane is on a more descending approach angle than the club coming into the ball from on plane.

So my question is, if 70 percent of golfers are coming into the ball from the outside, aren't 70 percent of golfers swinging into the ball with

too much descent or downward angle of the club relative to the ball? I know from playing ping-pong and tennis, when you swing into the ball with a descending racket or paddle; you produce cut spin, which is **not** powerful. So the blanket statement for the all golfers to hit down on the ball cannot be good, because they will try to hit more from the outside.

Most top players will tell you that the goal is to deliver a blow into the "back" of the ball by creating a more shallow approach, not a more descending approach. The "divot" is overrated, and you have to know how to take a divot as a result of a proper swing. Trying to take a divot thinking that is going to produce a good swing generally leads to slices and swing problems.

*Kip Puterbaugh is Director of the Aviara Golf Academy in Carlsbad, Calif.*



# OUT OF THE ROUGH®

Athlon Sports

GOLF NEWSLETTER

## PGA TOUR NOTES

July 27, 2007

### Major Ramifications

The recipe for a great major is typically a duel between two well-known golfers ending with some dramatic play. And that's what the golf world got on Sunday. But who could have predicted the bizarre finish to the British Open? Furthermore, what the result will mean for the parties involved?

First, the champion. Padraig Harrington, long known as a very talented golfer with closure issues, looked as if he gave away another chance at a major by hitting not one, but two shots on the 72nd hole into the Barry Burn. But his double bogey got him into a playoff, and he eventually sank a three-foot bogey putt on the fourth playoff hole to win the claret jug. Before Sunday, Harrington had never finished better than fifth in a major and quietly earned a reputation as a guy who got too nervous to win the big ones. So you can imagine what another loss, especially the way he played 18 in regulation, would have done to his confidence.

"Now, if Sergio (Garcia) parred the last (in regulation) and I did lose, I think I would have struggled to come back out and be a competitive golfer," Harrington said. "It meant that much to me. But I never let it sink into me that I had just thrown away the Open championship."

Now that Harrington has broken through, it seems very realistic to think he can do it again. Harrington might soon be known as the best golfer ever to hail from Ireland. Actually, he became the first Irishman in 60 years with his name on the Claret Jug, ending Europe's eight-year drought in the majors. The victory moved him up to No. 6 in the world golf rankings.

As for his opponent in the duel, the future isn't quite as clear, nor as bright. Granted, at age 27, Garcia still has a long way to go before he can be written off as one of the most talented golfers to never win a major. But it's going to be interesting to see how he responds.

Garcia came into the event with a reputation (and statistics to prove it) of imploding on Sundays. His final-round, two-over-par 73 on verified it. While he putted and played great for three rounds in this tournament, he was still the same old Sergio down the stretch. Garcia had as much as a four-shot lead on the front nine but could not make the putts he needed to make on the back.

"You know what's the saddest thing about it? It's not the first time. It's not the first time, unfortunately," Garcia said of his ego-crushing loss. "I

don't know. I'm playing against a lot of guys out there, more than the field."

Ghosts? Demons? Whatever supernatural forces Garcia was referring to, it's clear that he somehow feels wronged when he loses the big ones. And because of that mindset, you have to wonder whether he will ever get out of his own way.

"It's tough, mainly because I don't feel like I did anything wrong. I didn't miss a shot in the playoff and hit unbelievable putts. But they just didn't go in."

— Sergio Garcia, after his disappointing British Open loss.

... and you can quote me  
"I never let myself feel like I'd  
lost the Open Championship as I  
sat watching."

— Padraig Harrington, on waiting for Sergio Garcia to finish after a final-hole double bogey cost him his one-shot lead

So what is he thinking? One comment he made after Sunday's round was particularly revealing. Garcia might have a sense of entitlement that could be doing him more harm than good when it comes to winning majors.

"It's tough, mainly because I don't feel like I did do anything wrong. I didn't miss a shot in the playoff and hit unbelievable putts. But they just didn't go in. I don't know how I manage to do these things. It seems to me like every time I get in this kind of position, I have no room for error. And I rarely get many good breaks."

Uh, Sergio? It's called golf. In this sport, you don't expect good things to happen. You have to make them happen. Ask Harrington.

### The List

The all-time best movies where golf makes a memorable cameo:

1. *Goldfinger*. James Bond outsmarts Goldfinger, and we get to see Sean Connery's impressive golf swing.
2. *Sideways*. The time-honored tradition of hitting a ball back at a group that just hit into your group is depicted in this movie about wine and love.
3. *Swingers*. One memorable scene showing just how bad muni golfers can be.
4. *Something About Mary*. How can you not love watching Cameron Diaz pound balls at an aqua range in South Florida?
5. *Rising Sun*. Another Connery appearance playing high-stakes matches against a golf-loving Japanese CEO. But this time he looks ready for the Champions Tour.

# PGA Championship Preview

August 9-12 • Southern Hills Country Club • Tulsa, Oklahoma

## Southern Hills Starts Sprint to Season's Finish Line

The PGA Championship returns to a familiar venue amid unfamiliar circumstances. Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, Okla., will host the championship for the fourth time, making it the venue with the most PGAs in the tournament's history.

But for the top players in the world, their frame of mind for the year's final major championship ought to be interesting. Chances are, they won't treat the tournament any differently. It is a major, one of the most cherished of titles.

And yet, with the new FedExCup schedule as part of the PGA Tour, the PGA Championship also kicks off a mad dash to the end of the season. A victory in a major will solidify a player's resume far more than winning the FedEx Cup, but the fact remains that just two weeks after the PGA, a four-tournament playoff format commences.

Instead of nearly three months of golf left, the official season — save for several fall events — will conclude just a month after the PGA.

"I think with these drawn-out seasons, you lose people sometimes, and that's why I think shortening the season, even if it's just by one month, is going to help a lot of things," said Arron Oberholser. "You're going to get more of the top players playing more often, in my opinion."

The problem is, they'll be playing a lot — maybe too much? — at the end of the year. If a player elects to play in the WGC, the PGA and the four playoff events, that is six tournaments in seven weeks. Extend it back to the British Open, and he's looking at seven out of nine to end the season.

That's a lot of golf.

## HISTORYCorner ↘

July 21, 1979

The recent retirement of Seve Ballesteros from competitive golf brings to mind the days when he was a swashbuckling youngster taking the game by storm. He burst onto the scene in 1974, when he turned pro as a 16-year-old, but his major breakthrough came five years later, at the Open Championship Royal Lytham & St. Annes.

Spraying balls all over the venerable layout, Seve managed to coax a 1-under par 70 out of his final round, good for the first of his five major championships. He famously made birdie from an adjoining parking lot, adding to his growing legend. About Ballesteros, Ben Crenshaw once said, "Seve plays shots I don't even see in my dreams."

## Contenders

• **Tiger Woods** is the defending PGA Champion, although he "struggled" at Southern Hills in 2001 when he was going for his fifth straight major. Woods tied for 12th. He needs this to avoid his first "0-fer" in majors since 2004.

• Can 44-year-old **Vijay Singh** make another run at a major? Why not? He has two wins this year, and he won his third major at the PGA in 2004.

• We predicted two years ago that **Adam Scott** would enjoy his major breakthrough at the PGA, as so many great players have done before him, players like Nick Price, Vijay Singh, David Toms and others. We may have been two years early. Scott finished tied for third in 2006. Even though his 2007 season has run hot and cold, watch out for him.

• Perhaps Southern Hills is the place for hard-luck British Open runner-up **Sergio Garcia** to break through. He contended here at the 2001 U.S. Open and also at last year's PGA.

• **K.J. Choi** would become the first Asian player to win a major championship, and the South Korean tied for seventh last year.

• **Phil Mickelson** has won a major championship in three straight years and will need the PGA to keep the streak going. After a sensational run in April and May, a wrist injury has seemed to derail Mickelson's season.

• **Retief Goosen** has already won a major at Southern Hills, the 2001 U.S. Open. He's overdue for another.

## Athlon's Pick

This is far from a reach, but the winner of the next big event on the golf schedule, the Bridgestone Invitational, will be Tiger Woods. Not only did he win last year, but Woods is due to rebound after a less-than-stellar performance at the British Open. In the last event before the PGA Championship, you can bet Woods will be on his game. A darkhorse pick

## LESSON TEE

A lot of attention is paid to the various putting grips golfers use (conventional, cross-handed, the claw, etc.) when discussing how to become a better putter. But perhaps more important than how you hold the club is how hard you hold it. Not only should the grip pressure be light, to ensure the club strokes through the ball, it should remain constant.

Too many golfers squeeze hard as the putterhead makes contact with the ball. This change in grip pressure can change the position of the clubface enough to push or pull putts offline. So focus on gripping the putter lightly and maintaining that relaxed feeling as you make a putting stroke.



You can play your best golf in 2007. Applying the best instruction from eight of the best teachers in the world is a nice place to begin. Athlon Sports has assembled one of the finest faculties in the game to help you get the most out of your game in '07. Visit [athlonsports.com](http://athlonsports.com) throughout 2007 for more instruction content from these great teachers.

## OUR FACULTY



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- Recognized by *Golf Digest* as one of America's 50 Greatest Teachers and the top teacher in Tennessee
- Students include 2001 PGA Champion David Toms, Loren Roberts

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# Where to Play

## Spring Creek Ranch

### A Truly Unique Experience in a Traditional Southern Setting

Several years ago word began to spread of a high-end, private golf course development that would be built in the eastern part of Shelby County, Tennessee, just outside Memphis in the small, yet rapidly developing community called Collierville. There were rumors that Jack Nicklaus might be involved in the project and that once completed, the golf course and its related facilities would stand as one of the finest the game had to offer, not only in the Mid-South, but in the entire country. That rumor became a reality with the opening of Spring Creek Ranch in late 1999.

Spring Creek boasts a championship golf course that will certainly test the finest players in the world while still providing members and their guests a uniquely enjoyable experience from any of the forward sets of tee boxes.

A recent addition to the Spring Creek Ranch staff is *Golf Digest* Top 50 Instructor Rob Akins who was named Director of Instruction in 2006. Akins has a reputation as one of the finest teachers in the game and helped guide PGA TOUR star David Toms to his first major win at the 2001 PGA Championship.

"I am very excited about being a part of the Spring Creek Ranch family," said Akins. "They are just as committed to their instruction facilities as every other aspect of the development. We have a vision for creating one of the finest training and testing facilities in the country, one that will serve as a standard of excellence in the game of golf."

Akins, who co-authored the book *Golf's Red Zone Challenge*, commented on the enhancements to Spring Creek Ranch's practice facilities that were completed during the recent renovation project and looks forward to the development of The Golf Academy.

"We truly have a world-class practice facility that will allow us to help golfers of all abilities," he stated. "And once construction of The Golf Academy is complete I believe we will have achieved our goal of developing one of the finest teaching and training facilities the game has to offer."

Understated excellence with an emphasis on the natural surroundings, unparalleled service without being pretentious and a uniqueness that can only come from a dedication to an inspired vision define what this facility is all about.

[www.springcreekranch.org](http://www.springcreekranch.org)



## Athlon Sports Destinations

- Alabama — [800alabama.com](http://800alabama.com)
- Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail — [rtjgolf.com](http://rtjgolf.com)
- Cornerstone, Colorado — [cornerstonecolorado.com](http://cornerstonecolorado.com)
- Play Florida Golf — [playfla.com](http://playfla.com)
- Canyon Ridge, Georgia — [canyonridgeclub.com](http://canyonridgeclub.com)
- Stone Mountain & The Frog at the Georgian — [www.marriottgolfatlanta.com](http://www.marriottgolfatlanta.com)
- Reynolds Plantation — [www.reynoldsplantation.com](http://www.reynoldsplantation.com)
- Brunswick & The Golden Isles — [bgicvb.com](http://bgicvb.com)
- Spring Creek Ranch, Tennessee — [springcreekranch.org](http://springcreekranch.org)

## RULES OF THE GAME

The winds never really kicked up at the British Open, but in the past, they have played havoc with golfers, particularly on the putting greens. So what happens when you stand over a putt and the wind moves it? It depends on whether you have addressed the ball or not.

Addressing a ball on the green means:

1. Taking your stance.
2. Grounding the club.

If you do both those things, then you have addressed the ball. And if the ball moves at that point, then the golfer is required to take a stroke penalty and move the ball back to its original position.

But if it moves and you haven't addressed it, then you should play it from its new position. And yes, that means if the wind were to roll it into the hole, it wouldn't count as an extra stroke. So you might want to hover your putter slightly above the ground on windy days.



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- Recognized by *Golf Digest* as a Top 50 Teacher in America
- Has spent 20 years as head instructor of *Golf Digest* Schools, teaching at Chateau Elan for the last 10
- Student of the late Davis Love, Jr. 770-596-2213



**Kip Puterbaugh**  
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