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A LESSON LEARNED

COME BACK EACH MONDAY FOR EXPERT PGA ANALYSIS ON THE WEEK'S PGA TOUR EVENT



A LESSON LEARNED: WGC-ACCENTURE MATCH PLAY CHAMPIONSHIP

By Trent Wearer, PGA - PGA.com

March 2, 2009 -- The first event of this year's World Golf Championships is now behind us. An always exciting match play format that brings out some go-for-broke shots that we typically wouldn't see at regular stroke play events played most weeks on tour. It goes without saying that seeing Tiger back playing golf again is exciting. It's more than exciting, it's exhilarating. There's no doubt that advertisers, sponsors and the television networks were pumped up for his return.

But it didn't last long and Tiger wasn't the only unexpected top player who was ousted early. Matter of a fact, Tiger was the only major championship winner from 2008 who made it to the second round. Pdraig Harrington, who won last year's British Open and PGA Championship, was upset in round one by Pat Perez. Trevor Immelman, who took last year's first major of the year, The Masters, was also upset in round one by Japan's Shingo Katayama.



Geoff Ogilvy's magic around the greens were critical to his second career win at the WGC-Accenture Match Play Championship. (Photo: Getty Images)

There are always some exciting moments however in match play. It's one on one. Not everyone in the field plays each other like in stroke play. Each player focuses on the play of their opponent at the time. You can make a ten on a hole and still only be down one hole because of it. As you may recall, it was in this exact tournament last year that Tiger started off the first hole of his first match by ripping it out-of-bounds. He still went on win all of his matches and was crowned the champion. This year however, it was a drive by Tiger late in his match against Tim Clark that pretty much sealed his own fate as he lost a drive OB right on the 15th hole.

It was great though to see Ernie Els playing well and back into the scene. Veteran tour players and friends Davis Love III and Justin Leonard dueled it out for a 1 up victory in favor of Leonard. It was also great to see more play from the teenage sensation, Rory McIlroy. And while I personally was hoping for a Tiger -- Rory match, it was Tim Clark who took down Tiger and then Rory stole Tim Clark's fame by beating him 4 & 3. The youngster was then handed a loss by eventual winner of the championship, Geoff Ogilvy

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Watching the match play event this week, it was evident how undulated the greens are at the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club. You didn't need HD television to see the difficulties the greens posed to these players. The greens not only kept a lot of makeable putts out of the hole but it made their approach shots extremely tricky. Awkward bounces made for a plethora of short game opportunities. Tour players, who usually knock pitches and chips within the leather, found themselves with some testers to finish out their hole. The severe slopes on the

greens can unexpectedly slow or speed up the ball on chips and pitches if not planned and executed well. The undulation also produces a dryer and harder surface at the top and a slower surface in the swales. While these guys can typically hit their landing spot with amazing consistency, the slopes make it vital that their trajectory, distance and even spin be right on. Here is a routine you can apply to your thought process before you hit a shot from off of the green that will help choose the most beneficial landing area:

Step #1: Begin by asking yourself, "If I were to hit 10 shots from here, what would be my average distance away from the hole?" If for the shot at hand you think 10 feet away would be your typical average then begin to ask yourself from which side/s of the hole would be the most beneficial 10-foot putt and plan to hit the shot there.

Step #2: Before you pick a club, you have to read the terrain of the green in an effort to find the most generous landing area. The chosen landing spot needs to be in an area so that if you miss the ideal spot slightly, your shot will still end up acceptable. To do this, you need to look to land the ball in an area that is of similar terrain. It can be flat, or on an upslope or on a downslope but you want to stay away from landing it on the crest of a hill as missing it slightly will result in an unexpected initial bounce and amount of roll.

Step #3: Then pick the club and trajectory (even spin for the advanced player) that accompanies that landing area. This of course means that you have to have a variety of shots in your bag. You need to learn to use different clubs and/or alter your setup and swing motion to get the ball to travel different heights. You've got to be versatile around the greens and have good feel. To aid in your learning, below are some setup factors to help you control the height of these shots.

Low Shots: position the ball toward the back of your stance, weight favoring the foot closest to the target, hands forward pressed a bit to de-loft the club.

Medium Height Shots: ball middle, weight evenly distributed between your feet, hands positioned just slightly toward the target side of your belt buckle.

Higher Shots: ball forward, open clubface, weight evenly distributed or slightly toward the back foot, hands positioned so the shaft is vertical.



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