



PGA

A LESSON LEARNED

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



A LESSON LEARNED: BUICK INVITATIONAL

By Trent Wearer, PGA Professional- PGA.com

The veteran play of Charles Howell III and Tiger Woods rose to the top, while the mix of some rookies and less than familiar names at this week's Buick Invitational. But Buick, Tiger and Torrey Pines are becoming synonymous with the word "win."

Howell was really the only player that had a legitimate chance at the end to threaten Tiger's dominance in the tournament, as the rookies and players somewhat new to the glare and pressure of final round leads, faded down the stretch, but he also fell trap to a golf malady that seems to affect everyone but Tiger.

When you evaluate the play of Woods in the last round, there weren't any shots that'll make his lifetime highlight reel. He didn't need to be spectacular, he needed to be steady. And he was. It was steady play, solid thinking and committed execution that propelled him to his third straight Buick Invitational title, fifth-overall Buick Invitational win and one more win on that streak of seven PGA TOUR wins in a row.

But the story might not be how Tiger won the tournament, but maybe how he didn't lose it. He stayed smart and consistent, while the others made a few critical mistakes. Tiger makes fewer errors, mental or physical, than anyone else and the end result -- in this week's tournament and many others -- is that Tiger holds the trophy. If the scoreboard could talk back, it would tell of the two or three important missteps of those below Tiger's name on the final leaderboard.

But certainly, there is a lesson to be learned by watching those shots and decisions. It may have cost some players a chance at upending the top player in the world, but it may gain you valuable insight that can help your game when you are in a similar circumstance.

For example, on the par-5 13th hole, Andrew Buckle had a flop shot from just ten paces off of the green to an uphill green with the pin cut tight. Instead of hitting the shot safely to the middle of the green -- to a landing spot where the ball would likely roll just a few feet past the hole for a relatively easy birdie attempt -- he tried to get cute with the shot by landing it just barely on the green and hoped it would roll to the hole.

His shot ended up not even making it on to the putting surface, and thus, had to chip it before he could attempt to putt it in. This choice of a landing spot ultimately cost him a stroke on a birdieable par 5 when he was only one shot off the lead at the time; and on a hole where both Woods and Howell had made birdies.

In fact, on the hole prior, he made a similar decision and walked away from the par-4 12th with a double-bogey 6. In that instance, while in the bunker, he again short-sided himself and tried to get too cute. Instead of hitting it at the hole and letting it roll past the cup (the safe play), his pressing cost him -- as the ball barely escaped the trap and got caught in the grassy slope between the green and bunker.

So there are two lessons to be learned from watching Andrew Buckle -- who overall had a great performance in this tournament -- on those two holes.

The first is that you should choose a target on your approach shot that doesn't leave you on the short side of the pin. Aim for the more open part of the green or the part that allows for an easier up-and-down attempt. Wisely choosing beneficial targets allows for easier next shots and therefore more room for error. After all, the game is about mis-hits, so choosing strategic targets that are easier to find allows for those misses without as severe a penalty for error.

The second, when you are faced with an up-and-down attempt with a pin that is tucked close to the edge of the green, you should play it past the hole on the initial shot. Just on the two holes where Buckle buckled, those shots cost him a total of three strokes. Take note that even after three more bogies in a row on holes 15, 16 and 17, he only trailed Tiger by four shots when the tournament concluded.

Charles Howell III made a stumble down the stretch as well. On the 17th hole, Tiger and Charles both found the fairway with their tee shots. Left with 159 yards, Howell attempted to hit a 9-iron while Tiger hit his 9-iron from 145. Tiger's approach ended within three feet of the hole and Charles' approach ended some 40 feet short of the hole. He did well to convert the long two-putt, but pretty much took birdie out of the equation. Tiger went on to birdie the hole and took a two-shot lead with just one hole left.

As you may have heard the announcers say, when Howell is between clubs he prefers to hit the shorter club harder. This hurts him and can hurt you in a couple of ways. First of all, it is difficult to control the ball when you swing harder. When a person does this, often one part of the body swings harder while other parts of the body are already maxed out on speed. Thus, those parts can't catch up -- or keep up -- with the area of the body that is now moving faster. The result is often an errant shot.

The other way this can hurt you is that the ball spins more when you swing harder. And when it spins more, it tails up into the air and then falls quicker, and you get negligible added distance -- which is what happened to Howell's ball. Howell, and perhaps you, would benefit greatly from learning to hit these shots with more club and slowing down the entire body as you regularly see Tiger do.



Trent Wearer is part owner of -- and teaches at -- the Meridian Golf Learning Center in Denver, Colorado. Trent has authored a number of published articles as well as the new and popular book Golf Scrimmages. He was named the Colorado PGA Teacher of the Year in 2004. Golf Magazine rates him as one of the Top Teachers in the Southwestern U.S. and Golf Digest has ranked him as one of the Best Teachers in State. He can be reached at 720-234-4653, at trent@trentwearergolf.com or through his website www.TrentWearerGolf.com.

