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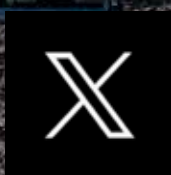
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**VISIT ING IN ROOM 312B
IN THE MEDIA CENTER**

Q4 / 2023

PLUS: ING MEDIA AWARDS AND INDUSTRY HONORS

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See You In Orlando!

ING Returns To PGA Show To Celebrate 30 Years Of Media And Business Awards

The International Network Of Golf returns to the annual PGA Show next month with a full slate of activities for ClubING, the ING Hospitality Room.

Included on the schedule is the celebration of the 30th Anniversary of two of our awards programs – the ING Media Awards and the ING Industry Honors.

Winners and Outstanding Achievers in a dozen categories will be announced and honored at the ING Media Awards Presentation Press Conference on Wednesday, January 24 at 12:30 pm in Room 312-A, next door to ClubING (312-B). Over 200 entries are being evaluated by a panel of three judges in each category, with results being announced at the press conference. Sponsors include PGA Show, American Fit apparel company, CertiFresh Cigar and Zero Friction.

ING has re-formatted the 30th Annual ING Industry Honors to mirror the ING Media Awards. Starting this year, the awards will recognize outstanding achievement by ING members and member companies only. Prior to this year, the awards program was open to anyone in the golf industry.

Nominees will be recognized and winners announced at the ING Industry Honors Press Conference Presentation on Thursday, January 25 at 12:30 pm in Room 312-A. As with the ING Media Awards, the PGA Show will sponsor cookies and treats following the presentation.

ING will also host a Media Reception on Thursday at 4:30pm, sponsored by Zero Friction. Details to come.

ClubING features plenty of space for meetings, product displays or simply relaxing, and connects to Room 312A for its awards presentations. PGA Show



attendees are welcome to visit ClubING to learn more about the networking organization.



SHOW

THE PGA SHOW WINTER JAM

AN AFTER-HOURS CONCERT EXPERIENCE FEATURING



JAKE OWEN

HAPPY HOUR WITH ING

ClubING To Host Pre-Concert Media Party On Thursday

The International Network of Golf will host a Media Happy Hour on Thursday, Jan. 25 in ClubING (312-B) prior to the Jake Owens concert, which will take place on the PGA Show floor starting at 6 pm. The ING Media Happy Hour will be sponsored by Zero Friction, and will start at 4:30 pm.

Zero Friction President John Iacono will do a brief presentation on the company's sensational new product, STRIDE, an all-in-one electric bag trolley with remote and follow-me technology. The Zero Friction STRIDE is the first of its kind in the golf bag/trolley category, like having your own personal caddy on the course.

The ING Media Happy Hour will be open to ING members and all media covering the PGA Show.

Winners in the two-day ING Raffle Contest will be announced at the Media Happy Hour as well.

Zero Friction is known industry wide for being

on the cutting edge when it comes to introducing new products to players and creative packaging for its retail partners. Zero Friction provides high-quality, technologically advanced products for golfers worldwide, including gloves, performance golf tees, balls and accessories. Zero

Friction will displaying all of its products in Booth 2063 during the PGA Show.



SCHEDULE – CLUB ING (Room 312-B)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24

8 am	Room Opens
All Day	Product Displays, Raffle Tickets
12:30 pm	ING Media Awards Presentation
3 pm	Mid-Afternoon Snacks

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25

8 am	Room Opens
All Day	Product Displays, Raffle Tickets
12:30 pm	ING Industry Honors Presentation
3 pm	Mid-Afternoon Snacks
4:30 pm	ING Pre-Concert Media Happy Hour
5:00 pm	Zero Friction Presentation
5:30 pm	Raffle Drawing

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26

8 am	Room Opens
Noon	Room Closes

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*Reprinted from Chicago
District Golfer Magazine*

Defying Predictions, Golf Surge Endures

The end of the pandemic was supposed to mean the end of the golf boom. It didn't.

BY ED SHERMAN

Photographs by Charles Cherney

It was a Wednesday afternoon in September, and Ron Cassidy's phone wouldn't stop ringing. "Excuse me," said the director of golf at Glenview Park Golf Club. Cassidy returned a moment later. "Sorry about that," Cassidy said. "It's been like this all day. This is the middle of September. Usually, things start quieting down by now. But you would think we were in the middle of June."

Not that Cassidy is complaining about his phone humming with potential business. In a very pleasant, if not remarkable development, golf course operators in the Chicago District and throughout the U.S. continued to see golfers flock to their facilities in 2023 in strong numbers, even though life has mostly returned to normal in the aftermath of COVID-19.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, shutting down virtually everything in the country, people turned to golf as an activity they could enjoy outside as an escape from COVID-19.

Initially, it was expected to be a one-time jolt for golf, with numbers regressing when COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. But that hasn't been the case.



“The expectation in the industry was that when people went back to having family gatherings, graduations, going to restaurants and ballgames, we would naturally see a regression back to what it was in prior eras,” said Ed Stevenson, Director of Golf Operations at Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. “If anything, the opposite happened.”

Nationally, golf rounds were 16% ahead of the three-year pre-pandemic (2017–2019) average through mid-summer, according to research compiled by the National Golf Foundation (NGF). Thanks in part to better spring weather, the NGF reports Chicago-area golf play was up 16% from 2022 enter-

ing August. The NGF expects those trends to continue when the final tallies are made for 2023.

Additionally, the Chicago District Golf Association (CDGA) saw a record growth in membership, eclipsing 106,000 individual members compared to plateauing at roughly 80,000 pre-pandemic.

Local golf course operators don’t need to wait to see the numbers. They can see what is going on with full tee sheets virtually seven days a week.

“Sometimes, it feels like every day is a Saturday,” Cassidy said.

Here are the factors that have golf booming:

Rediscovering the game: A funny thing happened when golfers who hadn’t played regularly in years retreated to courses as one of the few entertainment options available during the early days of COVID-19- they remembered golf is fun.

“I think during COVID, people truly resumed their connection with things that mattered for quality of life, such as time spent outside, and being able to play with friends or play with your family,” said Katherine Jemsek, the president of Jemsek Golf, whose portfolio includes the four-course Cog Hill complex in southwest suburban Lemont. “They realized that golf is one of the best ways that you can spend time outside and be with your friends and family.”

Once those golfers came out again, they continued to come back. Again, and again. This year, KemperSports, which owns and operates more than 140 courses throughout the U.S., including 17 in the Chicago District, did a survey of 16,000 golfers. The data showed 89% of golfers played the same amount of golf in 2022 as they did during the height of the pandemic in 2020, with 78% tallying more than 16 rounds per year.

Four golfers putt out on the 16th hole on Course 3 at Cog Hill Golf & Country Club in Lemont. Golf’s popularity among diverse demographic groups has continued post-pandemic.





Katherine Jemsek, president of Jemsek Golf, says a large number of women took up golf during the pandemic and have continued to play both with their spouses and with one another.

“That number truly is telling about the state of the industry,” said KemperSports CEO Steve Skinner. “It shows the growth in the game.”

Home work: There is no question that the shift from people trekking to offices five days a week to working more remotely from home has been huge for golf. With more flexibility in their schedules, people can carve out time in their day to play.

The numbers are particularly dramatic for mid- to late-afternoon play. A *New York Times* story reported on a 2023 study by Stanford University. Using geolocation data near golf courses in the United States, the study found there was 278% more people playing golf at 4 p.m. on a Wednesday in August 2022 than in August 2019.

“We are seeing a lot more people for those [3-4 p.m.] tee times,” Skinner said.

“The people who don't have to commute downtown now can run out and play a round late in the day. That is making the game available to even more players.”

New players: Being the only game in town during the pandemic also attracted a significant number of first-time players among women and millennials in the age 18-34 demographic, two important categories in growing the game. According to the NGF, 25% of female golfers were new to the sport in 2020 and tried it for the first time because of the pandemic. Millennials accounted for 27% of new golfers.

Jemsek is thrilled to see more women becoming regular players.

“We have seen more women playing in foursomes and in events,” Jemsek said. “During COVID, we saw women playing with their spouses. That got them into the game. We still see that, with couples playing together.”

It is personal to Skinner when it comes to young players taking up the game.

“When my son Jack was growing up, he played every other sport but golf,” Skinner said. “He started playing during COVID because it was the only place



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“We are seeing a lot more people for those [3-4 p.m.] tee times. The people who don’t have to commute downtown now can **run out and play a round late in the day. That is making the game available to even more players.”**

—KemperSports CEO Steve Skinner

where you could be outside and be with your friends. Now he’s a golfer. He and his friends now go on golf trips together.”

As president of the Illinois Junior Golf Association, Stevenson has seen strong increased interest among younger players. That bodes well for golf’s pipeline.

“In the social media era, golf has become cool,” Stevenson said. “With the kids seeing (big-name) athletes playing the sport, and the apparel and other things, golf has a much cooler persona and vibe than it did previously.”

The future: The last time golf enjoyed a boom was in the mid-to-late 1990s. The arrival of Tiger Woods as a transcendent star sparked a big spike in play.

And for the most part, golf took it for granted.

“In many ways, golf acted like a nightclub that was hot, where they increase the cover charge and a two- or three-drink minimum, and they made it feel like you were lucky to be there,” Stevenson said.

“We stopped trying,” Jemsek said. “We just figured the demand would always be there.”

Golf paid the price when the economy went bad in the 2000s, and play declined significantly. Operators know they can’t make the same mistake with this boom.

To that end, golf is making adjustments. For instance, this isn’t their father’s game for younger players. Glenview Park Golf Club and KemperSports’ Glen Club in Glenview now have carts with Bluetooth speakers to accommodate millennials who want to hear music while

they play.

“You have to find different ways to make it appealing to them,” Cassidy said.

Since golf is hard, Skinner says it is incumbent to boost instruction so new players, and even current ones, can better enjoy the game. Stevenson also points to continuing to develop and enhance junior programs to keep that pipeline growing.

Golf also is becoming more than about playing. Jemsek says for many players it is about “the total experience.” Activities such as “Nine and Dine” where couples play nine holes and then stay at the facility for dinner have become increasingly popular.

The bottom line, Jemsek says, is that golf can’t become “complacent.”

“We’re spending a lot of time and energy on ‘How do we appeal to these new golfers? How do we make it welcoming to everyone?’” Skinner said. “We have to keep being innovative to find ways to keep them coming back.” ■

A former golf writer at the *Chicago Tribune*, **Ed Sherman** is a frequent contributor to *Chicago District Golfer*.

VISIT US

In Room 312B in the Media Center

ING MEDIA AWARDS - Rm. 312A - 12:30 p.m. - Wed., Jan. 24

ING INDUSTRY HONORS - Rm. 312A - 12:30 p.m. - Thurs., Jan. 25



AN AMERICAN FIT

ING's New Apparel Partner Has Long History In The Golf Industry

American Fit™ may be a new name in the Golf Apparel industry, but it is certainly not new to designing men's and women's golf apparel as it has long been associated with some of the most major of golf apparel brands as their private label manufacturer.

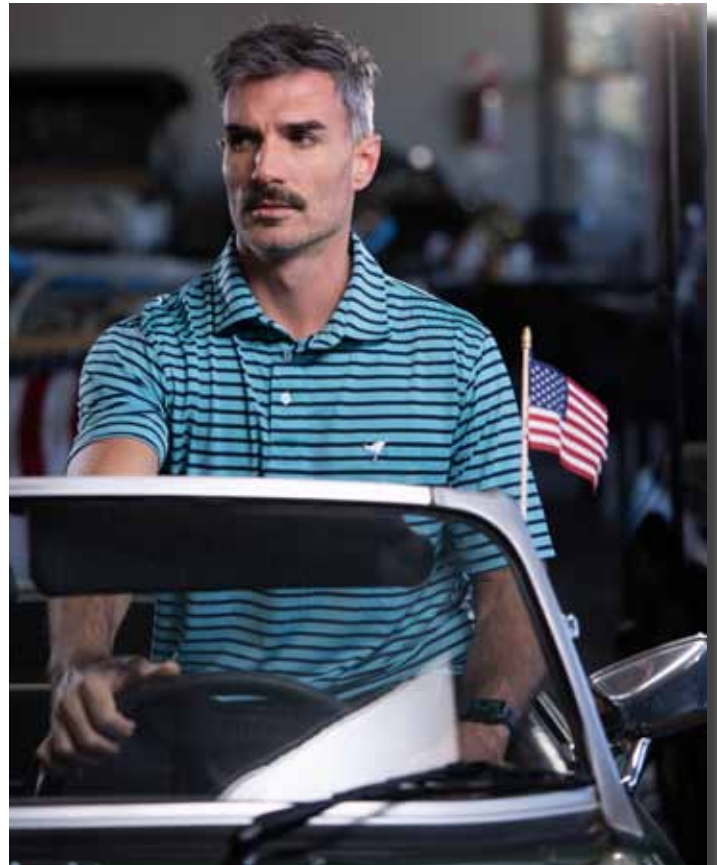
The International Network of Golf recently selected American Fit as its official apparel company. American Fit introduced its broad range of exclusive Men's, Women's and Juniors golf apparel to attendees at the ING Fall Forum in Sebring, Florida.

"We look forward to working with ING in taking our American Fit brand to the better pro shops across North America," said Diego Levental, CEO of American Fit.

American Fit's parent company, Valgroup International, has its headquarters in Santa Fe, Argentina and its production facilities in Lima, Peru, from where it has been producing high-end collections for apparel clients worldwide.

Levental added: "Now is the right time to launch our own brand as we have many distinctive designs and types of materials that we felt needed to be introduced to the golf apparel markets. Only a vertically positioned apparel company like ours could properly undertake bringing to the golf industry a new slant on the golf apparel business while at the same time providing PGA professionals personalized and very profitable collections to sell."

"Our parent company, Valgroup International, grew by providing full manufacturing services to other major golf brands," said Esteban Solis, CFO at American Fit. "With a monthly capacity of 45,000 garments and exportation to destinations in the US, Canada, Paraguay, Chile and in our home country of



Argentina, it has provided us with the depth of market experience like no other new golf apparel company."

One of the elements that sets apart American Fit apparel from its competitors is the fine Peruvian cotton used in some of its product portfolio and the wide selection of technical fibers used in its athletic designed apparel that is exclusive to the brand.

"We're thrilled to be working with the team at American Fit," said Mike Jamison, Executive Director of ING. "Their company is an exciting combination of a new story to tell, but with principals who have been hugely successful in the golf apparel business for many years."

American Fit will be participating in the PGA Show in Orlando Jan. 24-26, and will have a display in the ING Hospitality Room - ClubING (312-B).

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IN THE BAG

Rekindled Romance

With options galore, a new, better-feeling grip can make you fall in love all over again with your putter.

BY KEN VAN VECHTEN

"If you walked into a golf store 20 or 30 years ago, and you'd been putting badly, what did you do? You bought a new putter."

That is if you didn't condemn it to the depths beside the 15th green.

Hyperbole? Perhaps not – it is golf, after all. But there is an option between pond and a new PING Anser.

Get a grip. A new one.

Large retail stores have scores and scores of grips. It's a Santa's workshop of brand and model names, shapes, sizes, lengths, textures, squishinesses, and colors (and never underestimate the importance of color in today's golf and larger sporting-equipment fields). It might be intimidating. But in there, somewhere, and trust us on this, there is a grip that will end your love-hate relationship with your putter.

At least for a while.

Selecting grips at retail isn't like going in on new sticks. Sure, body dimensions and dynamics, and personal interests or biases, are at play when selecting irons and other full-swing clubs, yet any sense of conjuring is eliminated because of the fitting process, where *x* data equates to *y* club and shaft in *z* configuration. Not so much with grips. As we addressed in the previous issue, hand shape plays into swing-grip selection, at least in the size arena; it's still largely a tactile thing, not so much math. And *sensation* is even more the case with a putter grip.

"It comes down to feel," says Winn Grips Marketing Manager Jeff Shepherd. "And everyone's feel is different. Don't simply (choose) what someone else in your foursome is using. Find what works for you, what feels *right* to you. It probably won't feel right to that other guy. It's about having something in your hands that gives you confidence. Golf is a game of confidence."

Adds Ian Zubkoff, co-founder and executive vice president of marketing for SuperStroke Golf, who gave us the opening quote:





“There is science to the geometry of grips, but in a key sense it’s not even a science, it’s how *that* grip feels in your palms, your fingertips, and your hands.”

SuperStroke produces 40 or so grip configurations so one size indeed does not fit all.

There are some general parameters to this. Most putter grips you come across are made of polyurethane as opposed to rubber – though the grips might have a rubber underlayment – as that polymer is generally softer and more malleable in terms of desired end uses than rubber. (Please, no comments from the chair of the chem department; we’re laypeople here.)

Putter grips come in many diameters, including “undersized,” but unlike full-swing grips most are not round – they might be square, pistol-grip flared, multi-sided – and come in several lengths. Size – diameter – is probably the big thing here.

There are advantages to a larger-than-standard putter grip, even much larger. Wrists feel more “locked in,” hands “quiet down,” and fatter, err, zaftig grips lessen face-closure and the resultant pulls, most critically on shorter putts. Then again, golf is often a zero-sum enterprise, so good here might not be good there. A paper-towel-core-sized grip can numb the innate sense developed as to distance control when rolling the rock on longer lag putts, where a fluid wrist-release is needed. Biggies still exist but the market is markedly trending midsize.

“Oversized grip sales have really slowed,” explains Justin Conner, who oversees the club division at PGA Tour Superstores. “If you’re playing one of those huge grips popular three or four years ago you might have lost a lot of feel. We’re seeing these people closing the gap and going back to midsize grips so they can get their speed back in line and maybe get a few more birdies.”

One hot trend in this market is longer grips – 15- to 17-inches in length (as opposed to the standard

10.5-incher or so) – that are back-weighted and affixed to slightly-longer-than-usual putters (think 36- to 40-inch putters, not “broomsticks”). These extended flatsicks are all over the tour – Brian Harman, Wyndham Clark, Rickie Fowler, Viktor Hovland, to name a few – and Zubkoff believes they are here to stay.

Not surprisingly, Winn’s Shepherd says it’s all about the hands and the sensation because of the counterbalance to the weight in the head. “It’s putting more weight up above where you grip the putter, and it steadies the stroke. You can put it on a standard-length putter but most of the time they are going on longer putters.”

Think of it somewhat akin to swingweight in a full-swing club, which is a measure of how we discern the sensation of weight in a club, be it more toward the head or more toward the grip. (Two full-swing clubs of varying weights can have the same swingweight as it is a comparative measure, not an absolute.)

SuperStroke has a counterbalanced grip offering in 13.5 inches specifically targeting users of “standard” 34-/35-inch models.

Putter heads have different properties; look at ‘em – of course they do. And we can be helped – or hindered – by the variability in resistance to twisting, shape, weight, alignment aids (or not), hosel configurations, and that most basic but essential matter of the visual aesthetic. It’s not snake oil. It’s real. But if feeling betrayed, do some experimentation. As Zubkoff quips, your sole recourse need not be to the putter corral for a new steed. Unlike decades ago, he says, we now have more than “three grips hanging on the rack in the shop,” and those three likely were in one diameter, black rubber, with myriad shape choices so long as one was round and one was pistol (flared on the underside of the butt-end of the grip).

Give it a go. A grip is an inexpensive way to – hopefully – fine tune a putter. You can even do it several times and still not remotely approach the cost of a new Bettinardi. It probably makes no sense to run through 10 or 20 grips with your flatstick, but in doing so you are, in essence, experiencing 10 or 20 “different” putters.

So try a few on your gamer first – before drowning it. ■

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Clearing A Path

ZoomBroom Leafblower Deserves A Place In Your Bag

By Gary Van Sickle

(First printed in *The Morning Read*)

Inspiration struck on the 12th green at Monroe Country Club four years ago. Monroe is a city of about 20,000 people located on Lake Erie's shoreline in Michigan, halfway between Toledo and Detroit. Monroe CC is an older course with a lot of trees.

"Every type of tree-dropping imaginable can be found there," said Randy Kuckuck, a member. "We had to clear a path to the cup on every green so we could putt."

It was so bad, someone in the group ruminated, "Too bad one of us doesn't have a leafblower in his bag."

That thought stuck with Kuckuck, who had an idea that he shared with engineer Kevin Newcomer a week later at lunch.

"I was thinking light saber with a blower in it," Kuckuck said with a laugh. "Kevin came up with a better idea and made it more efficient."

Thus was born the ZoomBroom Golf Breeze, a golf-club-sized leafblower that fits in a golf bag so golfers can use technology to win the battle against leaves, acorns and assorted whatnots (pardon the technical jargon) that interfere with putts.

The ZoomBroom is available in select stores and online at ZoomBrooms.com and other online retailers. The suggested retail price is \$179.

Allow me to lead the applause. I have needed an on-course leaf-mover during spring and fall golf in the Pittsburgh area for years. In fact, I took my own full-sized leafblower to

my favorite, low-maintenance public course a few times last fall so I could enjoy putting without having to move sticks and leaves one-by-one or putt through the debris Plinko-style. I once considered creating an umbrella with a hollow shaft and a pump handle that would turn it all into a hand-operated bellows. Only my utter lack of engineering skills and consummate laziness kept me from pursuing that.

The ZoomBroom, a skinny, high-powered, battery-operated leafblower, is a way better solution. And it has already turned into time-consuming business.

"I thought I was retired," Kuckuck joked. But the ZoomBroom has kept him busy.

"Kevin built six or seven more prototypes," Kuckuck said in a joint interview with Newcomer. "It was 18 prototypes, Randy," Newcomer corrected his buddy with a grin.

They formed a company, then looked for a manufacturer. No luck. Meanwhile, COVID-19 hit. So did the supply-chain crisis. Last March, the ZoomBroom was shown at the International Housewares Show in Chicago and won "Best New Cleaning Product." It's not just



for golf. With a home version that features a shaft handle for easier use, the product is ideal for clearing the front porch, back patio, blowing dust-bunnies from under the bed and other things.

“Just about every time we talk with someone, they come up with a new way to use it,” Kuckuck said. “Pickleball courts, RVs, boats.”

A young man who represented a Chinese factory was at the Chicago show and was so impressed, he offered a deal to manufacture the blower, just what the new company needed.

“This is actually a high-tech product,” Newcomer said. “It’s really a small jet engine in a blower with high-power batteries in a stick. Almost every vacuum on the market comes from China. They are the only ones who can make these very small, high-tech parts efficiently.”

The ZoomBroom’s operation is simple. Press a button on the shaft and it starts blowing. It has as much power as a small Black & Decker leaf blower. “It’s more than enough to clean a path to the cup,” Kuckuck said. “The whole green, if you want. You can even move leaves around in the fairway to find your ball.”

The ZoomBroom combines the inherent appeal of another whiz-bang gadget with a useful, all-purpose blower for frustrated golfers from tree-friendly courses.

“I was playing Monroe Country Club on Memorial Day last year and most of their trees are maple trees, which drop a lot in late spring,” Kuckuck said. “I pulled out a prototype and cleared a path on the green. Some guys in the pro shop saw me. If we’d had ‘em available, I could have sold a bunch that day.”

The list of potential product names Kuckuck and Newcomer came up with was relatively short. The Typhoon was one idea. The Blow Pro was another. But once ZoomBroom came up, it stuck. The golf version is called The Golf Breeze and comes with a



headcover.

The ZoomBroom Golf Breeze conforms to USGA rules. It is legal to remove impediments on the green by any means, including waving hats and towels to move them.

Developing ZoomBroom and bringing it to market has required a substantial investment. Some Monroe-area friends stepped up to back the new company and the Chinese manufacturer offered some creative financing for tooling and production. The financial risk sounds significant for a golf accessory but this product could break much bigger than that. Think globally in the home-cleaning areas of big-box stores.

The fall golfers among us who have had scores unfairly affected by putts kicked offline by leaves and other debris know this product is desperately needed, if not essential.

“There will be probably a little plaque by Monroe’s 12th green someday,” Kuckuck joked. If there is, Kuckuck will be able to quickly clear the leaves off it every time he plays through.

Gary Van Sickle has covered golf since 1980, following the tours to 125 men’s major championships, 14 Ryder Cups and one sweet roundtrip flight on the late Concorde. He is likely the only active golf writer who covered Tiger Woods during his first pro victory, in Las Vegas in 1997, and his 81st, in Augusta.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

If You've Played Scramble Tournaments, You're Very Familiar With These Role Players

BY TINA MICKELSON

(Reprinted from FORE Magazine)

As we skidded around the corner of summer and slid into the fall months, I found myself catching my breath after a busy tournament season. And before anyone gets excited and asks which notable competitions I tested my skills in, let me clarify. I'm talking about charity events ... more specifically, scramble tournaments.

But make no mistake. The level of competition and sheer will to win is every bit as intense as any official competitive amateur or professional event. Over the years, I've noticed the same cast of characters every single time. I started to jot down the various categories in which these players seem to fall.

And there it was ... a pattern that cannot be denied. Which begs the question: If there isn't a compilation of this specific personality salad, is it even a scramble? You decide.

Tee Shot Guy (TSG): He's here for his distance, not necessarily his accuracy. He can launch it off the tee ... you just don't know where it's going. Sometimes he hits the fairway and when he does, he struts around the tee box like a peacock in mating season. But when it goes offline, he heads straight for the golf cart to pout while everyone else freezes in place, listening for a window to break. It would not be unheard of for TSG to crack open a cold adult beverage in the middle of the next player's backswing.

Straight Shooter: This player is there as an antidote for Tee Shot Guy. Think: tortoise vs. hare. He doesn't hit it super far, but he's always in the fairway. He's usually in finance, banking or investments and

not the funniest in the group. He's rather serious, quiet and has his own water bottle filled with ... water. Don't kill the messenger. I'm just stating facts based on years of research.

Once-A-Year Player (OAYP): OAYP is ... you guessed it ... that guy who plays (at most) once a year and just shows up because: 1) His boss made



“Short Game Sleuth (SGS): Short Game Sleuth can’t hit a full shot to save his life, but get him around the green and he’s a wizard. He’s usually the quiet player that everyone underestimates because they are so impressed by Tee Shot Guy and his (air quotes) long drives.”



him, or 2) There was a last-minute cancellation and he jumped on the free round of golf. What he lacks in ability he makes up for in humor. He’s the one most likely to carry a flask disguised as a sunscreen bottle. He’s also typically in charge of the playlist and knows just the right volume to keep his magnificent speaker on. When he loses the sleeve of new balls he found

in his swag bag, he quickly digs into his stash of random used balls. He also spends an exorbitant amount of time in bushes and along lake shores looking for additional used balls.

Short Game Sleuth (SGS): Short Game Sleuth can’t hit a full shot to save his life, but get him around the green and he’s a wizard. He’s usually the quiet player that everyone underestimates because they are so impressed by Tee Shot Guy and his (air quotes) long drives. SGS is sneaky in his contributions to the group, which is why he never gets the accolades he deserves. He is always placed first in the batting order, even though he’s the only one who can hit a decent chip shot from a tight lie. C’mon, let the poor guy at least get a read on a few putts before his turn because ... let’s face it... this is his only time to shine. Help HIM help YOU.

Always Use My Shot Guy (AUMSG): Bless his heart, but AUMSG honestly can’t see the value in ANYBODY else’s shot. Never mind the fact that all his playing partners outdrove him by 30 yards and he’s directly behind a tree. He likes his angle in and that’s all there is to it. By the third hole the rest of the group stops including him in the decision-making process

over which shot to use, and quickly come to a verdict amongst themselves. AUMSG will feign confusion and reluctantly go along with the consensus. In case you haven't yet ascertained, he's a real delight.

Aw-Shucks Guy (ASG): Aw-Shucks Guy is good. And he knows it. But he won't admit it (at least out loud). He is self-deprecating and not comfortable receiving compliments for his shot, swing or any talent whatsoever. Every good shot is followed by, "Even a blind squirrel finds a nut sometimes." But here's the thing, ASG: Blind squirrels don't find 57 nuts in four hours. Put those shoulders back, stand up straight and when someone says, "Nice shot," OWN it.

Nobody Better: Nobody Better guy thinks he's God's gift to the game of golf. He slowly and deliberately glides from the check-in area to the driving



range with his entire golf bag in tow, as if dramatic music is perfectly cued. He is convinced everyone within chipping distance has halted their conversations to observe and appreciate

his golf prowess. His arms don't fall straight down to his side, they stick out a bit... like he's holding a soccer ball under his armpits. His shirt is crisply pressed and tightly tucked into his perfectly creased slacks. (He rarely wears shorts, even on the hottest of days.) He's the guy who is most likely to give you a shot-by-

shot of his entire round at the bar, while friends play musical chairs to avoid sitting next to him. We love this guy. But the jury is still out as to just how much we actually LIKE this guy.

Baffling Volcano (BV): You've seen BV's swing and quickly assume he's the Once-A-Year Player of your group. He's at least a 25 handicap and you just



assume his expectations are congruent with his index. He hits a tee shot that is actually pretty decent. You try to disguise the shock in your voice as you compliment him on

his drive, but before you can finish your accolades he slams his driver down so hard you have to sand the divot. You are confused. Does he think he can actually do better than that? Has he hit a better tee shot with that swing? Never. Will you be able to handle this for the next five hours? Nope. At some point you will make a comment, whether it's under your breath or sung from the roof of your golf cart. But you WILL inevitably mention that BV needs to chill.

These players, as predictable as they may be, are the heart and soul of every charity event. And we all know who they are, even if they don't. So, the next time you happen to be in a group with one of these folks, you can chuckle to yourself as you slowly nod and say under your breath, "Yep. There it is."

Makefield Putters Launches New Home Fitting System

Makefield Putters has introduced a convenient home-fitting system.

"This is a revolutionary product for the putter fitting industry. The MakeFit Home Fitting System from Makefield will dynamically affect the putter industry, and especially putter fitting for the consumer," said Nick Biglasco, Marketing Director.

Now you can try the Makefield putter and its X-3 Weight system on your home turf at your own pace. Your MakeFit Kit is unique to your chosen preferences. It includes two club heads and four shafts with



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ING Fall Forum



Successful Return To Sebring For ING Fall Forum

The ING Fall Forum returned to the beautiful Inn On The Lakes in Sebring, FL, in mid-November, and post-Forum consensus was that it was another successful outing.

The event was hosted by Visit Sebring and the Citrus Golf Trail, and was held in conjunction with the Citrus Golf Trail Open Pro-Am at Sun 'N Lake Golf Club.

Sponsor presentations were made by ING's new apparel sponsor, American Fit, along with ZoomBroom's Golf Breeze leaf blower, Citrus Golf Trail and Wander Media Company. Also, Kate Strickland of Wander Media conducted a marketing seminar, and a lively state of the industry roundtable

was held.

The ING Stableford Championship was held at the recently renovated Country Club of Sebring, and was sponsored by Pro Golf Weekly and Zero Friction. Tony Leodora of The Traveling Golfer TV Show was the winner.



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GOLF IS ROBBIE GOULD'S NEXT CHAPTER

A full-page photograph of golfer Robbie Gould. He is standing on a lush green golf course with trees in the background under a clear blue sky. He is wearing a dark blue polo shirt, light grey trousers, and a white baseball cap. He is smiling and holding a golf club with both hands in front of him. The large, bold text of the title is overlaid on the image.



The massive fairway bunkers on the opening hole at Cog Hill's famed "Dubsdread" course serve as sandy uprights, giving Robbie Gould a familiar target. From the blue tees, Gould mapped out a plan: "I'll try to start it at the middle of those (left) bunkers. It's about 260 to carry, and I should be able to carry it 270-280 with a cut. Little bit of wind in my face."

Gould fired away without a practice swing.

THWACK!

"Hang on," he said. "Is that in the bunker?"

Not sure. But it was wide right.

Want a breakfast ball?

"No," Gould replied. "I'm going for the course record."

And then he pointed to my camera phone: "I'm coming for you, Tiger!"

Gould has never lacked ambition. It helps explain his incredible run with the Bears, his perfect record in the NFL postseason – 29-for-29 on field goals, 39-for-39 on extra points – and his decision to become an ambassador for the Chicago District Golf Association (CDGA).

Rather than taking it easy in semi-retirement, Gould aims to serve as the face of the Chicago golf scene. A CDGA member since 2007, Gould will collaborate with the CDGA on social media content, including in-depth visits to public and private courses, promote the CDGA at various golf and social events and add a CDGA logo to his shirts and golf bag.

Gould, 40, lives in Chicago's northwest suburbs, recalling this: "The Bears released me on a Sunday at 9 p.m. Two days later I closed on my 'forever' property."

He resides minutes from Inverness Golf Club, his tree-lined home course, with his wife and three boys. After nailing 27 of 32 field goal tries for the 49ers last season, he is prepared to trade in his spikes for Soft-spikes – and work on his skills as a broadcaster, one equally adept at describing birdies and safeties.

"When it comes to Chicago golf, there are only a rare few that can rival the passion and enthusiasm of Robbie," texted NBC/Golf Channel commentator Mark Roling, the Northern Illinois alum whom Gould describes as his mentor. "He will be a tremendous ambassador for the CDGA. Also, as I get more toward the end of my career, I have a feeling he might have his eye on my job!"

Gould's marketing agent, Mike Neligan, sees the Bears' all-time leading scorer reaching both traditional country club players and the "Barstool crowd," saying: "How can he bridge that gap to make golf more accessible for everyone?"

Continued on Next Page

Reprinted from Chicago District Golfer Magazine

Former Bears kicker to rep CDGA

BY TEDDY GREENSTEIN

Photographs by Charles Cherney

Robbie Gould, the Chicago Bears' all-time leading scorer, is parlaying his longtime passion for golf into a role as brand ambassador for the CDGA.

With that, we ask nine questions to the former No. 9:

1

What will your focus be when you are visiting courses?

We'll have nine criteria, including course design, pace of play, the tee (signup) system, memorability and the logo. I'm a big logo guy.

2

Would it be awkward if there is an aspect of a course you don't like?

I think it's in your delivery, right? I'm not here to crush a golf course. I mean, every course has something. There's not a perfect golf course. Augusta National, maybe.

3

You played in Chicago, New York and San Fran. Amazing areas for golf, right?

I got pretty lucky. You go to one hill in San Francisco, and there are incredible places like Olympic Club and Lake Merced. Pebble is two hours away. You've got all the historic clubs in Westchester and on Long Island. And Chicago speaks for itself – such a rich history with organizations like the CDGA and Western Golf Association.

4

Why did you join Inverness?

It's five seconds from the house. I can take my kids to the range and help develop their games. I used to be a member of Rich Harvest Farms and Medinah – A-list clubs, but the commute was way harder.

5

When we played in 2012 for a *Chicago Tribune* column ("18 Holes with"), I asked you what you wanted to do when you were done playing. You said golf commentating.

Would I love to do stuff in the golf space? Absolutely. Now I'm home and can create content on my phone, so it allows me to be a commentator of sorts. My focus now is all about building an authentic voice in the sport.

"My focus now is all about building an authentic voice in [golf]."

—Robbie Gould, former Chicago Bears kicker and CDGA

Brand Ambassador



Gould, an 18-year NFL veteran, sees numerous similarities between golf and kicking. A longtime CDGA member dating back to his time with the Bears, Gould carries a 2.7 Handicap Index®.

6

And beyond?

You probably won't see me on a Golf Channel set talking about Tiger Woods anytime soon. But listen, the BMW Championship was just here (at Olympia Fields). I have not missed a kick in the playoffs, and that's a playoff event. I can talk about the pressures those guys are feeling. And eventually we'll interview successful business people and have them give tips – both on the course and in business. Everyone has a story to tell, just like every golf course has a story to tell.

7

You carry a 2.7 Handicap Index® with a goal of breaking 80 every time you tee it up. How does kicking relate to golf?

Very similar. I'm picking a target and there's a routine – the same routine. Both involve swing planes, hitting balls left to right, right to left, into the wind and downwind. Ironically when I'm kicking better, I play worse golf and vice versa.

8

You came so close to reaching the top of the mountain. Your 49ers came ridiculously close to winning a Super Bowl in 2020. You led 20-10 in the fourth quarter, not like I have to remind you.

That one hurt for a long, long time. We outplayed

the Chiefs for almost the entire game – unlike with the Bears (29-17 loss to the Colts) when we got outplayed. But what a team that was. Urlacher. Briggs. Olin Kreutz. Ruben Brown. Muhsin Muhammad. Charles Tillman. Devin Hester. Thomas Jones. Tommie Harris. Tank Johnson. Alex Brown. Hunter Hillenmeyer. Greg Olsen. And we traded him to Carolina.

9

You're a Pennsylvania native who kicked at Penn State. But deep down you feel like a Chicagoan?

This city has been great to me. We made a kick for San Francisco against the Packers, and I got a standing ovation at a Bulls game even though I wasn't wearing a Bears jersey. I'm so thankful this city has adopted my family and me.

When the time comes for me to be done, I will retire a Chicago Bear. I appreciate the (McCaskey) family and the relationship (with the team) is solid. Not everyone gets to play their entire career with one team. Look at Peyton Manning, Tom Brady and Aaron Rodgers. But I'm both a business and a football junkie, so I'm glad I also was able to move around. ●

A former golf writer and sports columnist at the *Chicago Tribune*, **Teddy Greenstein** joined PointsBet in 2020 and works as a Senior Player Development Manager.

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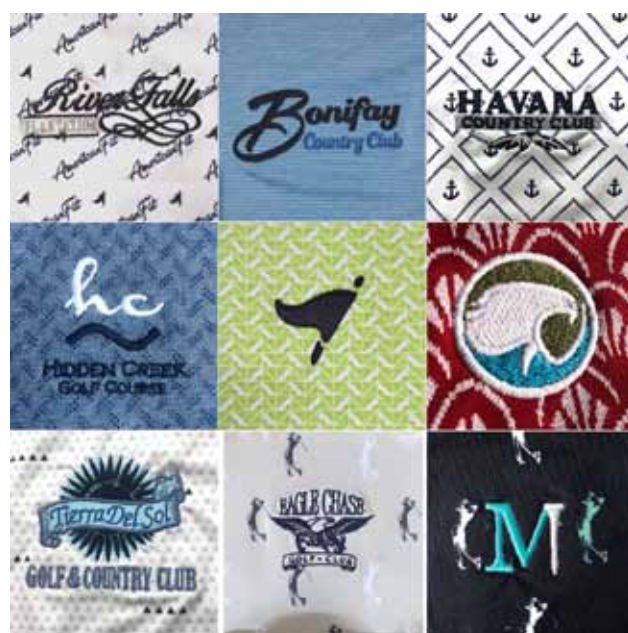
news

Nearly 1,000 of golf's top brands will showcase their newest innovations in equipment, technology, fashion, accessories, training aids and golf-related services to thousands of PGA of America Golf Professionals, golf retailers and influential industry leaders from around the world at the **71st PGA Show** in Orlando, Jan. 23-26, 2024. Show Floor exhibits, which currently exceed the 2023 event, include many of the sport's most recognizable brands, veteran manufacturers and emerging companies. Additional brands are currently finalizing participation plans for the limited remaining spaces. The PGA Show Exhibitor Directory is updated regularly at PGAShow.com.

Award-winning country music artist Jake Owen is the headline artist for the first annual PGA Show Winter Jam, an after-hours concert experience, on Thursday evening in a new concert lounge created in Hall E of the Orange County Convention Center. Registered PGA Show attendees will receive complimentary admission to enjoy performances by Owen and additional supporting music acts, beginning at 6 p.m. The concert is not open to the public.

The country rock band Back Country Boys and Latin Grammy winning trumpeter, songwriter, producer, and DJ Spencer Ludwig have been announced as the opening and closing acts, respectively

American Fit, one of the most fashion forward golf apparel lines and the maker of several major private label collections, will offer free and no-charge embroidery on all of its '24 Spring – Summer Men's and Women's Collections from now to the PGA Show.



In introducing the new profit program, Diego Levental, CEO of American Fit said; “The most valued item that a golf course owns whether it be ultra-private, or a highly trafficked daily fee golf course is their name and logo. And one of the best ways a club can compete with the big box and off-course discount retailers is to offer their members the finest in golf apparel with the club's logo prominently featured with a quality embroidery.”

Bridgestone Golf staff player Jason Day teamed with Lydia Ko to win the Grant Thornton Invitational in Naples, Florida on Sunday. Day's confidence in his brand new 2024 Bridgestone TOUR B X prototype golf ball yielded incredible scores including a 58 in the first round and a pair of 66s on the weekend for a

26-under-par finish. This is the first win for the new prototype golf ball.

“Jason has been playing at an extremely high level since he first joined Bridgestone Golf in 2022, with a win at the Byron Nelson this past Spring and now a second win at Grant Thornton with Lydia Ko, a great talent from the LPGA,” said Dan Murphy, Bridgestone Golf President and CEO. “He’s also been instrumental in the development of our 2024 TOUR B prototypes by providing invaluable insights and feedback, particularly regarding the TOUR B X, which he has been playing for most of his time with Bridgestone.”



Tour Edge recently introduced an all-new Template Series Putter line featuring four designs and three modified shapes from the original Template Series. With a combination of blades, semi-mallets, and mallets, every Template shape was designed with optimized Center of Gravity and Moment of Inertia properties, while suiting every player preference and need.

Seven total head shapes will be available in both Black PUD and Silver PUD finishes: Alps, Biarritz, Eden, Maiden, Narrows, Punchbowl and Valley. The Template Series putters are available for an MSRP of \$129.99

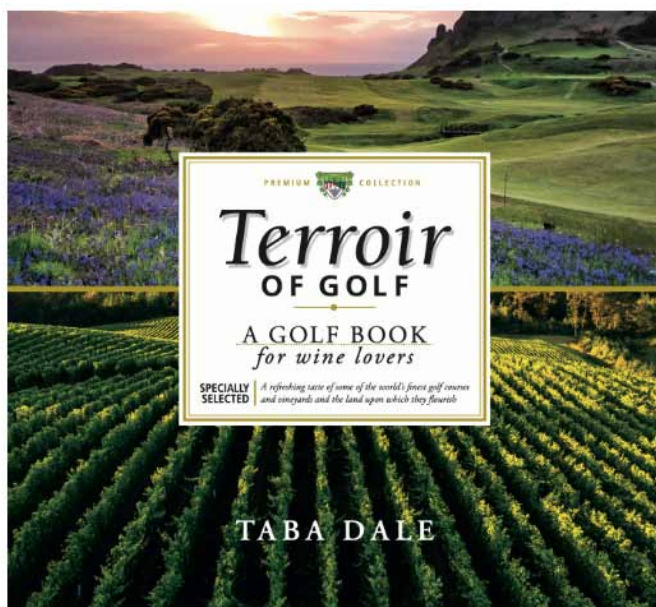
“The new Template putter series has taken leaps and bounds in the look and feel department,” said Tour Edge President and Master Club Designer David Glod. “This putter line is bringing together today’s technology with classic putter designs and perfectly blending the two, just like what Template golf holes are designed to do in course architecture.”

Pro Golf Weekly, a leading golf media brand, recently named **Len Ziehm** Senior Golf Writer. Ziehm is an award-winning journalist whose career has spanned more than 45 years. His resume includes 41 years as sports writer specializing in golf for the Chicago Sun-Times. He has covered 27 U.S. Opens, 11 Masters, 17 PGA Championships, 4 U.S.

Women’s Opens and 34 Western Opens as well as writing about every facet of the golf industry, including competition, travel, equipment, competition and the turfgrass industry.

Taba Dale recently introduced the design of the NEW elevated edition of *Terroir of Golf – A Golf Book For Wine Lovers*. The new version of *Terroir* is designed by Chic Harper. He is the DESIGNER of the USGA’s Herbert Warren Wind Award winning books 2008, 2015 and 2020, the DESIGNER of the British Golf Collectors Society’s Murdoch Medal winning books 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016 and the WINNER of the British Golf Collectors Society’s Murdoch Medal 2019.

Every story and profile has been updated and enhanced. Even the Introduction has been revised in an intriguing way. There will be dozens of high-resolution photographs throughout the book along with some historic images woven into stories and profiles to emphasize the historical aspects of many of the captivating narratives.





Fall, Football, and Fairways

Nothing tops the combination of my two favorite sports during the best season of the year.

I don't know if you remember this television commercial that ran about 10 years ago around the end of summer. Two parents are riding gleefully up and down the aisles of an office supply store in a shopping cart as their middle school child stands by glumly watching them. The music playing as the two adults fill the cart with school supplies: "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

Completely agree, fall absolutely is the best time of the year, for more than one reason, neither of which has anything to do with my kids.

Take golf. The grass is its happiest. My shirt doesn't stick to my back like a wet paper towel because the temperature in fall is Goldilocks perfect: not too hot ... not too cold ... JUST right.

And if I've used my summer well, my swing doesn't feel like something from an alien disco.

So there's that, but there's more to why these first two months of fall are especially so incomparable.

Autumn is football season – more specifically the heart of college football season – one of my two favorite sports. (Can you guess the other?)

What could be better? And occasionally college football and golf intersect.

The thought first occurred to me when I was visiting my son in college in Ann Arbor, Mich., not long ago. "The Big House," which seats well over 100,000, is one of the most iconic venues in college football. But for home games, they park cars on the university's Alister MacKenzie golf course – Mackenzie would be the guy who designed Augusta National and Cypress Point.

It's a little like using the Mona Lisa as a placemat. Whatever. Go Blue!

Actually, a number of America's great courses are college courses, including Ohio State's Scarlet (MacKenzie/Jack Nicklaus) and the course at Yale (C.B. MacDonald.)

The much-decorated professional golfer

James Nicholas of Scarsdale has a unique perspective on the two sports. He played both at Yale, although during his season-and-a-half playing football for the Elis, he only touched his clubs once ... when he missed making the gridiron traveling squad one week.

"It's the best time of the year, no doubt," he says as he was preparing for the DP World Tour's qualifying school. "Throw on a pullover if you're sweeping the dew, then before you know it, it could be 70 degrees. And the grass is just SO healthy.

"I prefer Sundays to Saturdays though." To be expected from a man whose grandfather was an orthopedic pioneer and did Joe Namath's knees.

Whenever I think of golf and college football, I think back to the time I teed it up in a pro-am with Steve Spurrier, the 1966 Heisman Trophy winner.

moment before I pured one ... right over the green.

I looked over, and in an instant, I was transported to "The Swamp," Florida's Ben Hill Griffin Stadium, where the field is named for Spurrier.

There was the man who, as Gators head coach, led Florida to the 1996 National Championship. He was standing by the side of the tee box seething, gritting his teeth. I was half expecting him to rip off his visor and toss it at his feet, kind of his signature move.

Wow, I thought, that's all it took for me to completely understand what it's like to throw an interception in the SEC.

I've had lots of other thoughts run through my head when I think about the subject. PGA Tour winner George Burns played college football at Tennessee before transferring to Maryland to play golf. Nice double dip if you ask me.

And along with the Masters, what's the best event in golf? The Ryder Cup, which is played in the fall and is kinda like a college football game. You don't think so? Wait until the matches are at Bethpage in 2025. It's

"In the end fall rules because college football and golf get to share it."

The "old ball coach" – who once was a 3 handicap – and I were partners and were in contention when we came to a par 3. I stepped up to the tee, and Steve said – with a little too much intensity – "What club you got there, Jimmy?"

"It's a 7, coach," I said as I settled confidently into my pre shot routine.

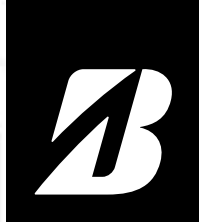
"That's too much club, Jimmy!" he barked at me. "Too much club!"

"No, I'm good, coach," I answered just a

gonna be like Miami–Notre Dame from the '90s ... on steroids.

But in the end fall rules because college football and golf get to share it. Tell me – what could possibly be better than a morning round on a brisk and glorious Saturday followed by extended couch time in front of the fireplace watching a buffet of college ball?

Yep – the most wonderful time of the year. ■

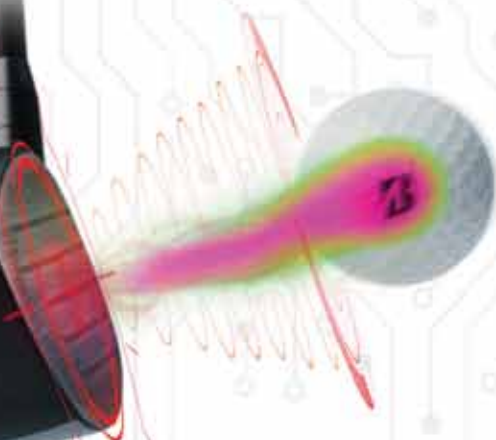


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