

Pro beaters, haters and lovers

Pro-ams frequently give the professionals an insight into the psychology of their amateur playing companions.

For those not possessed of prodigy-like tendencies and outlandish natural talent, the path to the top of professional golf can be quite circuitous. While the Adam Scotts of the world make a beeline for the biggest tour possible, a vast majority of hopefuls find themselves banging away on the various secondary tours.

The term “secondary tour” has all sorts of implications. In America, this could mean anything from playing for \$500,000 a week on the Nationwide Tour to \$3,000 a day on a regional mini-tour in the Deep South.

However, you can't get much more secondary than the pro-am tour of Australia. No disrespect intended, but there is no rung beneath it to fall to. The only way out is up. Down equals professional golf oblivion.

That said, it has provided a launching pad for a number of the very best players to come out of Australia in the past 30 years. Names like Ian Baker-Finch, Wayne Grady, Brett Ogle and Peter Senior all initially plied their trade on the pro-am circuit before finding international success. The series of one and two-day events in towns and cities big and small are in many cases institutionalised in communities all over the country.

One of the harsh realities for many professionals trying to work past this level is that they must play well each and every day to maintain their existence. Prizemoney is often minimal, and with up to 100 pros playing and only the top 25 or 30 getting paid, it is a cutthroat situation that takes no prisoners.

In the lucky dip of pro-am golf, the draw can be particularly cruel when it comes to the allocation of playing partners for the day. The difference between receiving a cheque and enduring the death of a thousand cuts can be as arbitrary as receiving the 12:08 tee-time rather than the 12:33.

This can mean that your playing partners will be anything from the club president and committee men to once-a-year players, or maybe total beginners – playing partners who walk across your putting line or move in the middle of your backswing. We're talking about guys who struggle to score a Stableford point in the whole round, whom you develop a symbiotic relationship with while you search for their ball in the trees.

To be fair to the guys who struggle, it's not their fault. They are non-players who have never been taught the rules and etiquette of golf, and in many cases are only there because of an invitation from a client or friend. For the vast majority of cases, you find yourself in the company of terrific people and many lifelong friendships are forged.

As a professional, you have a responsibility to ensure that they have a good day in your company. End of story. You take the good with the



Will Smith and Jesper Parnevik:
Which pro-am partner category
does Smith fall into?

bad, and a sense of humour is a valuable companion. One player who always had an amusing take on the outcome, for better or worse, was Sydneysider Neil Kerry.

Kerry was one of the more entertaining characters on the professional golf tours. Quick of mind and wit, he has been a leading competitor on the pro-am tour for longer than a decade, winning more than his share while clocking up interminable distances driving from venue to venue around New South Wales.

The budding sociologist in Kerry came up with a unique classification of amateur partners. Born out of years of observation and hundreds of intimate case studies, it was created specifically to categorise the exceptional cases where he encountered a decidedly ‘individual’ playing partner or group. The key classifications were:

The Pro Beater: Single-figure/pennant player type, is playing simply because he wants to say that he beat you/hit it further than you, and could obviously be a pro if he weren't so good at his day job.

The Pro Hater: Hates the fact that your job is playing golf. Wants nothing better than for you to shoot 82 so that he can go back to the bar and say how hopeless you were and that you will be washing dishes for a living within three months.

The Pro Lover: Never misses an edition of AUSTRALIAN GOLF DIGEST or the “Golf Show”. Knows your score averages and greens in regulation percentage. Cheers on every shot. Hopes to be your best friend once the round is over.

Sitting outside the individual is a group:

The Hamburger Group: Three with the lot. Tops, shanks, duffs and skies. All have the maximum 27 handicap but play to 45 or more, and haven't picked up a club since this event last year.

There is no animosity in his observations, just a dry, good-natured and somewhat satirical take on an unseen aspect of one of the most unusual occupations on the planet.

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