

# Ford

## SENIOR PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP

# Older and better: Stockton finding golf is a bit easier

By Terry Jacoby  
Sports Writer

Dave Stockton has accomplished a great deal since he became a professional golfer in 1964. He won the PGA Championship in 1970 and again in 1976, and played on two United States Ryder Cup teams.

In 1991 the California native captained the Ryder Cup team, and last June, Stockton won the Senior Players Championship at the TPC of Michigan in Dearborn.

But after all his experience and all his wisdom — being selected to captain a Ryder Cup team requires great knowledge of the game as well as knowing the top players' strengths — Stockton is still fascinated by the game.

"Golf is just amazing to me," Stockton said following the pro-am of the Bell Atlantic Classic in Malvern, Pennsylvania. "The interesting side is the mental side. Golf is 90 percent mental and it's often ignored."

"People take too long when they play golf. They think far too much. I just go up and hit the ball. If it's bad, I go up and hit it again."

Sounds simple.

And to Stockton, golf has become easier as he has gotten older and wiser.

DURING HIS career on the regular PGA tour, Stockton won 11 tournaments, including the two majors. He made over \$1 million over the course of 20 years.

But Stockton seems to be getting better as he gets older. And maybe the awareness of golf's mental side is starting to pay off in fewer strokes and bigger paychecks.

"I've been looking forward to this summer because I'm playing well," said Stockton, who looked quite fit and relaxed after playing 18 holes in the rain.

"From tee to green, my game is the best it has ever been," he said. "I'm hitting the ball a lot further than I ever did and I am putting pretty well."

Stockton's 1992 season has been one of consistency.

Through May, Stockton was in the top 10 in four statistical categories, including first in number of birdies (150) and fifth in putting.

ON APRIL 25, he won the Muratree

Reunion Pro-Am near Dallas, Texas and finished third at the Brian Webber Invitational the week prior to the Bell Atlantic Classic.

Stockton was third on the money list with more than \$337,000 in 13 tournament appearances.

It's easy to see that Stockton is playing well heading into a tournament he has already proven he can win. So it's not surprising to hear him say, "I am looking forward to returning to Dearborn."

Stockton's first-place finish last year was both dramatic in the way it happened and special because it had been 18 years since he last won a tournament.

The last time Stockton had heard the roar of the crowd came in 1976 when he walked up the 18th fairway at Congressional Country Club en route to his second PGA Championship.

TO WIN any tournament is special, but to win a major is as good as it gets.

"To me, it was like winning the 'Players Championship' on the other tour," he said. "The guys think it's the toughest field to beat, so undoubtedly, I was playing against the best senior players, and that gave me a great deal of satisfaction."

It also gave him a much larger bank account. The win helped Stockton capture the 1992 Senior Tour Rookie of the Year award and more than \$650,000 in official earnings, more than four times what he made during his best year on the regular tour.

And what about this year's TPC Senior Players Championship?

"Anytime you win on a course, you feel good about going back there the next year," he said. "I do think I can play better tee to green than I played last year."

STOCKTON SAYS a defending champion has a distinct advantage.

"Jim Albus and I are the only two who know we can win on that golf course," said Stockton, a 1991 graduate of the University of Southern California.

"And I enjoy the TPC of Michigan. The course still has a ways to go, but it's a good test of golf and of major championship caliber."

Stockton is a very open and hon-



1993 champion: Dave Stockton was in position to win the championship last year when J.C. Snead faltered on the last hole.

est man. He says what's on his mind, but doesn't offend anyone. While some professional athletes shy away from attention, he seems to enjoy himself when talking to the media or out on a pro-am.

During the TPC media day last month and during a press conference prior to the Bell Atlantic Classic, Stockton appeared to be having a good time.

REGARDING J.C. Snead's collapse on the final hole of last year's Senior Players Championship, Stockton said, "I should name the creek he hit into after him. I don't say that in a mean way. There are

a lot of creeks and ponds named after people."

Stockton added, "He (Snead) almost did it again in San Antonio (The Vantage at the Dominion). We have to work with him."

On longer exemptions, Stockton said, "They have to be longer than one year. It doesn't matter at all to me because it doesn't affect me, but you have to have tradition at these tournaments."

It also doesn't hurt to have class individuals win every once in awhile. And with consecutive champions like Albus and Stockton, the Senior Players Championship has chipped in with two first-class people.

# Tour's best ready for a shoot-out with just 1 winner

Everybody has a tip for golfers, but here's one for golf fans planning to attend the Ford Senior Players Championship:

Don't wait until the first round Thursday to visit the TPC of Michigan. Get out there Tuesday afternoon for the Merrill Lynch Shoot-Out.

It's a blast.

The shoot-out is held on the Tuesday of tournament week prior to the 17 biggest events.

It gives fans a chance to get a close look at nine of the top players without fighting big crowds.

The atmosphere is lighter than during actual tournament play, but the \$4,000 prize for first place and the quality of the shoot-out field guarantee excitement.

THE FIELD IS made up of the defending tournament champion, the top three players from the current money list, the top three players from the all-time money list and three sponsor selections.

So there will be some serious players teeing off June 22.

The rules are simple.

The field begins on the 10th hole and plays the entire back nine. The highest score on each hole eliminates that player. The longer you last, the more money you make upon elimination.

Ties are broken by a sudden death "shoot-out" involving a pitch, chip, bunker shot or putt. The player whose ball comes to rest furthest from the hole is out.

The winner of the shoot-out is the last man standing on No. 18.

PRESIDING OVER the festivities is master of ceremonies Brian Henning.

Henning is the Tournament Director of the Senior Tour. That job keeps him busy behind the scenes at every tour stop, but he comes to the fore

during the shoot-out.

The wise-cracking South African calls the shots on a portable microphone. He picks on the players, gets the fans involved and generally keeps the party going.

At last year's shoot-out at the TPC, he slipped an exploding golf ball onto the tee just before a player hit his drive, then started raiding Billy Casper's equipment bag.

He kept tossing Casper's golf balls to various fans and even promised the veteran's trademark knickers to one lady before Casper drew the line.

"IT'S FUN FOR everybody, that's the whole idea," said Henning. "They're playing for a lot of money, too. The winner gets \$4,000 every week and at the end of the year there's a \$400,000 shoot-out."

The event gives players a first-hand look at the course and gets the fans in the mood for the rest of the week.

"The most important part as far as we're concerned is that the shoot-out entertains the fans with some light-hearted golf that's fun to watch," Henning said. "The players are all kind of loose and my function is to keep it that way."

"A majority of the players are sort of shy in nature. I bring their colors out during the shoot-out."

HENNING USUALLY carries the shaft of a putter with him as he roams the course. Fortunately, he hasn't had to use it to fend off a golfer upset with his putter.

"There are certain players you don't mess with," he said, "but I haven't got a club across my head yet."

"I take it easy when a new guy comes out, but they know what to expect."

So players, if you hit the ball in the water, don't be surprised if Henning offers you a life jacket.

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