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Size up a field like this, and favorites multiply

By Terry Jacoby
Sports Writer

There is no question golfers like the attention from knowledgeable golf fans in Southeastern Michigan. Most of them also enjoy playing the Tournament Players Club of Michigan in Dearborn.

Actually, there are more than 1 million reasons why the top senior golfers in the world are in Dearborn this week. And we are talking about the \$1,200,000 purse, the second largest official money purse in Senior PGA Tour history.

The winner will walk away with \$180,000 and the runner-up will pocket \$105,000.

That's why Nicklaus, Trevino, Floyd, Welskopf, Palmer and Rodriguez are all meeting at one of Michigan's finest golf facilities.

So what does the crystal ball say about this year's tournament? Who is the favorite to win the 1993 Senior Players Championship and take home that big check?

A number of golfers in the field of 78 have a shot at walking away with the big money.

LET'S START with defending champion Dave Stockton.

"(Jim) Albus and I are the only two who know we can win on that golf course," Stockton said prior to the start of last month's Bell Atlantic Classic.

"I've been playing well this year. I feel from tee to green, my game is at its best it's ever been."

He played well enough to win the Murrie Reunion pro-am in April and heading into this month's play was the tour's top birdie leader with 150.

Stockton's charge past J.C. Snead last year at the TPC of Michigan was a memorable one for the 51-year-old Californian. He nailed a 40-foot birdie putt at the 17th hole to cut Snead's lead to two strokes.

Then came the great comeback of Stockton — or downfall of Snead depending on how you viewed it.

Stockton birdied the 18th hole while Snead ended with a double-bogey for a rare three-stroke swing. The win was Stockton's first title in more than a decade and he has been playing well ever since.

THROUGH HIS first 13 events, Stockton was third on the money list with more than \$30,000 in prize money.

Albus, winner of the 1991 Senior Players Championship, has also been on a roll since he won the title. Winning at the TPC appears to change people's lives.

Albus, who was 85th on the money list in 1990 with only \$14,433, rocketed up to 20th on the money list after winning \$301,400. And he proved '91 was no fluke when he won \$404,693 in 1992.

This year he won the GTE Suncoast Classic and is currently 12th on the money list.

Albus obviously likes the TPC of Michigan.

"I feel very comfortable there," he said. "It really helps me mentally to go back there since I've won there before."

Others have played well at the is tough to beat.

The "Golden Bear" didn't play last



Tourney favorites: Jack Nicklaus and Lee Trevino are always among the contenders at a Senior Tour event.

TPC of Michigan despite not winning, including Snead whose 65 during last year's first round is a course record.

AND WHAT about Jack Nicklaus? "Jack is one of the favorites in any tournament he enters," Stockton said. And when Nicklaus is on, he year but has played the course since it first opened in 1991. He has a distinct advantage considering he designed the course.

Nicklaus was struggling earlier in the month. Following a poor showing at the Bell Atlantic Classic in late May, Nicklaus finished with a score of 298, 24 strokes off the pace, at the Memorial Tournament.

To win at the TPC takes both skill and intelligence. And compared to other courses on the Senior Tour, the TPC of Michigan is a long course which requires the big drive as well as a strong short game.

Which brings us to Raymond Floyd.

Floyd, who is among the top 10 on the money list despite only playing half of the Senior Tour events, is always a threat to win a tournament — whatever tour he is playing.

Last year on the Senior Tour, Floyd was among the best in both driving distance (273.4 yards) and hitting greens in regulation (77.8 percent).

This year, Floyd leads the tour in total driving and greens in regulation. He is second overall statistically to last year's champion, who had a shot at the TPC trophy.

Meanwhile, Floyd has played in just four PGA tournaments through May. Playing both tours is something he doesn't want to continue doing.

"I just don't know where I'm going," he said. "I've got people pulling me from both sides, people wanting me to play their event."

OFFICIALS, GOLFERS and fans

are certainly glad Floyd is playing in Dearborn this week.

Another favorite has to be Bob Charles. The former bank teller from Carterton, New Zealand has been cashing some big checks since joining the Senior Tour. His win last month at the Bell Atlantic Classic was his 20th senior win as he became the first player to earn over \$4 million in career Senior Tour earnings.

He also finished first in the Doug Sanders Celebrity Classic in March and was third at the Senior Commemorative earlier this month.

He also has an impressive track record at the TPC of Michigan. In 1991, he finished second to Albus. Last year, he ended up seventh after a hot start in which he shot a 67 the first day and a 69 the second day.

Michigan native Mike Hill, the leader of this year's money list, is also playing some excellent golf. Hill, who was second last year in scoring average, has won twice this year. He finished tied for 12th place at last year's Senior Players Championship.

At Geiberg, who finished 18th a year ago at the TPC of Michigan, is having a much better year in 1992. The California native has won two tournaments this year, is third statistically on the tour and fifth on the money list.

AND LET'S not forget about Lee Trevino. The fan favorite has played well the past two years at the TPC of Michigan and would like to add the Senior Players Championship to his already long and impressive win list.

Senior Tour newcomer Tom Welskopf has not won a tournament, but is playing well and is quite capable of making a run this week.

"Only outstanding players will win an event like this," Miller Barber said.

And the field of 78 features plenty of outstanding players.

Now everything is in order; Ford takes over as sponsor

It never made a lot of sense when you really think about it.

Here you had the premier event on the Senior PGA Tour, being played every year in the hometown of Henry Ford, on Ford Motor Company property virtually in the shadow of the glass house that is Ford's world headquarters.

And Mazda was the sponsor. That's Mazda. As in the Japanese car company.

Sure, Ford and Mazda do business together, but it didn't seem right to have another car maker putting on such a big show in the middle of Dearborn.

The stars are back in alignment now as Ford has taken over sponsorship duties for this year's event, which will be known as the Ford Senior Players Championship.

"QUE PROXIMITY to the course makes our involvement very appropriate, not to mention convenient," said Allan D. Gilmour, Vice Chairman of Ford Motor Company and Chairman of Ford's Tournament Executive Committee. "There are a lot of good reasons for us to become associated with this particular golf tournament."

"First of all, it's held in our backyard. Secondly, Ford understands the marketing advantages of golf and has a long-standing association with this upscale sport and, finally, it makes sense for Ford to get involved in this event because of the tremendous positive impact it has on the local community."

This year's tournament will benefit the Henry Ford Health System, Oakwood Health Services, Beaumont Hospital and the Boy Scouts of America.

"FORD HAS A long history of civic involvement," said Gilmour. "We be-

lieve in being a good neighbor in the places where we do business and over the years we've found that golf is an effective and fun way to benefit local service organizations."

Ford has been involved with golf before, but never like this it will be this year.

"The Ford Senior Players Championship will be the biggest involvement we've ever had in golf," Gilmour said. "In fact, in terms of the number of organizations involved, it may be the largest cooperative marketing effort ever undertaken by the Ford Motor Company."

Ford Division, Lincoln-Mercury Division, Ford Parts and Service Division, Truck Operations and Climate Control Division will all participate and seven other divisions will also take advantage of the promotional opportunities presented by the tournament.