

COLUMN

Back in Contention

Compleat Golfer's playing editor is Louis Oosthuizen and this month he talks about The Players Championship



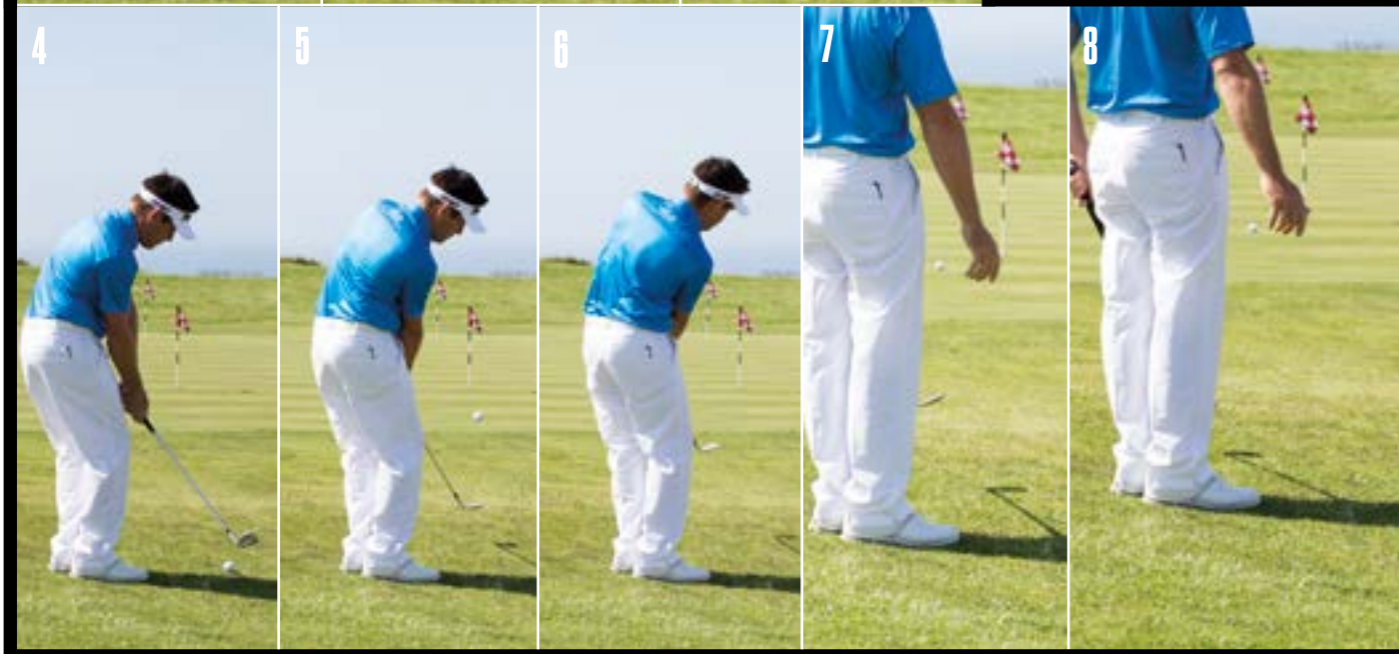
TPC Sawgrass is a track where you can easily make a mistake - and I think we saw that all week at The Players Championship.

It's a similar situation to what will face us at the next Major, the US Open.

After a great start in the first two rounds, which saw me leading going into the weekend, I struggled in the third round. I didn't hit it great.

I probably tried too much in the windy conditions and missed loads of fairways in the early stages. But, even though I shot a 73, I was still one off the lead and it put me in a decent position going into the final round.

It's always great being in the mix on the Sunday in a big tournament. It's a long day because of the wait before going out and you've got to



try to stay calm. Any nerves that are there are 'good nerves', because of the position one is in.

Someone made me aware after I was the halfway leader that only two golfers had won an Open Championship at St Andrews and the 'fifth Major' - Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods. I thought I'd have a bit of fun and when I went out there for the final round, I was wearing a belt with a Claret Jug as the buckle. It's amazing how many people spotted that!

I started out well enough, making birdie at the 2nd, but had a double-drop at the 4th when I found the water. Again at the 9th I had to scramble for a bogey, but an eagle at the 11th brought me back into it. Back-to-back bogeys at 13 and 14 didn't help before another

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birdie, so I had another 73 and a tie for second.

But I hit the ball well at times, especially in the second round. I made birdies on both par threes on the back nine and on the 1st I made birdie from a tough spot, my drive having landed deep in the woods on pine straw. I managed to play a low punch with a draw and it ran up to about five feet from the flag.

My putter was also working nicely and I holed a couple of 20-footers to stay in contention.

I've been working a bit more on my putting at home - and I think it's paying off. I'm rolling the ball nicely and feel confident on the greens. That's a real positive heading into the US Open on a tough course, which is always the case in that Major.

Sometimes a par can feel like a birdie and a bogey can feel like a par. In next month's instruction feature, I will be focusing on my putting set-up and roll, and how I've gone back to the grip I used years ago.

The breeze dried out the greens at TPC Sawgrass and made them firm, so that made it doubly important for the putter to be working during The Players.

Overall it was a good week heading towards the US Open. One of my main targets for the year was improving my FedExCup ranking so it would help me in the earlier stages of the knockout phases later in the year, and a tie for second at The Players did just that. I improved to 32nd after TPC Sawgrass. ◉

STOPPING THE BALL QUICKLY

In South Africa it's a lot easier spinning the ball on the greens than elsewhere, because of the type of grass we have. Here, we have kikuyu. It grabs the club in the right way so the ball goes up your clubface for a long time and then it shoots off really low with a lot of check. With kikuyu it's easier doing that than with a tight surface, or a grainy grass. For this shot you need a lot of speed. Open your clubface, but do not pull through the ball. Rather, release the clubface like you've hit a little cut shot. A common fault is to aim more left and then pull across the ball. In doing this, the ball is going to roll across the face and pop up in the air. You need to go down the line, but you have to release it to the left which, if you get it right, is a really good feeling because you can feel the ball on the clubface and it comes off with a little bit of check. The images below are taken from the side and show what I mean by releasing. The most important picture is when the club goes past your hands and it just releases down to the left, still aiming where I want to go. Images five to eight (far left) are from behind and you'll see the ball land on the green, spin right and then stop.

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