

## **AUSTRALIAN OPEN GOLF TRIP**

### **Tuesday 24 November**

I got up earlier than I normally would as there was a truckload of work to complete at the office plus I was on Day 3 of finding out why my courier company had sent to Sweden a courier intended for Nepal!

The hotel where I was staying was the Meriton Zetland which had been heavily booked out by Golf Australia and was no more than 5 or 6 minutes by car from the course. Everything was going swimmingly until I got to the hotel which had been pre-booked for me by Golf Australia. It seems that they had booked me from Wednesday to Monday rather than Tuesday to Sunday. The problem was that the hotel was full that night. So after a bit of wailing and gnashing of teeth, I was transferred for the night to another Meriton about 10 minutes away. Ironically, the chap who ferried me to the new hotel turned out to be the TD!

### **Wednesday 25 November**

Finally at the right hotel.

A compulsory briefing was scheduled for 2.30 and a TIO demo before that at 1.30pm.

However, I thought I would pop down to the course earlier to have a look around. I remember saying to one or two of you that we were lucky to have so many opportunities to get out and ref (correct) so that when we get to a big dance like this, it is just another day at the office (yeah, right!).

As soon as you get to the course, you realise this is a whole new kettle of fish. Not only is this the Australian Open but it is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary being played at Australia's oldest golf club (although not oldest golf course).

The clubhouse is large and imposing on the hill and screams opulence.

It is only Pro-Am day but already there are squillions of people, cars and security.

But the first view of the course is breath-taking. It is quite magnificent and in superb condition. One can't help noticing all the trees, water, bunkers and other things designed to bugger up a golfer's day.

The TIO briefing was conducted by Simon Magdulski, Director of Rules for Golf Australia. The whole question of line of sight relief is not quite so straight forward as you would think especially when the ball is in front of the TIO but less than a club length from it on an arc.

What was also pointed out to us was a large hospitality area to the right of the water by the 18<sup>th</sup>. It included a large grassed area and was designated an Immovable Obstruction (relief optional but with a drop zone back up the rough).

Then there was a general briefing for the tournament. All fairly standard but they are very organised and have great flip-top folders which can fit in the pocket. If we did not already have one, we were given a Golf Australia badge which clipped onto the belt. With that, you could go anywhere on the course or clubhouse. Oh, yes, I was Badge Boy!!

It was nice to hear that the players genuinely appreciated our assistance.

Even though everyone was very nice, what was very clear from early on is that there is a hierarchy – the professional refs; the Aussies who have been round for years; and the rest – more on that later. We were told that, if we got a curly one, to call in a more senior ref straight away.

Dave Mangan was there and it was nice to catch up with Scotty and Swanno again – the latter full of beans as ever. I got to meet John Paramor, although it was a brief hello at the hotel and, for reasons below, never saw him again. And it was nice to catch up with a number of the Aussies who had attended the Australasian Rules course in Auckland in March last year. It is interesting to note that most of them work for their respective State golf associations.

The great pity is that you don't really get to mix with your colleagues. You see them briefly at the Wednesday briefing and to an extent at the Thursday dinner. But, other than that, we are, of course, spread out over 5 hours or so depending on when you kick off each day.

I kept bumping into Brian Hill from Victoria and Chris Daday (female) from the Gold Coast, but did manage to buddy up with three likely lads from Western Australia who were always a starter for the pub.

On Wednesday night, I went to what ironically became the highlight of the trip, even though it was entirely non-golf related – the musical *Mathilda*, based on the book by Roald Dahl and written (including music) by Tim Minchin. Absolutely brilliant and the best show I had seen since *Billy Elliot* about a decade earlier in London. If you ever get a chance to see *Mathilda*, grab it!

#### **Thursday 26 November – Sunday 29 November**

At this stage, I would love to be able to (as Anthony has the last 2 years) tell you on a day-by-day basis, all the wonderful decisions that I made. But the truth is that I had one in four days!

Regrettably, most of my players kept hitting it on the short stuff most of the time. Clearly they did not realise that they were there for my amusement.

Day 1 started out rather warm. The early starters were saying it was lucky as we would avoid the heat of the day. Wrong! I started about 7.40am. By 9am, it was 35 degrees; by the time I left the course around noon, it was 38 degrees. I kept hearing the voices of you who had been telling me (somewhat gleefully I might add) that it had surpassed 40 the previous week.

In my group was a young upcoming Aussie called Lincoln Tighe. Boy, can he smoke the ball. We started on No. 10, a 381 metre Par 4. He smashed the ball to within 10 metres of the green and then proceeded to hit an even bigger drive on No. 12. 7 birdies, 2 bogeys and he was the clubhouse leader after the first round.

The one thing that really strikes you with these players is the way they hit the ball and the flight path it takes. Nothing like mere mortals.

From the first round, we were all walking with a group. There were about 30 of us in total and we all took the early groups to assist with pace of play. (At this stage, you should be envisaging a Tui's advert.) Some players, especially from Asia, were there only because they had won a local tournament. Clearly, they were not up to it and certainly had no idea about pace of play. Some groups were more than 20 minutes behind after only 5 or 6 holes. And, of course, that concertinaed up the field. One or two were put on the clock but nothing more drastic was taken. One player shot a 93 on day one and improved markedly with an 86 next day. I wanted to know where I could sign up.

By Friday, the weather had turned 180 degrees and it was a very pleasant 22 degrees or so, although the wind had gotten up somewhat. It stayed like that the rest of the tournament. This was the day of my big decision. I had to walk a total of 34 holes before I got whistled up by Peter Uihlein, after he had bladed the ball through the green into the lateral at the back of the green. He really just wanted help working out where it had crossed the margin (frankly, he did not really care as was already well over the cut) but, as I was desperate for a ruling, I told him the ball was in play (although I think he had worked that out for himself!).

On Friday night, we were handed our assignments for Saturday – and I had Darren Clarke. I was genuinely stoked. One of my favourite players especially after that Press Conference he gave after winning the Open in 2011. He cracked more smiles on the first tee than my 6 players had in the previous 2 rounds. He is a bigger boy than he looks on the TV and he can certainly hit a ball. I was wonderful to be walking with him.

On the last day, the seniority kicked in in terms of the assignments and that is how it should be. I had a fairly early start which suited me fine as I had to get to the airport to catch a flight home. It meant that I missed the big booze up afterwards but hopefully if I get another chance to go back, I will stay an extra day.

I was assigned to Rod Pampling, an Aussie golfer well-known to all of you but who was 10 off the pace. He hit only one bad shot all day – his first. And only 60 more during the round. After a bogey on no. 1, he was 4-under at the turn and, with the second nine being somewhat easier, I could see that he might be on for something special. And the birdies kept flowing.

Hole 18 is a shortish par 5, although it is a tight drive to avoid bunkers on both sides and has a big bunch of water protecting the green. To the right is the very large hospitality area in the form of an immovable obstruction. (Can you imagine trying to move an Aussie with a beer in his hand?). Pampling hit a great drive but still with 205m to the green. He pulled out his hybrid and I was thinking that, if he didn't get all of it, I had a ruling coming up. But he got it all and just cleared the water. He then proceeded to calmly drain a 70 foot putt for a 10 under. Sweeeet. All of a sudden, he was the tournament leader as Jordan Spieth and Matt Jones had just had a double and triple bogey respectively over on No. 1.

There was one thing that aggravated me somewhat on the last day. Everyone was very conscious of pace of play due to television requirements. So those in charge were wanting flag-in times after every hole. Fair enough. However, rather than simply deferring to each referee walking with a group, they kept asking the senior roving referees. It felt somewhat disingenuous. We are there because we know what we are doing and understand what is required. However, it appears that we cannot read a watch or do simple maths. For those of you frustrated that we are often just glorified time keepers, on that day, we weren't even that!

I do have to say that we were well looked after and there is nothing too taxing about walking around a golf course, especially one as interesting and beautiful as The Australian. And it was certainly great to be part of a magnificent tournament. Notwithstanding the lack of business over the four days, it certainly makes you want more!