

## GTE BYRON NELSON CLASSIC

# When you think about it, golf



**FRANK  
LUKSA**

smaller.

The only thing worse than time on his hands for a pro golfer is time on his brain. This is why golf is the most mentally demanding of all sports.

Other sports are games of reaction ranging from instant to split-second. A baseball hitter with .04 seconds to swing at a fast-ball. Pro basketball and its 24-second clock. Next season, 40 seconds between plays in the NFL.

Golf, by comparison, is slow-motion.

IRVING — Add one more reason why golf is such an infernal game. Players have too much time to think. That makes 1,257 reasons why whoever invented golf also forgot to make the hole bigger and the ball

Golf requires thought. Careful study. Hours of concentration on the course. Skill can be useful.

Golf leaves the player time to think rather than react. Golf *makes* him think.

Something else different about golf and other pursuits. The faster a runner runs, the quicker he finishes the race. The better a pitcher pitches, the faster the game ends. But in golf, the better a fellow plays, the *longer* he spends between shots.

Figure the average PGA round takes 4½ hours (or 270 minutes) to play. For anyone who shot 70 Thursday at the GTE Byron Nelson Classic, the average elapsed time between each stroke computes to 3.85 minutes. Dallas rookie Russell Beiersdorf spent 4:15 between shots to fashion a five-under 65 and share the first-round lead.

It's like the guy said. Golf is a funny game. But moreso like his buddy replied: But it isn't supposed to be.

Golf is serious to an extreme. Players en-

list the aid of swing doctors, nutritionists, physical therapists and sports psychologists. One of the latter, Dr. Patrick Cohn, even caddied for Beiersdorf.

Cohn, 32, earned a Ph.D in sports psychology from the University of Virginia. He teaches three courses on the subject at The University of North Texas, and plays to an eight handicap between lectures.

Why do players look him up?

"It's a mental game," Dr. Cohn said. "They've been over their swing mechanics 10 times, and though they're hitting the ball perfectly, they're not scoring as well as they should be. That's where I come in.

"You use the mind in a way to enhance physical ability."

Some golfers, he said, try too hard. They begin to steer shots. Over-control the swing. We're talking tense.

"This is where you get their mind out of the way," Dr. Cohn said. "The mind is interfering when they try too hard."

## is a mind-scrambler

Nothing magical or mystical takes place. No trances or gaze-into-my eyes stuff. The doctor doesn't say, "Just lie down and relax in this sand trap."

Dr. Cohn reinforces simple thoughts. Patience. Self-confidence. Forget one bad shot before it leads to another. Such was the content of his few whispers to Beiersdorf.

Dr. Cohn accepted no credit for the resulting 65. Neither will he accept blame if Beiersdorf or clients such as Kelly Gibson or Rick Dalpos shoot 75.

"Russell may have shot the same, better or worse, without me," he said. "I'm a very small part of the picture."

Nor did Beiersdorf offer credit to his caddy for splendid work off the tee. He mentioned the Callaway driver and swing guru Hank Haney for improvement in his drives.

Some golfers avoid mentioning an association with a sports psychologist. They fear the public thinks they're seeking *clini-*

*cal* help instead of a performance-enhancing lift.

"Golfers are learning it's very basic stuff and nothing to be afraid of," Dr. Cohn said. "This isn't for head cases. It's for those who want to put their mind in position to score."

Every golfing mind wants to shoot a low score. Not every mind can because it is not attached to enough talent. Dr. Cohn can help maximize a golfer's talent. He can't improve skill that doesn't exist.

The saddest reaction of a failed golfer — or any athlete — is taking it personally. He feels less a person just because he failed as an athlete.

"I call that attaching self-worth to performance in golf," Dr. Cohn said. "They've played golf all their lives. It's hard to separate how they play to who they are."

Yet another reason why whoever invented golf should have made a rule that no course contain sand, water or an off-level lie.