

Hiring a top golfer like 1992 U.S. Open champ Tom Kite can turn your tourney into a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PRO



*An insider's view
on matching a
pro with your
group.*

BY DAVID MARAGHY

David Maraghy is a vice president and partner with Pros, Inc., a Richmond, Va., firm that represents PGA, LPGA and Senior Tour players and runs numerous pro-am golf events.

It's Monday morning. The memory of a great weekend lingers. You are quietly settling into work with your first cup of coffee when your boss bursts through the door.

"Everyone is using golf but us," he screams. "The country is golf crazy. The damn game is on television every weekend. Our customers are playing in competitor's golf outings. Our next seminar *will* revolve around golf! So hurry up and get us a pro!" Out he storms.

Now, you don't know Jack Nicklaus from St. Nicholas, so you naturally do the sensible thing in such a situation: PANIC!

But close your eyes and imagine that same boss warmly grasping your shoulder, looking you in the eye and saying, "I have never enjoyed a day more. Everyone

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had a fabulous time. You did a terrific job. Thanks! I'm giving you a \$50,000 bonus." (OK, the last sentence is pure artistic license.)

Maybe you won't get that bonus, but there's nothing to prevent you from planning a memorable event

that involves hiring a pro golfer. With some research about your group and careful planning, you can find the right pro to fit your meeting's needs and thrill your attendees.

Hiring a pro can turn your event from just another tournament to one

they'll long remember. Just about every golfer dreams of strolling the fairways with a pro—whether it's a well-known PGA player like Tom Kite, an LPGA hotshot like Beth Daniel or a rookie sensation like Robert Gamez. It's a chance to test their skills against the best, get an up-close look at how these gifted players make those amazing shots, and, hopefully, pick up some pointers along the way.

KNOW YOUR GROUP

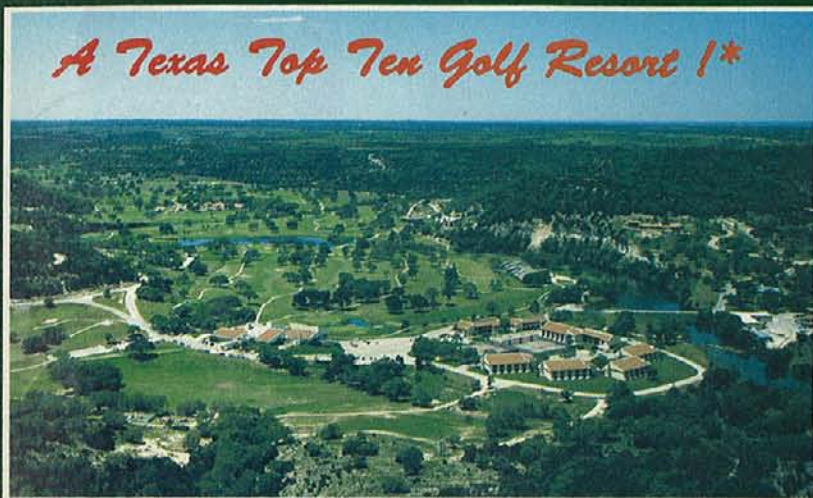
The old adage in meeting planning is, "Know your group." Well, this applies equally to picking a pro golfer. Before leafing through the PGA Tour book, you must first investigate the goals of your golfers and the demographics of your group.

Do you have a group of serious golfers? Whether they're high-handicappers or scratch golfers, you might consider a pro who's good at instruction. Try planning a clinic or exhibition where the pro offers tips and perhaps demonstrates specialty shots. A clinic also may suit a group who are just getting into the game and are eager to learn. No matter what the level of play, those who are serious about the game will love getting advice from a pro.

Then there's the "hit and giggle" crowd. These players don't want to be burdened with drills and the latest swing devices. Instead, they just want to have fun. For these types, think in terms of a professional who is a real entertainer—one who'll enjoy playing a few holes with each foursome and attending a post-tourney cocktail reception.

Another consideration is the other duties you might want the pro to perform. Do you want the pro to make an awards presentation? Don't assume that every pro golfer will be able to make a 20-minute "rally the troops" speech after dinner. Make sure you inquire candidly about the pro's public-speaking experience. While most players are fairly comfortable with question-and-answer sessions because of media-room experiences, a true speaker is a different matter.

The average age of your attendees comes into play as well. Are your golfers baby boomers who would be



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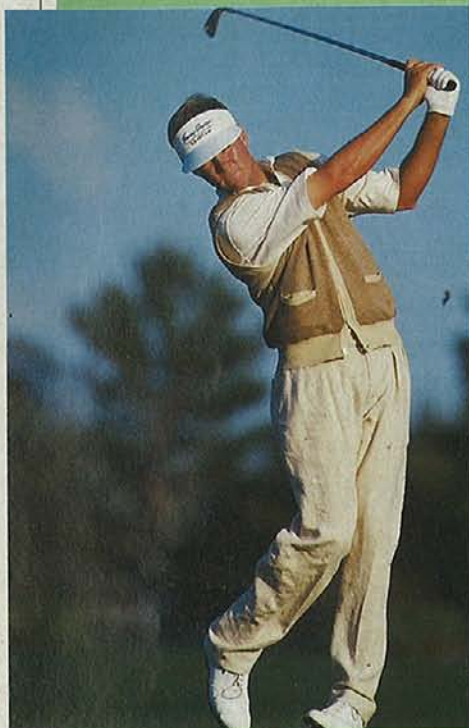
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Well-known PGA Tour players, like Davis Love III, can cost up to \$35,000, plus expenses, for an appearance.

more interested in spending the day with hot young stars than with old-timers? Or are they the more typical golfers you'd find on a corporate outing—grey-haired men? These golfers might enjoy meeting some of the Senior Tour players.

On the other hand, a group of women might relate better to the more accessible game of an LPGA pro. The distance the male pros hit is yards beyond what most women (or men, for that matter) could ever achieve.

And don't forget to look into the pro's personal beliefs or political convictions. For example, one planner endured a true nightmare when he booked a famous LPGA player for the golf outing of his employer—a prominent tobacco company. As it turned out, the LPGA player was an anti-smoker and was quite vocal about her feelings at the very outset of the day.

On a positive note, you can try to match the outside interests of the pro with your group. For instance, PGA Tour veteran Bobby Wadkins also enjoys the outdoors, especially fishing. For many years he was successfully aligned with Humminbird Co., maker of depth finders. Humminbird's customers obviously loved fishing, but many also were avid golfers. Bobby could entertain with golf and tell some great fish stories—an effective presentation for that crowd.

Often some of the Senior Tour players can speak about outside business interests they've developed.

BUILDING A BUDGET

Getting information on fees is easy. Just call the PGA Tour, which can direct you to the players' management companies and agents. Another option is to establish a trusting relationship with one such management firm, and



allow it to make all the calls for you.

But do your homework before you promise the boss a round with the 1992 Masters champion, Fred Couples. You would not believe the number of calls management firms receive from well-intentioned planners who want to hire a marquee name, but only have \$2,000 to spend. Top players, such as Lanny Wadkins, Davis Love III, Tom Kite and Couples, can cost up to \$35,000, plus expenses.

When considering your budget, do not let the marquee name dazzle you or the accompanying fee deflate you. Establish the budget for the pro first, then determine the best way to maximize your money. (In budgeting, do not forget travel expenses and room and board, if necessary.)

There are many quality players with engaging personalities who are available for less than \$12,000. In fact, most PGA and Senior players

cost less than \$12,000, as do virtually all LPGA players, with the exception of such luminaries as Nancy Lopez and Jan Stephenson. Most LPGA players charge from \$2,000 to \$3,000 per appearance. So, there's a wide selection of players to consider.

Hiring less expensive pros has another advantage: You can greatly improve the ratio of pro to attendee by bringing in two or three pros, rather than one superstar. Such pros may not be in the top 10 today, but if you choose personable players, your attendees will feel they are the most important part of that event.

You're actually better off hiring a pro with a friendly attitude than a top name who is only interested in collecting another paycheck.

FINDING A FORMAT

Also keep in mind the format of your event. If you're planning a tournament and can only afford one or two pros,

then station each pro on a par-3 hole. In this situation, a foursome can play one hole with each pro and have its picture taken.

A more meaningful experience may be one in which a pro plays several holes with every group. The pro plays the first, second and third holes with the first group, then waits on the fourth tee to play the following three holes with the next group. That pattern is followed through 18 holes.

Regardless of the chosen format, the right pro can provide a once-in-a-lifetime experience for your attendees. Lifelong fans and friends can be made in just such a day. ■

For more information on pro golfers, call the PGA of America at (407-624-8400); the LPGA at (904-254-8800) or the PGA Tour, which handles Seniors, at (904-285-3700).

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