

## TALKIN' GOLF

with Charlie Epps

## Club pros belong in PGA

This month brings us "Glory's Last Shot," otherwise known as the PGA Championship and the final major of the golf season. The PGA Championship is unique for many reasons, one of which is the fact that club professionals all over the country have the opportunity to qualify for it.

Houston's Royal Oaks Country Club head professional Ryan Polzin, for example, will tee it up in the PGA Championship (Aug. 8-11) at Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, N.Y. Ryan made all the members of the Southern Texas PGA Section—myself included—very proud with his second-place finish in the National Club Professional Championship in June at Sunriver Resort in Oregon.

Ryan is a great player and is headed for one of the greatest experiences of his life. As someone who has been there and played in two PGA Championships, I'm sure he's going to feel like time is speeding up and slowing down at the same time. Regardless of how he plays, he'll make memories that he can share with his loved ones for the rest of his life.

Some people have questioned whether club pros belong in the same major championship field as the best Tour players in the world. I believe they absolutely belong. They've earned it like Ryan did. The PGA of America is made up of 27,000 hard-working professionals who are trying to grow the game, assist in the improvement of recreational players and help golfers of all ages enjoy the game as much as possible.

The PGA of America conducts the PGA Championship—not the PGA Tour—so it is absolutely appropriate that a select number of club pros are allowed to qualify. Just like Bobby Jones letting select amateurs play in the Masters from the beginning, club pros belong in the PGA Championship.

For me, I was always happy getting to the majors, but I never felt I had a chance to win. So I enjoyed the practice rounds more than anything.

In 1986, I finished sixth in the National Club Pro Championship and played in the PGA Championship at Inverness in Toledo, Ohio. That was extremely special for me because I lived there while I went to college at the University of Toledo.

During a practice round, I played with Jack Nicklaus and Greg Norman, who was No. 1 in the world at the time. There were 25,000 people following our group and they all had the same question: "Who is that other guy?"

At the 1984 PGA Championship at Shoal Creek in Alabama, I got to play a practice round with Seve Ballesteros, who I first met in Spain when I lived there in the early 1970s. That was an honor for me because I've always respected him and he was always so nice to me. I also played with Tom Watson and Ben Crenshaw and found out why there were such great putters.

They could read the greens for the speed they used. Tom was more aggressive on most putts, especially ones with little break. Ben was a feel putter and used more break and less speed. Two amazing putters who got it done in different ways. Both were very nice to be around as well.

Ryan and the other club pros who qualified will form their own special stories this month in New York. It'll be fun to watch the "tournament within the tournament" and see which club professional finishes highest on the leaderboard. **TL**



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