

FIVE IDEAS TO MAKE PRO GOLF MORE COMPELLING

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The decision by the sponsors and the PGA Tour to make the Zurich Classic a two-man tournament reminds me of the joke: “What do you call a thousand lawyers chained together at the bottom of the Ocean? A good start.” This is a good start, but it's only a start.

While the professional tours are doing very well they need to add some spice to the stew to expand the number of fans who sample the product. The key to this growth is television. That’s where the prize money comes from. Innovation will create more exposure and that might create more growth for a stagnant recreational game.

One of the things I hear consistently from the TV executives is that they'd love something other than 72-hole stroke play tournaments. On any given week we have about a dozen tours around the world offering up that format.

Here are my ideas for some ways the tours can offer TV – and the fans – something new and exciting.

1). BEST-BALL, MATCH PLAY: Both the PGA Tour and the LPGA should have an official event using this format. The tournament would have 128 men or women, creating 64 teams. Think of how exciting best-ball match play is in the Ryder Cup and the Solheim Cup. Let’s replicate that every year on the tours. Teams could be chosen by computer (the No. 1 seed paired with the

No. 128 seed, for example) or, more interestingly, the players pick who they want to team with.

2). MIXED TEAM EVENT: There should also be a best-ball, match-play tournament that counts as official money and world ranking points in which a man and a woman are paired together. The man would play from the PGA Tour tees and the woman would play from the LPGA tees. Again, the teams can be chosen either by computer or humans. My preference is for the latter. Phil Mickelson and Stacy Lewis, for example, have a natural chemistry because of their KPMG connection.

3). SAME VENUE, DIFFERENT TOURNAMENTS: How about the PGA Tour and the LPGA both playing an official tournament at the same venue on the same week from different tees? The men are playing the men and the women the women. This would have to be a limited-field event because of the number of players involved but that's no big deal. The LPGA has limited-field tournaments outside the U.S. and the PGA Tour has WGC tourneys and FedEx Cup events that are limited field. This can be done, as the twin U.S. Opens at Pinehurst No. 2 proved. Women can putt greens at the same speed as men, they just need to be hitting in the right approach irons in order to hold the greens. A threesome of men would tee off followed by a threesome of women.

4) A WOMEN'S EVENT AT AUGUSTA NATIONAL: This idea would have been unthinkable in the pre-Billy Payne Era. But under Payne, Augusta National Golf Club has taken a real leadership role in the growth of the game. The Asia Pacific Amateur Championship, the Latin American Amateur Championship and the Drive, Chip & Putt Championship are all events in which ANGCL has partnered with governing bodies to help grow the game globally and with junior players. A women's event at ANGCL would be a one-off or an occasional event, the way The Old Course at St. Andrews has hosted two Ricoh Women's British Opens. The three logical candidates for Augusta National are the Solheim Cup, the U.S. Women's Open and the

KPMG Women's PGA Championship. It would bring great exposure to the women's game.

5). STAGGER FINISHING DAYS: The four major pro tours based in the United States – The PGA Tour, Web.com Tour, PGA Tour Champions and LPGA – should finish on different days. What if the Champions finished on Saturday, the PGA Tour on Sunday, the LPGA on Monday and the Web.com on Tuesday? In fact, the Web.com has already said it will have a couple of mid-week, overseas finishes. Now, you'll say this will be an inconvenience to fans, TV and volunteers. But I'd respond by saying fans and volunteers already have two weekdays to deal with under the current system so it's just a matter of making them different weekdays. And I think it would increase TV interest by creating a series of Championship Days.

I'd also like to see the PGA Tour play a short course like National Golf Links of America, Pine Valley or Seminole to see how they would handle not playing bomb-and-gouge golf. Or how about a limited-field made-for-TV event in which the men play equipment from 40 years ago? And a mixed team, best-ball event involving the PGA Tour Champions and the LPGA Legends Tour might be interesting.

The move to change the format of the Zurich has opened the door, as has the strategic relationships the LPGA now has with both the PGA Tour and the PGA of America. Let's kick that door wide open and create tours that throw in something different on occasion. It might be fun. And what do we have to lose?