

HEY GOLF CHANNEL, LET'S STAGE A MATCH OF THREE SINGLE-DIGIT MALE AMATEURS AGAINST AN LPGA PRO AND WATCH THE COMEDY ENSUE

By Ron Sirak • @ronsirak
October 22, 2018



At its best, social media is an immediate sharing of ideas among informed people. At its worst, it is an unedited platform for people to voice their inner monologue, which more often than not should remain silent. I am particularly amused when people – pretty much exclusively men – weigh in on Twitter when I write about women's golf and the LPGA in particular and try to demean the game.

Now these guys are a tiny minority of the responders I get, even among men, most of whom recognize the beauty and value of the women's game. But among the naysayers I've detected two common themes.

One is to say: "No one cares about women's golf." Well, in fact, tens of millions of people globally care deeply about women's golf. Did you see the crowds at the UL International Crown in Korea? What the tweeter is really saying is that *he* doesn't care about women's golf. And that's fine. It's just too bad he's so insecure in his belief that he insists everyone feel the same way he does. #SAD.

The second reaction I get is from the macho single-digit male who says: “I’d kick the butt of the average LPGA player.” Well, actually, no you wouldn’t, which leads me to my idea for a made-for-TV golf event.

Let’s have a contest in which three single-digit handicap male amateurs are selected to play a 36-hole stroke-play competition against an LPGA player on a golf course set up to LPGA green and rough specs and at the typical LPGA distance. Let’s have gallery ropes, a gallery and TV cameras. And let’s play real golf: No mulligans, no gimmes, no rolling the ball over in the fairway.

Among the things these boastful boys are not taking into consideration is the choke factor. Stroke-play golf played by the Rules of Golf is incredibly stressful. LPGA players compete under those conditions 25 to 30 times a year in the tour’s 34-event schedule. They know what it’s like to have their every shot watched and every moved scrutinized.

One of the reasons I like the idea of a 36-hole event is so the amateurs can go back to their hotel room at night after the first round and see what people are saying about them on social media. Let’s see how they like having their skills demeaned. And let’s see how tight their collar feels the next day when they tee it up.

The second thing that I’m certain about these single-digit males is that they have an inflated vision of their

ability. I often hear guys bragging about hitting it 300 yards when what they should be saying is that have, on occasion, hit it 300 yards – if the hole was playing downhill and downwind.

I once asked Butch Harman the most common mistake by recreational golfers and he said one was that they base club selection on their best shot not their average shot. I think many men evaluate their entire game that way. I think of the great line in a Dan Jenkins novel when the amateur is chopping it up in the pro-am and he says to the pro: “I’m better than this; I just never play that way.” Exactly.

All of this has rattled around in my head for a while but it popped to the front of my brain when I recently came in possession of a study conducted by the stewards of the game who used Shot Link to create a comparison between abilities of PGA Tour, LPGA and top amateur players. While the information is nearly a decade old, the trends likely are still valid with driving distance probably being 5 yards or so longer for everyone.

In the study, data was gathered on PGA Tour players and LPGA from 2006 through 2010 – a five-year period that is lengthy enough to be a valid reflection of performance. Data was also gathered in that time period from competitors in the World Amateur Handicap Championship in Myrtle Beach. The results are fascinating.

The average driving distance for PGA Tour players was 288 yards; for the LPGA it was 249 yards; and for amateurs with handicaps 0-to-5 it was 237 yards. Driving accuracy for the PGA Tour was 63 percent; for the LPGA 67 percent; for the amateurs 63 percent. Greens hit in regulation were 65 percent for the men; 63 percent for the women; 48 percent for the amateurs.

The men averaged 1.78 putts per green; the women averaged 1.82 and the amateurs 2.05. Sand saves were 50 percent for the men; 39 percent for the women and 18 percent for the amateurs. Scoring average was 71.1 for the men; 72.6 for the women and 82.3 for the amateurs. The birdie average was 3.4 per 18 holes for the men; 2.9 for the women and 0.94 for the amateurs.

These numbers support both of my theories. First, many amateurs overestimate how far they hit the ball. And secondly, there is the choke factor. The fact that 0-to-5 handicap players averaged 82.3 tells me that handicaps established in the Saturday skins match don't hold up real well under the scrutiny of multiple-day stroke-play competition.

But let's prove this once and for all: Come on Golf Channel! Let's have a contest and the three winners from a pool of single-digit male amateurs take on an LPGA pro in 36 holes of stroke play under tournament conditions and under the scrutiny of the TV camera. I

know I'd pay to watch that – although I'd rather be there writing about it.