

Four Lazy Weeks

By Lorne Duncan

Life as a professional caddie means you rarely know where you'll end up next. One minute you're working a tournament off the coast of South Carolina, the next you're off the west coast of Africa. You must be—or become—a postulant of flexibility.

After a very successful week at the 2014 Sea Pine Heritage Classic on Hilton Head Island with my nineteen-year-old boss Matt Fitzpatrick, a US Amateur Champion who just finished Top 25, I realized that my services would't be needed until the US Open at Pinehurst No. 2 several weeks later. After short visits with friends in Brooklyn and Myrtle Beach, I was off to my adopted home in UK for four lazy weeks off.

Pete Cowen's Golf Academy is where I hang my hat during longer stretches of time off and I would spend weeks just hitting balls, relaxing and sitting in on Pete's lessons. Or so I thought.

I'd just walked in and said hello to Pete when my phone rang. It was my old boss Johan Edfors who'd heard I was back in Europe. Johan wanted to know if I wanted to caddie for him in the Madeira Island Open. Five minutes later I'd booked a flight to Madeira and I was on my way to the train station. As they say, "that's life on Tour." I'd still have three lazy weeks off after Madeira.

Six am the next morning I was flying to this beautiful Portuguese island off the coast of Morocco where a magnificent verdant mountain protrudes out of the Atlantic Ocean. There isn't a flat spot on the Island of Madeira (one of our islands that make up Madeira) and Robert Trent Jones designed as good a track as one could on a nearly impossible piece of land atop the mountain. Alas, Robert could do little about the course's vulnerability to weather. Come Sunday morning only one tournament round had been completed and unrelenting clouds clung to the mountain. You couldn't see as far as you could throw a golf ball, let alone drive one.

The on/off pace of the tournament wasn't exactly breaking the hearts of the caddie fraternity. Santo da Serra Golf Club is one of the hardest courses in the world to walk. Not caddie-friendly. The Ninth Hole is referred to as 'cardiac hill' by loopers who've had the misfortune of having bosses compete in this event. Little did we know that by day's end it would more than a mere saying.

Johan and I were on the Fifteenth Green when a siren sounded to stop play, yet again. Minutes later a tour official informed us that one of the caddies had 'gone down' on the Ninth and that play was suspended until things could be sorted out. We hopped a ride on a cart to the clubhouse which took us by the Ninth Hole where an ambulance had parked in the middle of the fairway, and a body was lying under a sheet. It was Ian Macgregor, Alistair Forsythe's caddy, a good friend with whom I'd had coffee that very morning. I was in shock. We were all in shock.

It took a couple hours before Ian's body was removed at which time everyone assembled on the putting green for a minute of silence. In what must have been an agonizing decision, Tour officials decided to complete the round and the tournament. Johan made a couple birdies on the remaining holes propelling him into Top Ten on the leaderboard but his success produced no joy. With two hours of play remaining, it was clear that players and caddies were going through the motions with little heart for play or competition. It was surely the strangest—and saddest—three holes of tournament golf I'd ever experienced in my years on Tour.

Sunday evenings are normally a gregarious time for tour caddies. With work behind us, caddie stories typically flow as fast as the beer. But I ended the day sitting alone in an empty Portuguese bar nursing a beer, contemplating the untimely departure of my friend and colleague. As somber a Sunday evening as I've ever had on tour.

Johan's Top Ten finish in Madeira meant he was automatically offered a spot in The Spanish Open the next week. One week back on Tour was now two. I'd still have two lazy weeks off after all.

Before I knew it, I was in Girona, one of the best Tour stops. A quiet river flows through this Spanish town so one can spend a whole day crisscrossing the river over dozens of pedestrian bridges and forge a labyrinthian circuit on streets with hundreds of little bars and restaurants. It's picture perfect, and the golf course does a good job of matching the town's charm. The P.G.A. Catalonia Club is one of the best—and toughest—courses in Spain. By week's end, Miguel Ángel Jiménez, the 50-year-old Spaniard, had outplayed his younger competitors for his 21st European Tour victory, and the win had all but secured his place on the 2014 European Ryder Cup team. To this day, he is one of the oldest winners on the European Tour.

Halfway through the Spanish Open week, Johan informed me that he'd received an invitation to the PGA at Wentworth. Hmm... The Wentworth week is the biggest tournament in Europe apart from the British Open so it did take much convincing to get me to come along. One week became three. I'd make the most of my one remaining lazy week off.

The tournament was a big event and brought out people I hadn't seen in ages. It was a great week—spent visiting friends nearly more than caddying—and halfway through it, Johan had received an invitation to the Scandinavian Masters. I wasn't getting the hang of this whole 'time off' thing, was I? I was off to Malmo Sweden!

For a caddie, Malmo rates near the top of the Tour schedule. There's a little square in the centre of town surrounded by bars and while the cost of alcohol is prohibitive, there's one attraction that makes the place irresistible: golden-haired Swedish sirens. More than one caddie has come to Malmo never to leave, abandoning the life of a wonderlust for something akin to a plugged lie. I was nearly a victim of a siren myself once upon a time.

The 2014 Scandinavian Masters was played on The PGA National, a beautiful links-style course that received a thumbs-up from most players. Matteo Manassero had managed to get a free room for his caddie at the hotel where players are lodged and he

was kind enough to include me. Life on tour would be pretty nice if you could live like that every week.

After my 'weeks off', I flew back to Myrtle Beach to pick up my car and head to Pinehurst No 2 for the 2014 US Open.

The Coore Crenshaw redesign that staged this Open was a hundred-fold improvement over the course I'd caddied on in 2005. The architects had replaced the foot-long rough edging the course to reveal the sand and scrubland Donald Ross had originally showcased. The result was one of the most beautiful courses you'd ever hope to see. And challenging: these upside-down saucers so-called 'greens' required remarkable patience. Martin Keimer demonstrated that he had deep wells of it, enough to prevail and win. Young boss Matt tied for 38th after playing with Lee Westwood, Darren Clark, Phil Mickelson, Justin Rose, among others.

While being a postulant of flexibility had robbed me of my lazy weeks off in the UK, it had filled my heart and soul with rich experiences. I had no regrets. I was on to the next Tour stop as would have been my friend Ian MacGregor.