



Going Fore the Gold

By **Jake Schneider**, Assistant Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

Amid all of the hoopla and letdown over Chicago's failed bid for the 2016 Summer Olympics was a bit of good news for the golf world. For the first time since Canadian George Lyon claimed individual gold and the U.S. swept the team medals at the 1904 Olympics in St. Louis, golf is back, and it's about time. The format will be similar to PGA tour events in that it will be a 72-hole stroke play tournament. What will be different is the selection process for the 60 participating players. Using the Official World Golf Rankings, the top fifteen players will automatically be eligible to participate, regardless of country affiliation. After that, if a country has two or more players in the top-15, no more players from that country are eligible. Although this system will likely leave out some of the top American players, it will give players from countries that aren't traditional hotbeds of golf a chance at representing their country, and I certainly believe that it's a fair process that could allow a relative unknown to be in the mix of things. Given the international nature of the economy and the worldwide exposure that the Olympics generates, this formula has the potential to be a real shot in the arm for the growth of golf around the globe.

Besides being good for the game, it should be downright exciting. Although I personally enjoy watching ANY golf more than my girlfriend would care for, nothing tops the excitement of rooting on the U.S. in the Ryder Cup or the President's Cup. My couch still has an impression in it from the ridiculous amount of hours that I spent watching Tiger, Stricker, and the boys putting on a show at Harding Park this past October. Someday, it is my hope that the team format will also be reintroduced to Olympic competition.

Unlike many of the other Olympic sports, there are few people in the world who would successfully argue that Tiger isn't the world's best golfer. If the Olympics were held tomorrow and Vijay Singh captured the gold, would that make Vijay Singh the world's best golfer? I certainly don't think so, but such is the fickle nature of golf, where you never know who's going to win from week-to-week. Comparatively, Jamaican Usain Bolt, who's currently the world's fastest man, would probably win 95% of the 100 and 200 yard dashes that he entered. Tiger's good (understatement of the year nominee), but even he'd be lucky to win 50% of the time. What am I getting at? Well, despite my excitement for golf's Olympic return, the amount of tour tournaments that are played on a yearly basis are a far better barometer for determining the world's best player than 72 holes in Rio.

However, a team format would be unique in that it would be a tournament that determined the world's best golfing country. Although I'm short on details (and stature) and long on ideas, if you were to pit the top four players from the countries that are traditional golf powers (U.S., Canada, Spain, Ireland, Australia, South Africa, etc.), I believe that you would have an incredibly exciting tournament that would offer more significance than individual stroke play. But, for now, it is what it is, and any time that golf can garner attention on a huge international stage like the Olympics, it's hard to complain. Additionally, if Stricker happens to win, any complaints that I've logged in this article will be retracted, and Madison will officially be named the best golfing city in the world. 🌱

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