

PGA TOUR FACING STIFF CHALLENGE

The Professional Golfers Association Tour, which has rolled along with nary a serious hitch for nearly 100 years, has hit a huge pothole or, more accurately, a gigantic crevasse.

The PGA Tour, which brags it has provided \$3 billion in charitable donations through the years, suddenly faces competition in the form of a Saudi Arabian-based golf entity with an apparent bottomless pit of money.

Funded by Saudi Arabia's public investment fund, which is fuelled by oil revenues reported to be \$1 billion per day, the LIV Tour has been trying to establish a foothold by offering vast sums of money to established PGA Tour players. And it has worked. Phil Mickelson accepted \$200 million to come on board; No. 15 in the world, Dustin Johnson, signed on for \$125 million. Journeyman pros such as Kevin Na, Patrick Reed, Bryson DeChambeau, Charl Schwartzel, Lee Westwood and Ian Poulter have also jumped to the LIV tour.

With eight tournaments planned this year, four of them in the U.S., the LIV tour features 48-player fields, 54-hole tournaments (18 fewer than standard PGA Tour events) and shotgun starts, where golfers begin simultaneously, but on a different hole. Schwartzel won the inaugural event June 11 in England, cashing a cheque for \$4 million, the highest winner's purse in the history of golf. The next event is coming up in Portland, Ore., starting June 30.

Critics say the LIV Tour is merely an exercise in 'sportwashing' — a term used to describe efforts to sanitize a country's image through sport. Saudi Arabia's reputation for human rights violations, censorship, treatment of women, etc., is less than stellar and players who have taken the money and joined LIV have had to face media questions about the morality involved.

PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan said those who play on the LiV Tour will be suspended and unable to compete in events such as the Ryder Cup, or regular Tour events. Not affected are the players' eligibility for the four majors, which are not run by the Tour.

It comes down to money vs. legacy. The game's best young players are, for now, staying with the PGA Tour, hoping to pile up victories they consider more legitimate than those offered by the LIV Tour, which is seemingly a rest home for the aging, over-the-hill players more concerned with their bank accounts than their historic position in the game.

Still, playing golf for what some call 'blood money' will undoubtedly tarnish the image of those involved. Said Monahan: "I would ask any player that has left, or any player that would ever consider leaving, 'Have you ever had to apologize for being a member of the PGA Tour?'"

This is a fluid situation. More players will be lured by the fantastic gobs of money. As a result, the future of the PGA Tour could be in real jeopardy.

- **Bob Molinaro** of pilotonline.com, after Commanders defensive coordinator **Jack Del Rio** described the Jan. 6 insurrection as a 'dust-up': "The Washington Commanders and public-relations gaffes go together like **Beavis and Butt-Head.**"
 - **Steve Simmons** of SunMedia: "The Maple Leafs didn't fire the president, the general manager, or the head coach after another first-round defeat but they did fire their goaltending instructor, **Steve Briere**. Which is a lot like blaming the first base coach for a bad baseball season."
 - Simmons again: "They are officially naming a street after **Kyle Lowry** in Toronto. What they should be doing is naming a southbound road, heading directly out of town, in the name of **Kawhi Leonard.**"
 - Golf columnist **Geoff Shackelford** on Twitter, while **Phil Mickelson** was suffering through an opening-round 78 at the U.S. Open: "The bad news for Phil: He's +5 thru 6 holes and on his way out of town. The good news for Phil: The tour he plays on doesn't require good golf at all."
 - Comedy writer **Brad Dickson** of Omaha: "Got a prompt on my iPhone reading: "You've walked 1.1 fewer miles today than yesterday." Would you quit nagging me, phone? How far have YOU walked?"
 - Headline at theonion.com: "**Deshaun Watson** Rethinks Life Choices After Finding Self On Browns"
 - **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "**Muhammad Ali** on a commemorative stamp? It's way overdue. As the ever-confident heavyweight champ, who died in 2016, once said: 'I should be a postage stamp. That's the only way I'll ever get licked.'"
 - **Ethan Bird** of Meridian, Mississippi's WTOK-TV, noting the local 10-day forecast called for temperatures ranging from 95 to 99: "It's looking a little bit like those Dallas Cowboys — peaking in the 90s."
 - **RJ Currie** of sportsdeke.com: "The governing body for bobsleigh has approved teams of four being mixed-gender. It's believed most sleds will have one female pilot with three men telling her how to drive."
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