

Down Under golfer Senior still gets shortchanged on respect

By BRAD EWART
Special to The Japan Times

If someone asked you the question, "Who are the top Australian golfers?" You would probably answer Greg Norman, Ian Baker-Finch or maybe Craig Parry.

How about Peter Senior. Peter who? That's what many golfing fans have said in the past of one of the best players Australian golf has ever produced.

After Senior's commendable play in the recent British Open at Royal St. George's — people may soon start to give this man the respect he deserves. Senior carded rounds of 66-67-70 and 67 for a fourth-place finish.

He is ranked among the top-25 golfers in the world and has won tournaments on the European, Japanese and Australian tours. The only place Senior hasn't won is on the U.S. PGA Tour.

"I feel I've done better than most," admits Senior. "I wouldn't put myself in the top category, but I'm on my game. I feel I'm just about equal to anyone."

It's not easy playing in the shadows of a golfing giant like Norman. Especially now that Norman has added another Open title to his list of impressive credentials.

At 152 cm, Senior barely stands as tall as Norman's shoulders. With his curly hair, bushy mustache, stocky forearms and a barrel chest;

if Norman is "the Great White Shark," then Senior is "the Fighting Koala Bear."

Senior, 34, is a self-confessed "streak player." During a three-week period in 1989 he captured the Australian PGA, Australian Open and the Johnnie Walker Classic. Since then he has won two times in both Europe and Japan. To date, he has won 18 tournaments around the world.

Earlier this season he took home the Chunichi Crowns title for his second victory on the JPGA Tour.

"The other players on tour think he is a better player than perhaps Peter does himself," explained compatriot Terry Gale. "Peter is a very fine golfer. In fact, over the past four or five years, with his record, you would have to say Peter Senior is Australia's best golfer."

Broomstick putter

What people won't forget about Senior is his "broomstick putter" and cross-handed chipping style. Cross-handed putting has become the rage of late. But cross-handed chipping? Now that's a new one.

Senior's putter shaft is longer than that of his driver and he looks more like he's sweeping the sidewalk than trying to sink putts. He sets up to the ball standing erect and holds the club with his left hand at the top of the club, rests his



Peter Senior PGA PHOTO

chin on the end of the grip and extends his right arm straight down the shaft.

"I was having a terrible time on the greens," explained Senior. "It was after the first round of the British Masters five years ago and I had taken 40 putts. It was really bloody pathetic."

Playing in the group behind Senior that day was British golfer Sam Torrance who had invented the broomstick putter and was using it to some degree of success. Torrance gave one of his inventions to Senior and suggested he should at least "give it a try."

After a few hours of prac-

tice and experimentation Senior used the broomstick putter during the next round. "The first hole I left myself with a difficult downhill putt of about four meters. I said to myself "if I'm going to yip one it's going to be this putt."

"I stood up and made the best putt of all time. It didn't go in but felt really good. The next hole, I holed about a 10-meter putt that went up and over a hill before going in."

Senior went on to shoot a 66 for the day and then added rounds of 66 and 72 to finish in a tie for sixth place. "I actually felt like a golfer again. It resurrected something inside of me and I've stayed with this style ever since."

The broomstick is obviously working for both Senior and Torrance. Torrance has won three tournaments this year and is the leading money-winner on the European PGA Tour. Jim Dent has also found considerable success with the broomstick putter on the U.S. PGA Senior Tour.

It really doesn't matter what style or make of putter a golfer uses. If the ball goes in to the hole — it works.

Tough years

Senior's success in the world of professional golf did not just happen overnight. After a successful amateur career he joined the professional tournament in the South Australian Open.

He then had five uneventful

seasons that were compounded by a fractured wrist bone. Senior didn't find his form again until 1984. That year, he won three titles on the Australian Tour.

With very little money and mountains of ambition, Senior packed his bags and headed off to the U.S. Gold Trail. He finished fifth in the 1985 Fall PGA Qualifying School and then proceeded to get lost among the multi-talented players on the regular tour.

"Unfortunately, in those days I didn't have much money. I didn't have a sponsor and to play any tour you've got to do well early to keep going for the rest of the year."

Just making cuts proved difficult and Senior's paychecks were few and far between. With very little money left, Senior headed back to more comfortable ground on the European Tour. It didn't take the likable Aussie long to find his form in Europe and he quickly won the PLM Open. He followed that up in '87 with a victory at the Monte Carlo Open and three more victories in Australia.

"To play the U.S. Tour you have to be really on top of your game. I didn't go back because I don't think I was confident. I didn't feel I was ready and I probably went over there a little too early in my career."

Senior does go back now

and plays three or four tournaments a year in the U.S. A very respectable second-place finish at The International in Colorado is his best result in America. This year Senior will play in the International, World Series and PGA Championship on the U.S. PGA Tour.

"I feel like I have the game now to play in the States, but I enjoy playing everywhere — especially here in Japan and back home in Australia. I'd love to win in the U.S. before I'm finished because then I would have won on every tour in the world."

Last year's Bridgestone Open victory earned Senior his playing privileges on the JPGA Tour. With his win at this year's Chunichi Crowns, Senior has decided to now play here on a regular basis and join the other Australians on the JPGA Tour. The "Wandering Wallabies" currently playing in Japan include: Brian Jones, Graham Marsh, Gale, Roger Mackay, Peter McWinney, Craig Warren and Bradley Hughes.

"I really moved to the Japanese tour for one reason and that's to be closer to my family in Australia. It is much easier to arrange my schedule to play here in Japan and it's a much easier and shorter flight back home than it is from Europe."

In only seven tournaments on the JPGA Tour this season



BRITISH GOLFER SAM TORRANCE, seen here using his usual "broomstick" putter in the 1990 Madrid Open, passed on a model of it to Senior five years ago at the British Open and it has helped improve the Australian's game. REUTER PHOTO

Senior has banked just over \$26 million. Combined with his worldwide earnings over the past eight years, Senior's financial worries are over.

"I suppose I could easily retire now and just do other things. I've invested wisely in business ventures. Money is

definitely not a problem now and the only thing that really matters is winning," he said.

"I feel the only thing that I've got left to prove is to win a major. That, and winning the United States are two things that I dearly would love to do."