

Nathan Crace's

**LIPQUTS**<sup>TM</sup>

## Tin Cup

By: Nathan Crace Date: February 25, 2008

Two years ago, it was simply the debate over COR (the coefficient of restitution) of drivers—also known as the “spring like” effect of more technologically advanced driver faces. Now balls are flying too far, wedges are spinning too much from heavy rough, and drivers are growing grotesquely large among amateurs and on the professional Tours too. At one point, Tiger Woods even went so far as to say that he thought an “unspecified” player on the Tour was using an illegal driver. When the world’s #1 speaks, people listen—especially Tour director Finchem. And now they have turned their attention to little plastic cups—and not the ones cut into the greens for pin placements. Practically every other major sport has drug-testing policies for players. Why should golf be any different? Though one would hope the PGA Tour’s drug policy and punishment would be stricter and more effective than Major League Baseball’s old revolving door policy (see Dwight Gooden, et al), I hope that the end result will not land professional golfers in Congressional hearings on Capitol Hill.

Let me be clear about one thing: I wish Congress had its act together enough that steroid use in baseball was a realistic priority for those elected to pass laws and provide for the common good. It would be different if “We the People” had a little more faith in the House and Senate as a whole, but when they are pulling an 11% approval rating—yes that is 11, as in between 10 and 12—then maybe they should focus a little more on what they were elected to do and leave Roger Clemens alone. Right is right and wrong is wrong, but someone please tell me why the US Congress is holding hearings on the use of steroids in a privately operated organization and calling players to Washington, DC to testify under oath! I cannot be the only person who sees this as ridiculous. Am I? Seems to me that Major League Baseball should be stepping up to the plate (no pun intended) and have the backbone to police their own policies and actually levy some meaningful punishment on those who break them. I don’t need Nancy Pelosi to tell me that it’s wrong if Barry Bonds broke Hank Aaron’s record because Bonds was juiced on ‘roids....allegedly. But I digress.

The PGA Tour has finally made the long-awaited decision to put into place a standard policy for drug testing. Though it may be a gentlemen’s game, it is not unreasonable to think that some players may be trying to gain an edge. Look at the money involved. Look at the older players in their late 40’s who are trying to make a living against a bunch of flat-bellied twenty-somethings as they grind out a few more years before they become the young guns on the senior circuit. That’s not to say that I believe anyone on the Tour is using performance-enhancing drugs, but the thought does make a scenario some say is unthinkable appear much more realistic.

The LPGA Tour is also putting into place its own drug testing policy, though it began back on January 1, 2008 (the PGA Tour is set to begin testing no sooner than July 2008 after a period of “player education”). There are many similarities between the two tour policies such as who is tested and how as well as their respective “three strikes” policies for offenders. One notable difference, however, is what is tested for. While both ban the obvious such as steroids, masking agents, and recreational drugs of abuse like marijuana and cocaine, the LPGA Tour will apparently not test for human growth hormone (HGH) and synthetic blood doping agents. The LPGA does not feel that either is a “proven performance enhancer” for golf. Too bad the LPGA Commissioner isn’t a member of the US House of Representatives’ “Baseball Sub-Committee.” Though I have done no study of the impact of HGH on player performance in golf, it would seem that bulking up and hitting the ball further as a result of human growth hormone could be considered an unfair advantage by the person getting flown by 40 yards on every tee shot.

Another interesting point: the Tour will not publish any findings until a player has exhausted all chances for appeals under the policy. Even then, the Tour retains the right to withhold information on cases involving those “recreational drugs.” With the possibility of permanent loss of membership after the third offense, it will be interesting to see if anyone comes up positive this year. Of course, with the Tour’s appeal process, it might not be until next year or after until you and I hear about it. One of the more interesting facets of the policy is that as a condition of a player’s Tour membership, all players agree to “waive their right to seek judicial review of final decisions under the program.” Does this mean there will be no lawsuits if a player insists he is innocent and the Tour as judge, jury, and executioner bans him for life, embarrasses him, and cuts off his income? I doubt it. Besides, if you get kicked off the Tour, you are no longer a member of the Tour and the waiver would seem to be null and void. And it would be almost un-American not to sue these days. It will be interesting to see how those first cases unfold. This year’s Tour slogan may not be “The Race for the FedEx Cup,” but rather the “Race from the Little Plastic Cup.”

Lastly, one substance not banned by either Tour is nicotine. I don’t smoke and I don’t propose to tell those who do where they can and cannot smoke. I’ll leave that up to the local governments. Just don’t blow your smoke in my face or on my kids—they’ll tell you how disgusting smoking is anyway. I prefer to let the power of the market dictate matters. I personally do not frequent restaurants with smoking sections if I can avoid it because it’s next to impossible to truly separate the smoke from the non-smokers without locking them into a room with its own exhaust fan. I love a smoke-free environment and simply eat at restaurants that have their own no smoking policy. Ironically, however, some of the more notorious chain smokers on Tour may have a case of the DT’s by the end of Open week at Torrey Pines this year. You see, the course is owned by the City of San Diego and is therefore City property. By extension, smoking is not allowed on the course just as it is not allowed in City buildings and on City property. Nevermind John Daly’s affection for cigarettes. Can you imagine Angel Cabrera’s condition if he is in the hunt to defend his title come Sunday and the City has the puffing police eyeing him down the stretch with no place to duck and cover for a few drags? The way he was tearing through packs during the final round in 2007, there aren’t enough Port-a-Lets between Argentina and Escondido to help him take the edge off.

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