

GOLF

FEBRUARY
2015

YOUR LIFE, WELL PLAYED

GOLF.COM

Drive With

DUSTIN

"You don't have to swing hard. I swing it fast, sure, but how often do you see me finish off balance?"

\$5.99US \$6.99CAN



02

7 25274 10852 7

CONTENTS

GOLF.COM

FEBRUARY 2019 / VOLUME 61, ISSUE 2



We're giving away Dustin's entire cover look (yes, including that TaylorMade M5 driver)! Visit golf.com/dustincover for all the details on how you can win. Good luck!

JUST ONE MORE REASON TO AVOID THE HAZARDS ON FALDO'S LAGUNA GOLF LANG CÔ IN CENTRAL VIETNAM.

58

Drive. Pure. Roll.

Go one-on-one with the game's best, and learn to bomb it like DJ, strike it like Rahm and putt it like J-Day. This all-world trio tells you what it takes.

72

Lanny Wiles Still Hasn't Played Augusta National

It was supposed to be a chill Augusta day for President Ronald Reagan's young staffer. He might even get to tee it up if the Gipper gave the nod. Instead, Lanny Wiles found himself on the very wrong end of a .38.

78

Good Morning, Vietnam!

Two thousand miles of sandy shoreline make Vietnam a golf course designer's dream. Nicklaus and Norman are already on the scene, and with 89 new tracks slated to open by 2020, you should be, too.

88

Missing Celia

The sky was the limit for Spanish golf sensation Celia Barquín Arozamena. An Iowa State undergrad and Big-12 champ, her athletic feats paled only in comparison with her profound gift for loving family and friends. Then she was gone, the victim of a devastating tragedy in the place she felt most at home: the golf course.



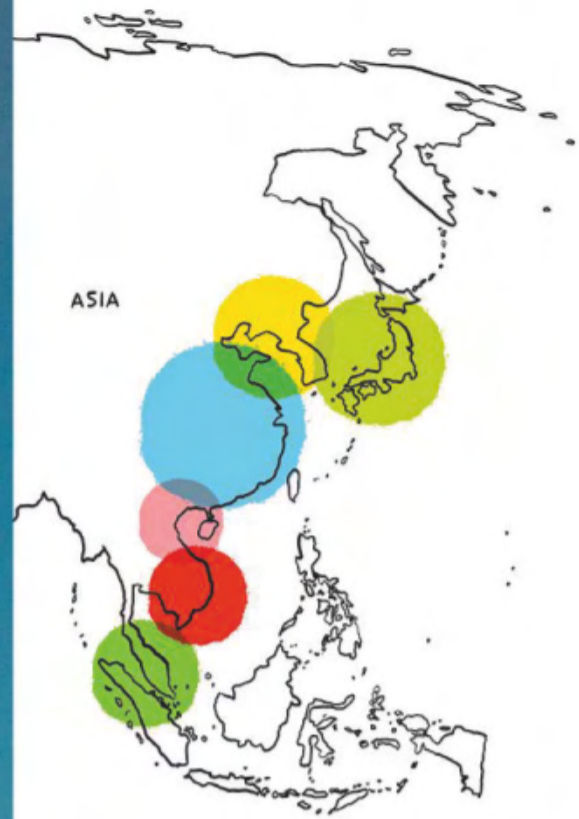
COLUMNISTS

<u>The Knockdown / Alan Shipnuck</u>	22
<u>From Scratch / Will Leitch</u>	28
<u>This Golfing Life / Michael Bamberger</u>	32
<u>Paige's World / Paige Spiranac</u>	38
<u>Rounds / Michael Corcoran</u>	44
<u>Every Shot Counts / Mark Broadie</u>	117
<u>Golf Science / Dave Pelz</u>	120

Good Morning, VIETNAM!

GOLF DAWNED IN ASIA
MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO,
BUT IF 'NAM CAME A LITTLE
LATE TO THE GAME, IT'S NOW
RISING AND SHINING. **BY JOSH SENS**





In

another setting, an SUV emblazoned with giant flaming golf balls might not cause a stir. But on the honeycombed streets of Hanoi, swarmed by motorbikes and rickshaws, and shadowed by ornate imperial pagodas, it stands out like a pushcart at a NASCAR race.

Perched at the wheel of his Toyota Fortuna, Duc Pham navigates the morning frenzy, rounding a rotary and ripping through an intersection without slowing, red lights in this city being mostly just for show. A traffic cop, his head on a swivel, tracks Pham's ride as it passes. A cluster of school children, crowded on a corner, flash thumbs up and shout in Vietnamese. "They're basically saying, 'Hey, that's cool, man!'" Pham explains, translating their reaction to his car's airbrushed side panels. "But

Laguna Golf Lăng Cô, a championship course designed by Sir Nick Faldo, hugs the country's central coast and epitomizes Vietnam golf's earthy exoticism.

I'm not sure they know what a golf ball is."

When he was their age, Pham, now 31, didn't have a clue. That was in the early '90s, and golf around Hanoi wasn't even yet a novelty; it was nonexistent. Pham's chosen sports were two national favorites: soccer and *da cau*, a variant of badminton played with one's feet.

In 1997, though, a game with a broad and deepening grip elsewhere in Asia finally got a foothold in Pham's part of the world. It happened with the opening of Kings Island, on a lake-wrapped peninsula 30 miles west of

the capital, Hanoi. It was the first golf course in northern Vietnam. Pham's father, a government official, got invited to an outing, and he brought along his then 11-year-old son. "I remember my first practice shot going high and straight, and the guys there telling my father, 'Your boy is a natural!'" Pham says. "I was really proud."

He was also hooked.

After high school, Pham, an unreformed golf junkie in a region with few outlets to indulge his fix, embarked for Brisbane, Australia, the better to immerse himself in the game. He returned

home eight years later, armed with impeccable Aussie-inflected English and membership in the PGA of Australia, making him the first—and still the only—Vietnamese citizen to earn those stripes. In the years since, having parlayed his credentials into two successful golf academies and retail shops in Hanoi, as well as his own golf instruction show on Vietnamese TV, Pham has emerged as a leading figure in a fast-growing market and as something of an emblem of today's Vietnam—a communist country where capitalism is alive and well. As is its favorite leisure sport.

Over the past decade, in the distant wake of golf's arrival in Japan and its more recent wildfire spread in Korea and China, a burgeoning monied class has given rise to a swelling population of Vietnamese golfers and triggered a starburst of course construction. Layouts by the marquee likes of Greg Norman

LAYOUTS BY THE LIKES OF NORMAN AND NICKLAUS NOW STRETCH FROM HO CHI MINH CITY TO THE BORDER OF CHINA.



Previous spread: Justin Mott; all other photos by Christopher Wise; all maps by Michael Mullan.



A SLICE OF SOUTH KOREA

In this small, mountainous, golf-mad country, prime golf-course land is a highly prized commodity. And nowhere is there a greater concentration of it than on Jeju Island, a popular holiday destination with a balmy year-round climate, a bounty of natural beauty and a handful of courses well worth seeking out for some distinctly Jeju juju.

and Jack Nicklaus now stretch from Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in the south to Vietnam's northern border with China, where noted architect Brian Curley has carved a stunner that overlooks the postcard-worthy rock outcrops of Ha Long Bay.

Across the country, locales whose names might resonate for other reasons have been transformed into busy redoubts for the game. In the village of Lăng Cô, near the Hai Van Pass, site of some of the fiercest fighting of the Vietnam War, a cool Nick Faldo course—an amenity for two luxury hotels—now spreads between the mountains and the sea, its rice-paddy hazards grazed by water buffalo. In and around Da Nang, once a central base of American military operations, R&R today includes the option of a round at one of four courses, among them designs by Norman, Nicklaus and Colin Montgomerie, whose layout, Montgomerie Links, is dotted at its edge by a weathered machine-gun pillbox. A fifth nearby course, slated to open this summer, also winds around a wartime relic—a concrete bunker. But the most distinctive traits of Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s layout-in-the-making are the artful rumples of a first-rate seaside track.

“Setting foot on it is a bit of a time warp,” Jones Jr. says. “The land has a rich history, which we’ve aimed to preserve. It also happens to be ideal for golf.”

Vietnam has a bounty of such sites, thanks in no small part to a sandy shoreline that extends for more miles than the entire West Coast of the United States. That factor alone

THE CLUB AT NINE BRIDGES

\$100 million of Samsung money reportedly went into the construction of this exclusive club, which hosts the CJ Cup, the first PGA Tour event ever staged in South Korea. Justin Thomas won the inaugural edition, in 2017, and Brooks Koepka snatched the title the following year.

BLACKSTONE GOLF & RESORT

Cut through rolling, rocky terrain, this 27-hole facility offers pristinely manicured golf in a tranquil, foothills setting. Two of the three nines (the East and South) are open to members and their guests only. But the North avails itself to public play.

PINX GOLF CLUB

Water, water, everywhere, not only in the views of the nearby coastline but also on the course, a plush layout rife with man-made creeks and lakes. Even by lavish Korean clubhouse standards, the après-golf facility here stands out, as does the property's luxury hotel.

LOTTE SKYHILL COUNTRY CLUB

A serene parkland setting provides the backdrop for two stoutly challenging courses by Robert Trent Jones Jr., where minefields of bunkers and myriad water hazards can be either fun or frustration, depending on the state of both your game and mind.

gives Vietnam an edge in the race toward the golf future over such space-pinched countries as South Korea and Japan. Balmy year-round temperatures are also an advantage. The political climate is accommodating, too. In contrast to China, where the government's anti-corruption campaign has put the kibosh on new course construction, Vietnam's ruling party has proclaimed its goal of pumping up supply. A plan put forth by the prime minister's office calls for the completion of 89 new courses by 2020, nearly double the number that exist today.

Financial muscle for such projects used to come mostly from overseas, but like so much else in Vietnamese golf, it's begun to skew domestic. Take the evolution of Kings Island, where Duc Pham first swung a club. The property, which visitors access by driving to a dock an hour west of Hanoi then hopping

onto a motorboat across a lake, was originally developed in 1997 by a Thai businessman. Less than two years later, it was snatched up by Nguyen Thi Nga, a feisty sixtiesomething with close-cropped hair, a taste for floral-patterned dresses and a net worth that reportedly makes her one of the wealthiest women in Vietnam.

As the chairwoman of BRG Group, a conglomerate that deals in banking, real estate and retail chains, among other holdings,



LEFT: The Lake Course at Sky Lake Resort in Hanoi, opened in 2012, has ample greenery—and teeth. RIGHT: Duc Pham, Vietnam's only PGA professional, likes his ride—and his roadside cuisine—extra spicy.



The New Norman

Greg Norman wears many hats, and not just ones with shark logos. Witness his new role as official tourism ambassador for Vietnam. His appointment reflects how seriously Vietnam takes golf, and also how seriously Norman takes Vietnam. With three courses to his name in the country—including heralded Ho Tram Bluffs, an Asian Tour host site, and KN Golf Links, a 27-hole facility etched through dunes along the southeast coast—and a slew of other projects underway, Norman sees great promise for the Vietnamese market.

Ambassador Norman? How'd that come about? The catalyst was what the government saw in the quality of our courses and in the potential for golf to promote tourism and growth. I've been in golf for more than 40 years. I've seen what it's contributed in Dubai, Mexico, Oman, Sweden. When the Vietnamese asked me to help, I was honored.

What drew you there in the first place? The people. The food. And of course the natural beauty. There's also an incredible openness here. Even though they're a communist country, they're very open to free-market capitalism. I was deeply impressed by that.

Golf is still in its infancy in Vietnam. Is it fair to say that that's where it was in China 20 years ago? Yes, but in China everybody was just throwing stuff out there without a sustainable approach, which is what also happened in the United States when we were building 400 courses a year. That's not sustainable, and it's something I've emphasized to the Vietnamese government. Let's make this a multi-generational opportunity.

What kind of courses will new generations see? I can tell you that we have five courses in construction and 21 in the pipeline. The site we're hoping to start on next year has sand dunes that dwarf anything you've seen and would dwarf anything I've done in golf. The coastline here is unbelievable. But I'm also looking at an area called Sapa, in the northwest. Vietnam has spectacular mountains and river systems to tap into as well. The diversity for golf architecture is just massive.

Madame Nga added a second course on the grounds. Just this past year, she cut the ribbon on a third, the Kings Course, a rolling layout that takes ample advantage of its lakeside terrain, building toward a rousing finish and a par-3 19th hole with an island green—a memorable stage for settling bets.

Designed by Jack Nicklaus II, the Kings Course is part of a larger deal between BRG and the Nicklaus group that has already yielded three courses around the country and calls for the completion of another five by 2020. At Madame Nga's insistence, each development boasts a signature feature. At the Kings Course, that role is filled by the island-green 19th. At Legend Hill, another of her Golden Bear-designed Hanoi-area courses, each of the 18 holes has two distinct green complexes, on which play alternates from one day to the next. Such projects result from interplay between architect and owner that can be enlightening for both sides.

"As an architect, I'm always focused first on good golf course strategy," says Nicklaus II. "But what I've learned is that as important as strategy is, Madame [Nga] puts more emphasis on beauty and difficulty. And the truth is that those

things aren't mutually exclusive. I can accomplish good strategy but also make a golf course that's beautiful and tough."

DURING GOLF'S embryonic stages in Vietnam, course aesthetics tended toward the lush and garden-like, much as they have throughout Asia, replete with waterfalls and forced carries. That's still the dominant taste. But a minimalist movement has taken root. One of several places where its seeds have sprouted is the city of Dong Hoi, an hour flight from Hanoi, along the country's northeast coast. Aside from its beaches—and a boardwalk brimming with street-food vendors and scented with the funky whiff of fish sauce—Dong Hoi merits guidebook mention for the Phong Nha caves, a labyrinth of subterranean passages that makes up the largest underground cavern system in the world.

But that's not what first caught Brian Curley's eye. A Monterey native with a laid-back, bemused California manner, Curley, 59, has seen golf through its infancy across large swaths of Asia. His credits on the continent include the Mission Hills projects, a pair of mega-golf developments in China. Curley turned his sights to Vietnam



Norman: Hunter Martin/Getty Images



NEAR WHAT ONCE WAS THE SITE OF
FIERCE FIGHTING IN THE VIETNAM WAR,
A FALDO COURSE SPREADS BETWEEN
THE MOUNTAINS AND THE SEA, ITS
HAZARDS GRAZED BY WATER BUFFALO.



On Laguna Lăng Cô, Sir Nick's second design in Vietnam, it is absolutely best to avoid the rough.

five years ago, as the Chinese government crackdown on course construction squelched the market there. What he saw in Dong Hoi was miles of unspoiled alabaster dunes, the stuff of architectural dreams.

Curley has since inked a contract with FLC, a Vietnamese real-estate concern, to build ten courses in Dong Hoi. That long-term task brings him to the area roughly once a month. On this sky-blue morning, he is standing on the brow of a deftly contoured green that backs up to the edge of a wind-swept beach. Blue water spreads behind him. White dunes rise on either side. Think *Streamsong* by the South China Sea.

This is the 15th hole of Curley's first completed Dong Hoi course. Another is seeded and set to open this summer. Both are so new that they're known generically as Course A and Course B, although Curley has proposed the names *Forest Dunes* and *Ocean Dunes*—inspired by their traits.

If their look and feel is relatively new for Vietnam, so is the style of play they welcome.

"I like courses that are find-your-ball hard," Curley says. From his beachside vantage point, his view takes in the broad sweep of Course A,

VIETNAM'S BRIGHTEST CLAIM TO FAME WAS SOLDIER NYUGEN "TIGER" PHONG, NAMESAKE OF EARL WOODS' FIRSTBORN SON.

which has ample fairways but not a single formal bunker, only firm, eye-catching sandy wastes. "But a lot of golfers here are gluttons for punishment and seem to think it's not golf if you don't lose a few sleeves along the way." He recalls an outing at another of his courses, in Quy Nhon, farther south along the coast, that drew some 300 golfers, all playing from the white tees. Over the course of three days, only four players broke 80. And yet, Curley says, "they all came away telling me that the course wasn't challenging enough."

As much as anything, Vietnam's scant percentage of skilled players underscores how swiftly its golf population has grown—to an estimated 30,000, a tenfold increase

from 20 years ago. Not bad when you consider that prior to the boom, the country's biggest claim to golf fame was not even a golfer but a Vietnamese soldier, Nyugen "Tiger" Phong, the wartime buddy of Earl Woods who became the namesake of Woods' firstborn son.

Two generations later, Tiger Phong is long dead and Tiger Woods has yet to play a round in Vietnam. The face of golf in the country is more prominently represented by Duc Pham, whose instructional show, *On Green*, airs on national TV with two to three new episodes per month.

Filming often takes Pham on the road. But today is a day off, and he's traveling for leisure, piloting his SUV through the heart of Hanoi toward the outskirts of the city, a set

CALL ME "MADAME" Legend Hill, the first of the Nicklaus-designed courses in Vietnam, features two greens on every hole and is owned by the colorful, commanding BRG chairwoman, Nguyen Thi Nga.



