

# NICK O'HERN LIVING THE DREAM



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FORMER LEADING CADDY,  
COURSE DESIGN MARKETER  
AND NOW LEADING  
AUSTRALIAN GOLF ANALYST

For many years Nick O'Hern seemed the quintessential journeyman, although many believed he had what it takes. After so many near misses he has an Australian PGA title to his credit, a top-20 ranking and now is living his dream among the world's best.



As Nick O'Hern relaxed at his new base in the exclusive Isleworth Estate in Orlando in Florida he had every right to pinch himself.

O'Hern had just completed the Tavistock Cup, which is a just a small community event for residents living in the Lake Nona and Isleworth area. Well not exactly your average community fun event. Included in the field were Tiger Woods, Stuart Appleby, Ernie Els, Retief Goosen and other leading players of the world. Not only do you have to be a resident of one of those communities to play the event but having a significant standing in the game also helps.

"Playing against and with guys like that would have been just a dream 10 years ago but now we are living the dream. To be surrounded by Tiger Woods O'Meara, Els, DiMarco and others - I think we had 12 of the top 30 players in the world was really quite special and the event itself was great to be involved in."

Not that O'Hern is any longer a lightweight in world golf. He has

climbed to No 16 golfer in the world (at the time of this article) and when one considers that he has won only two events in his professional career, it offers an indication to the consistency that is the hallmark of the West Australian's game.

The week prior to the Tavistock Cup, O'Hern had finished sixth at the World Golf Championship-CA event on the demanding test that is Doral Resort and Spa in Orlando. Three weeks prior he had beaten Tiger Woods at the Accenture Matchplay for the second time in three years and a couple of weeks earlier he had finished runner up to Goosen at the Qatar Masters.

"People are starting to recognise me over here as the man who beat Tiger Woods," said O'Hern, referring to his extra time third round victory over Woods at the Accenture. He had also beaten Woods in the same event in round two in 2004. "I'm not sure they yet know my name," he said jokingly, "but at least they are now recognising me."

There's been much to admire about O'Hern over the years as a player who gets the most out of his game. Any young player wanting a role

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model would do no better than watch O'Hern craft and plot his way around the golf course.

O'Hern knows his limitations and plays very much within them and plays a game with which the average golfer is far more familiar than that of Woods. O'Hern's results in the past few years in some of the best tournaments in the world highlight that a player does not necessarily need to be a modern day power hitter to achieve significant success at the elite level.

**T**he turning point for such an elevation came interestingly enough at the 2004 USPGA at Whistling Straits in Michigan when, although he finished only 31st, he came away from that event with a belief that he could compete at that level.

“I had a bit of a chance there after working my way into contention but had a poor finish to my last few holes.

“What it did for me however was that I came away thinking ‘I am

good enough to do this’. Sometimes there are points in your career where you do realise these things and from then on I have really had quite a good focus for the majors.”

That focus has taken him to 15th place finish at the Open Championship at St Andrews in 2005 and a brilliant sixth at the US Open at Winged Foot in 2006.

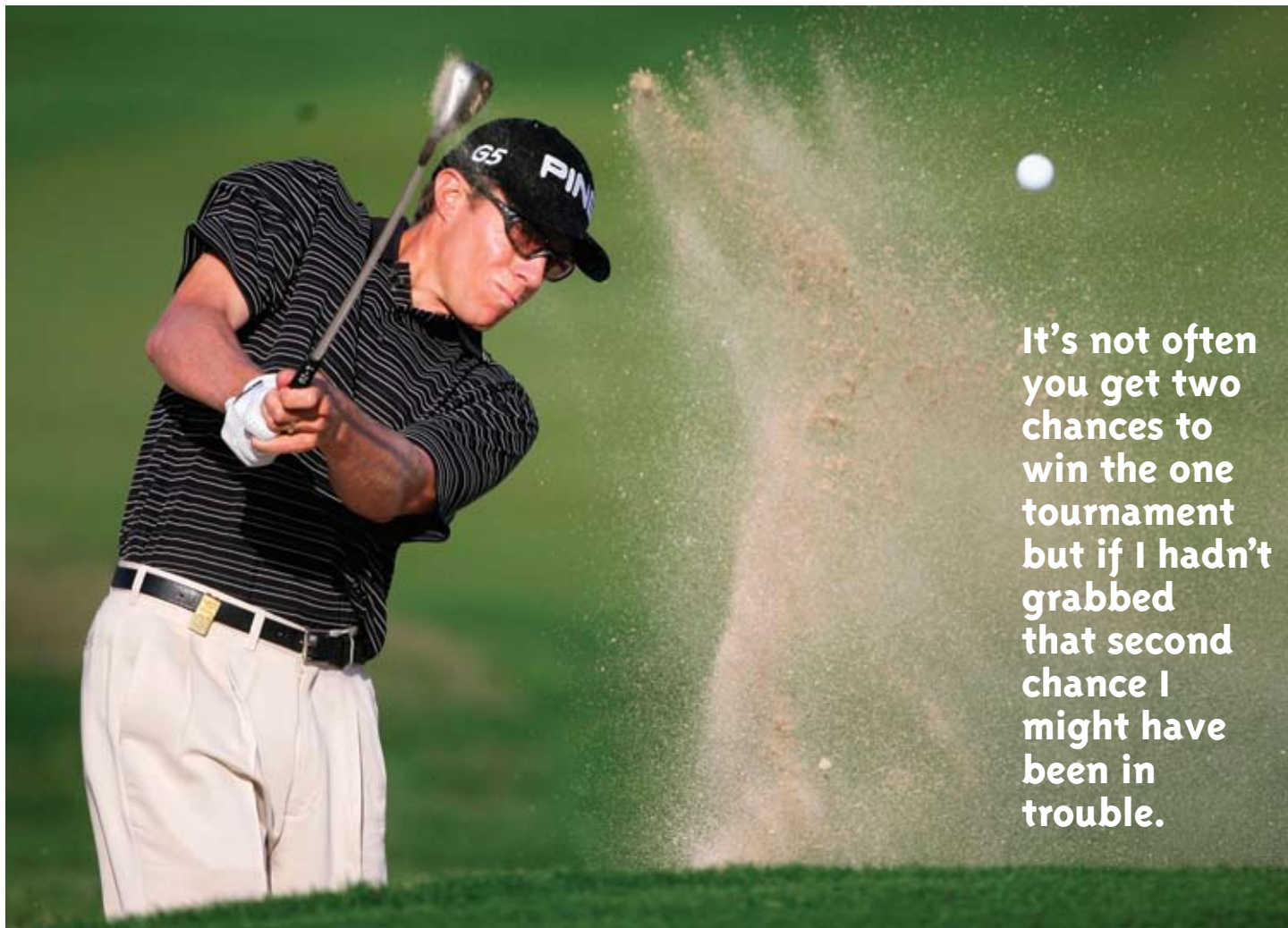
“I got to the winning score with nine holes to go at the US Open, although the US Open and its course set up being what it is, makes it difficult to hang on. It reinforced my belief that I was improving at that level.”

The Masters also offered another challenge - which this year O'Hern did not conquer, like many other big names, he did not make the cut.

“The first year I made the cut but I was like a deer in headlights as so many are as you try to take in all of the things that have been so exposed to via television over many years.

“Once that is out of the way, in the second year when I finished 19th you begin to learn how to play Augusta National and now this >>





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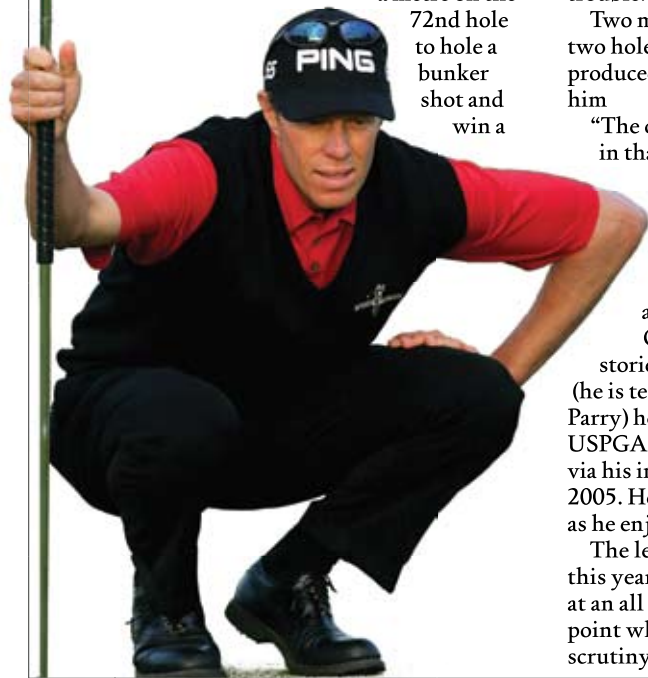
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year I have a really good idea of how I want to play the course.

"The thing that perhaps works against me there is the length of the golf course but to a large extent Augusta is all about how you handle the greens and when you miss a green making sure you get up and down as much as possible."

His significant win over Peter Lonard at the Australian PGA Championship at Hyatt Regency Coolum in December of 2006 was of particular importance. He was able to rebound from a shattering missed putt from less than

a metre on the 72nd hole to hole a bunker shot and win a



playoff at the fourth extra hole. He was still carrying the demons of a last round demise at the MasterCard Masters 12 months earlier and the jury was definitely still out on his capacity to pull through in a tight finish.

"The tournament at Coolum took me through a whole range of emotions from thinking I was comfortable to thinking 'what have I just done' and then the elation of holing a bunker shot to win. I was just so pleased that I was able to regroup and win there. It's not often you get two chances to win the one tournament but if I hadn't grabbed that second chance I might have been in trouble."

Two months later O'Hern led by two with two holes to play in Qatar before Retief Goosen produced a whirlwind birdie eagle finish to beat him

"The one in Qatar was different than Coolum in that there was nothing I could do about it.

I had played well for most of the week and in the last nine holes got it up and down from everywhere so the loss there was not really of my making and of course there was nothing I could do about Retief's great finish."

O'Hern is one of the understated success stories in the game. Now domiciled in Orlando (he is temporarily renting the home of Craig Parry) he has made the commitment to play the USPGA Tour, where he gained the right to play via his inclusion on the Presidents Cup team in 2005. He will retain his European Tour card also as he enjoys playing there.

The lefthander might just surprise us all this year in one of the majors. His self belief is at an all time high and his game has reached a point where it will stand up against the closest scrutiny. ■ ■

**FACT FILE**



**NICK O'HERN**

Height: 1.85m Weight: 74kg  
 Birthdate: October 18, 1971  
 Birthplace: Perth, Australia  
 Turned Pro: 1994

- O'Hern is the only player who has beaten Tiger Woods in matchplay more than once.

**TOURNAMENT WINS**

- 1997 Port Hedland PGA Classic
- 1998 Port Hedland PGA Classic, South West Open
- 1999 Schweppes Coolum Classic
- 2006 Cadbury Schweppes Australian PGA Championship

**TEAM APPEARANCES**

- 2000 Alfred Dunhill Cup
- 2004 World Cup
- 2005 Presidents Cup