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# The eternal grind of Padraig Harrington

'I want to do this when I'm 80,' says PGA TOUR Champions newcomer



November 07, 2022

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## FEATURES

# Padraig Harrington makes his PGA TOUR Champions debut

Padraig Harrington is OK with cartoonish mayhem. Over-the-top blood and guts, fine.

But he does not like violent movies.

“I didn’t like ‘Reservoir Dogs,’” Harrington said at the recent Constellation Furyk & Friends in Jacksonville, Florida, where he finished sixth. “A guy bleeds to death through the whole movie. That was harsh. I don’t like it when it’s real. But I loved ‘Pulp Fiction.’ I don’t mind cartoon violence; I was brought up on ‘Tom & Jerry.’

“I love ‘ Fargo,’ the series,” he continued. “I’m watching ‘Hacks.’ I like to binge-watch. ‘Breaking Bad’ was obviously brilliant. When Walter White let Jesse’s girlfriend die, I was so shocked at that. It was one of the worst things I’ve ever – but I have no problem watching a horror movie because it’s not real. Like ‘Cape Fear’ with DeNiro was terrifying. It was real.”

Where does Harrington, one of golf’s great range rats, find time for all these films? Even after 50, Harrington is still obsessed with getting better, a pursuit that doesn’t offer much time for movies. But his transatlantic commutes, flying business class on Aer Lingus, British Airways and United Airlines, and from his Dublin home, offer a few hours for him to kick his feet up. He likes it up there in the air, he said, savoring the hours with nothing to do but drink Diet Cokes, eat chocolate and delve into pop culture. While most of his peers long ago established U.S. bases to compete on the PGA TOUR, Harrington will take the hours in the air in exchange for the familiarities of his native Ireland.

“It makes for a happy home,” he said. “If I brought my wife (to America) and then left my wife at the base, she’d be asking, ‘Why am I here?’ We live 10 minutes from her folks, my folks, and her sister, and all her friends, so me being away, it’s no burden. If you want to be a professional

sportsperson, especially a golfer, and you're married, live where the wife is from. If I'm home three or four weeks I'm kicked out the door; I'm ruining the routines.

"I want to be doing this when I'm 80," he continued. "What else would I do? I like the competition, I like playing, and I know if I stop, you'll find me sitting in a chair watching the shopping channel in my skivvies with chocolate ice cream spilled on my top, and I'll be fat. That's my future. This is the only way I know to keep myself young and sane."

And now, as his first full season on PGA TOUR Champions comes to a close, there's still a chance that the Charles Schwab Cup is part of his luggage on his return flight to Dublin. A three-time winner this season, including the U.S. Senior Open, Harrington remains the only man with a chance of catching Steven Alker for the season-long title. Harrington needs a win this week while Alker, winner of four titles this year, needs to finish no better than a 10-way tie for second ([click here for full scenarios](#)).



## Highlights

# Padraig Harrington seals first Champions victory at the U.S. Senior Open

### **Obsessively dedicated**

Harrington, staying sane means going all-in, and fellow pros, coaches, and Harrington himself agree that his ravenous, sometimes comical quest for improvement – he would call himself “pig-headed” – is his secret sauce.

“I got to the European Tour a few years before him and I remember when he came on, he was good, but he wasn’t – it didn’t look like he was going to become as great as he did,” said Robert Karlsson, a vice-captain for Harrington at last year’s Ryder Cup. “He’s just done it through pure hard work and being curious about the game.”



Vice-captain Robert Karlsson(left) walks with Captain Padraig Harrington(right) at last year's Ryder Cup. (Richard Heathcote/Getty Images)

Asked about Harrington, Jay Haas professed ignorance but then chuckled.

I [redacted] with him in an outing in New York four or five years ago,” Haas said, “and he was doing a speed drill where he barely took it back and [redacted] ked the club through, and if you didn’t know better, you’d think he was a 120-shooter. But whatever he’s done, it’s worked, because he’s got as much speed as guys who are in their 30s.”

Added David Toms, “He gets our attention on the range, but I respect it. His stuff has worked.”

Harrington finished T4 at the 2021 PGA Championship at Kiawah, suggesting he could still win on the PGA TOUR. He said he did nothing special in his T17 at the Dunhill Links on the DP World Tour in September. He leads PGA TOUR Champions with an average driving distance of 309.1 yards – longer than the likes of Xander Schauffele, Viktor Hovland and Tony Finau in the recently-completed 2022 PGA TOUR season -- and is third in greens hit (75.5%).

“He’s played phenomenal the last few years,” said Karlsson. “I don’t know what it was that made him turn the corner.”

Ask him that, and Harrington says he still works with instructor Noel Fox back in Dublin, and Pete Cowen on the road. He has the same mental coach, Dr. Bob Rotella. He is two-plus decades with the same caddie, Ronan Flood. (They’re married to sisters.)

What’s changed over the last nearly two years has been Harrington’s work with Michael Jacobs.

### **Winning in 3D**

A Golf Digest Top 50 instructor at Rock Hill Country Club in Long Island, New York, Jacobs, a specialist in 3D biomechanical work, said an intermediary called him about Harrington.

“I have a new client for you,” the man said.

“Great,” Jacobs said.

“It’s Pádraig Harrington.”

“Even better.”

They would develop a relationship in which Jacobs makes suggestions, and Harrington, as ever, figures out how (and whether) to incorporate them. The two have become friends, and when Harrington travels to Long Island for some work, he stays at Jacobs’ house.

“He’s really, really smart,” Jacobs said. “He’s big into the speed thing and wanted to measure the force he could put into the club, so we did an analysis of how energy is created from the ground up and makes its way to the club. We found some inefficiencies.

“The center of gravity of him and his club, all as a unit, is seven inches forward from where it was a year and a half ago,” he continued. “That’s massive. It aligned all the joints of his body up when he releases the club into the ball so he’s not wasting hardly any energy.”

Added Harrington: “Most people think I’ve gained speed; I haven’t. I’ve always had the top level of speed on the range, but I couldn’t bring it to the golf course.”



Padraig Harrington leads the PGA TOUR Champions in Driving Distance this season. (David Berding/Getty Images)

Harrington's average drive this season is 10 yards clear of the circuit's second-longest hitter, Scott McCarron, and nearly 30 yards longer than the PGA TOUR Champions average. When Harrington visited Jacobs in September, he was at 195 mph ball speed, which is elite even on the PGA TOUR.

“I couldn’t believe how much he’d improved,” Jacobs said. “He said, ‘I’m a professional.’”



Harrington nerds out on this type of thing in the way that, say, Tom Cruise obsessed over G-forces in “Top Gun: Maverick,” which Harrington has seen three times. Hard questions, hard work, assimilating and field-testing new data – this is the wind in his sails.

On the PGA TOUR, Harrington said, he spent 90% of his time on his long game. Now he spends 90% of his time on his wedges, chipping and putting. He thinks about winning, not making the cut, and is grateful for the six months he took off during the worst of the Covid crisis.

“I suppose since May I’ve really hit some good form, pretty much in contention every week,” he said. “It’s a nice place with your golf when you’re going into Sundays with a chance of winning. You know the pressure’s on, you know you’re alive and it’s exciting.”

Back in Ireland, his and Caroline’s oldest son, Paddy, is in his first year at University College-Dublin. Ciaran, their youngest, is 15. Wilson the dog, named after Harrington’s clubmaker, is no longer a puppy but still a handful. It’s a good, balanced life.

“I’ve never seen a credit card bill in my life; my wife fully runs the show,” Harrington said. “If something goes in the house, something breaks, she gets it sorted. It has nothing to do with me.”

Being a big fish in a smaller pond has pumped up his confidence, he added, noting that his swing has also improved thanks to his coaches having all done their jobs. And while he can’t be as monomaniacal as he once was, he doesn’t want to be.

“The only way I can keep playing is to try and enjoy my life,” he said.

Having won the U.S. Senior Open in June, he’ll get into the U.S. Open next year, one of three majors he’s already in, and he said he intends to play more amongst “the juniors.” But first things first; for Harrington, that means trying to win in Phoenix.

A Schwab Cup title in his first try? It’s not unheard of, but another victory amongst the kids, or even another major, his fourth? If he gets all that done, they might even make a movie about it.