

# More Than Words



Transplanted  
Californian  
**SEAN MARTIN**  
has found his golf  
writing dream at  
**PGATOUR.COM**

**T**HE PGA TOUR WILL NEVER COME TO WESTLAKE GOLF COURSE. It's a little 5,000-yard, par-67 track tucked away in Southern California, friendly to old men and juniors but no great challenge for players with big-time dreams.

Still, golf is golf and a fair match can be played just about anywhere. So like any course in America, Westlake has its regulars. And with its lighted lineup of hitting bays, it's a hangout for range junkies and talkers, those who in another time and place might be at the playground shooting hoops or down at the dive shooting pool.

Westlake is where Sean Martin grew up around the game. Tiger Woods' swing coach Chris Como was working in the shop back then, and current USC men's golf coach Chris Zambri would give group lessons between tournaments on what's now called the Web.com Tour. But understand, "back then" is not a big travel in time—just to the spring of 2000 when Martin was getting ready to head off for his own collegiate career at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

What is a stretch is to call Martin's college golf efforts a "career," a truth to which he readily admits. The Mustangs were a fledgling Division I program, and by the third year of recruits landing at a desirable school just a few miles from the beach, Martin was finding himself overmatched. He redshirted a season, played three events as a sophomore, and retired to journalistic pursuits.

"I was doing stuff that was a much better, much wiser use of my time," Martin remembers now. "They didn't have any problem finding someone who was probably better than me to fill my spot."

**S**EAN MARTIN HAS TRAVELED A LOT OF MILES since those days on the California coast, no matter where he chooses to call home. His house—if we go that route—is cross-country, in Jacksonville, Florida, where he lives with his wife and infant son. It's also near PGA Tour headquarters, which lines up with his job as the Events Editor for *PGATOUR.COM*, the official website of the PGA Tour and the most-visited golf content website on the internet. Martin stepped into this job in 2013 after more than seven years at *Golfweek*.

Martin is still a writer at heart, but his role at the Tour includes planning coverage, particularly of the big events: the majors, World Golf Championships, the PLAYERS, and the FedExCup Playoffs. This means his other home is the road, just as it is for nearly everyone in the grand parade known as the PGA Tour, with its players and caddies, its coaches and agents, the TV crews and other press, all met one way or another by the Tour's support staff and the local tournament committees. For Martin, this means 12-15 weeks away from Jacksonville during the heart of the season, which lands chiefly in the summertime. Full weeks, too—not three or four days out then a long weekend back home.

The travel is a bear, but otherwise the job's demands are what Martin long dreamed of.

"I always loved sports as a kid," he says. "I loved to write, and I loved to write about sports. It helped that I loved golf, because I kind of knew that being a baseball writer, basketball writer, or NFL writer, there's a lot more competition than trying to be a golf writer. There's not a lot of people trying to be a golf writer, so I figured that would be perfect. I could write about it with some experience, some wisdom, some authority."

He first discovered *Golfweek* magazine in the pro shop at Westlake Golf Course and knew the publication would be the perfect place for him to work. He loved that they covered all levels of golf, not just the pros. By the time he started college, he'd pegged *Golfweek* as the job he most wanted.

And so, he pestered them for years, asking for any type of work. It was a classic case of not taking *no* for an answer.

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He got his first full-time job during his final semester at Cal Poly, as the sports editor of a twice-weekly newspaper in Arroyo Grande, California. His next job took him to the *Los Angeles Daily News*. He was working at the *Daily News* when he learned that an entry-level position was available at *Golfweek*. The editors there were happy to give Martin the job, if only to shut off the dripping faucet of his inquiries. He started at *Golfweek* on Jan. 2, 2006.

“They must have figured I really wanted it, so I think that dedication paid off,” he laughs.

He started at the bottom—with junior golf—but by 2008 he was working his first major championship, the US Open at Torrey Pines, and within another two years was reporting regularly from PGA Tour events, in addition to keeping an eye on amateur and college golf and contributing to instruction articles. “A mixed bag,” he calls it. But it was the bag Martin wanted to hold, so much so that he has found himself saying to groups of collegiate golfers aspiring to reach the Tour that “me doing what I was doing in 2011 would be like you getting your PGA Tour card. That was me doing everything that I had dreamt and hoped and worked towards doing.”

But there was a problem. Martin was still so young. The travel ate into more than half his year and it was what he now describes as “a hard, lonely time.” And he goes on: “I kind of had that existential moment that a lot of people have, that ‘*Oh man, am I just going to write about golf for another 30, 40, 50 years, and then die?*’ That didn’t really sit well with me.”

The best place Martin knew to go with these questions was to the woman who had hired him at *Golfweek*, Beth Ann Nichols: “She’s a Christian, and so we had some really basic kind of talks about faith.” Nichols invited Martin to her church in Orlando, and while he was surprised at the tenor and the content of the preaching—they were softer than the fire and brimstone he anticipated—he remained hesitant.



**HOOFING IT** Sean Martin's travels both as a writer on assignment and a lover of the game. Here, at right, he caddies at the 2015 USGA Four-ball at the Olympic Club for College Golf Fellowship's Matt Van Zandt, who was Martin's best man. PRECEDING PAGE: Martin and his wife Abby stand on the Swilcan Bridge at St. Andrews.

His search continued in China, though, where he was covering the first Asia-Pacific Amateur in 2009. He met up with an old high school friend who was teaching English abroad, and over dinner they had more conversations about life and God and how they intersect.

More time went by. Two years more. After occasional visits to a big church in Orlando, Martin says, “I found myself in this smaller church, where I was finally led to fill out one of those visitor cards. The pastor called me and we talked and we had lunch. We would meet two or three times a week. He



loved golf, so that would help the conversation, and I'd say it was probably through that relationship with the pastor that I was led to Christ through his discipleship."

**L**IFE WITH JESUS IS DIFFERENT, of course. For **L**one, it normally leads to a new set of friendships with people who support you in your walk of faith. For Martin, this has included a strong connection with the staff at College Golf Fellowship, a national ministry that works with golfers during their collegiate careers but often beyond that as well. CGF leaders have a strong presence among PGA Tour players, helping lead the weekly fellowship for players, caddies, their wives, and others around the Tour.

Martin's key connection with CGF is Matt Van Zandt, who lives in Texas and maintains a game that places him among the nation's top mid-amateurs. Van Zandt baptized Martin at a CGF retreat and was the best man at Martin's wedding late in 2015. They talk several times a week. Martin also serves on the advisory board for CGF's Toby Ragland in Florida. "I just love what they do," Martin says, "and I love how they do it. I'm a big believer in CGF."

But the impact of Christ affects Martin's work as much as his relationships.

"One of the reasons I took the Tour job is when you're doing traditional reporting you're dealing with a lot of gossip, trying to break news," he explains. "There's times where investigative journalism is necessary to reveal great injustices and wrongdoings and crimes and bring about justice. I think that's a great end. But I was covering golf. It's not the same. You're not righting the wrongs of society."

"At *PGATOUR.COM* we try to be as objective as possible, but at the end of the day I think people know the point of the website is to promote the Tour, promote the game. We're celebrating the game and its players, trying to celebrate what's good about those things through what we write. It helps that I don't feel conflicted about trying to get scoops and gossip and all that stuff. My current role doesn't tug at my conscience in that way."

There is also the question of productivity in an information-driven job environment where good media and bad can pull a worker

off his mark. Martin describes the dilemma this way: "They want us to tweet, to be present on Twitter, but should I spend four hours a day tweeting or looking at tweets? Probably not. It's trying to find that balance. On the other end of the spectrum, you can become so focused on productivity that you don't get involved in relationship with people."

And that, likely, is where golf helps—because Martin finds that what he still loves most in the game and in writing about it is

finding the stories of the "little guys," the ones beating balls under the lights at the local range or those coming up through the ranks at smaller schools like Cal Poly. Still in his 30s, Sean Martin has not come full circle, but he's gained perspective from hard work and travel and now marriage and family. Bind these up with a maturing faith and he's found answers for a much broader set of questions in his life. Those 30, 40, 50 years out ahead of him don't look so daunting. **J**

## 'For my next trick...'



**O**ne of the great competitive golf stories of 2016 belonged to **Wesley Bryan**, who captured three events on the Web.com Tour to earn his "battlefield promotion" to the PGA Tour. What made Bryan's feat so special was that before last year, his claim to fame was a series of trick shot videos he'd made with brother **George** (Wes is on the right above, George is on the left).

*PGATOUR.COM* generates only two or three longform features each season, and Sean Martin got a crack at telling the broader story of the Bryan Bros (their YouTube moniker), who were raised on a golf facility their father, George III, scratched from 10 acres of ground in Chapin, South Carolina. The website's treatment of the subject included Martin's words and a good collection of videos showing the brothers in action. "You need to find the right story," Martin explains. "You don't want to make a story long just for the sake of making it long."

### LINKS TO FOLLOW

#### The Bryan Bros feature

[www.pgatour.com/long-form/2016/09/12/bryan-bros-trick-shot-tour-card.html](http://www.pgatour.com/long-form/2016/09/12/bryan-bros-trick-shot-tour-card.html) (or [bit.ly/2c6WXQH](http://bit.ly/2c6WXQH))

#### Elizabeth Bryan's 'My husband the Tour Player' feature

[www.pgatour.com/webcom/news/2016/05/30/wesley-bryan-my-husband-the-tour-pro.html](http://www.pgatour.com/webcom/news/2016/05/30/wesley-bryan-my-husband-the-tour-pro.html) (or [bit.ly/2hxc6AT](http://bit.ly/2hxc6AT))