

Written by Nichole Brophy

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A seasoned Tour caddie gives AFM the scoop on what it's like to navigate a PGA Tour pro through the bustling (and newly named) Waste Management Phoenix Open.



Half a million spectators swarm the grounds of TPC Scottsdale for one week each PGA Tour season. Known for its rowdy, party-like atmosphere outside the ropes, the tournament, still often referred to as the Phoenix Open despite its corporate sponsorships, conveys a different experience inside the ropes for PGA Tour players and caddies on the job. While some players and caddies feed off of the crowd's energy, others find ways to cope with the sheer volume of spectators in hopes of making it to the winner's circle on Sunday.

"I think it is different for each player," says Teddy Scott, caddie for PGA Tour player and Scottsdale resident Bubba Watson. "Some players are better at dealing with distractions than others, so as a caddie you have to provide what your player needs." With 10 years of caddie experience to his credit, Scott has caddied at the Phoenix Open a total of eight times for players like Paul Azinger and Olin Browne, before getting on Watson's bag three years ago. Scott admits that it is hard to compare the feeling of caddying at the Phoenix Open to any other event out on Tour. "The only other tournaments where you get that kind of feel are at the majors, where there are just crazy amounts of people watching and cheering," says Scott, who resides in Lafayette, La.

Scott says one of the challenges for a player teeing up at the Phoenix Open is having to deal with the unpredictable crowds even when their game is falling apart. "At a typical PGA Tour stop, you tend to end up with a lot of spectators only if you are playing well," Scott says. "At the Phoenix Open, everyone has to play [holes] 16, 17 and 18 and experience it. So if you are shooting 80 on a particular day, it makes it that much tougher because you have to deal with something that you normally don't have to when you are struggling."

While the players take the brunt of the crowd's affection or verbal antics, newer caddies can easily catch a case of the nerves with a gallery of thousands watching their every move. "My very first time at the Phoenix Open, I was nervous myself as a caddie hearing all the people screaming," Scott says, "After a few holes, you realize it is still golf and you just try to focus on your player and see if he is getting adrenaline from it."

A major caddie duty at all Tour events, but especially at the Phoenix Open, is to gauge their player's reception of distractions on the course. Nerves can turn into doubt or be translated into adrenaline, which Scott says impacts how he assists his player with club selection. "Adrenaline makes the golf ball go farther," Scott says. "What might normally be an eight iron could be a nine iron, as a caddie you have to figure out what kind of player they are and how they react in that kind of situation."

More mature players understand the ups and downs that come with all those eyes beating down on them, Scott says. He also points out that while helping their players to play great golf is the main goal, many caddies also contribute heavily to a player's mental approach, either by providing tips or by staying out of the way. "As caddie, you don't want to point out the negative," Scott says. "It's almost like a poker game—you are trying to read your player without asking him questions that would make him think about something negative. You really don't want to ask questions like 'Are you nervous right now?' or 'Are you thinking about hitting it too far?'"

Expectedly so, the tension-mounting 16th hole is where Tour caddies brace for the unexpected. "For me, the best part about caddying at the Phoenix Open is when you get to No. 16," Scott says. "Hearing the crowd chant, scream and holler all the funny stuff that they say." He continues: "The very first time I caddied there, I was caddying for Grant Waite and the crowd would make puns off his name like 'we've been Waite-ing all day' or 'we can't Waite to see this shot.' The funny thing about 16 is the stories you hear of how they use player's names in order to cheer for or against them."

A straightforward 162-yard Par 3, the famous 16th hole at TPC Scottsdale has become exponentially more difficult in recent years through the incorporation of a full stadium affect. The 2009 event marked the first time the hole was completely encircled by grandstands, allowing for spectator viewing from every possible vantage point. The addition also meant more room for the gallery, which upped the volume potential surrounding the hole. "It's a short iron, but I've seen guys hit it fat, thin and shank it," Scott says. "Obviously, the reason the best players in the world are doing that is because, mentally, something has got in their way."

According to Scott, the key for making it through the 16th without succumbing to the pressure is to remain positive. "[Tour players] need to look at it as an opportunity to hit a great golf shot." Scott recalls a particular year he caddied for Tour player Olin Browne and how enthused Browne was to tackle the 16th hole each day. "He loved it, he was just so fired up because he engaged in the chaos," Scott says. "He birdied the hole three out of four days and just about made a hole in one."

While this year's tournament week from Feb. 22 through 28 will play host to Tour pros and golf fanatics, the energy and appeal of the event reaches far beyond those typically enticed by the sport. "The crowd is there to have a party and have a good time unlike the typical golf crowd we get on Tour," Scott says. "There are people out there walking a five-mile golf course in high heels and you are thinking this person has

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obviously never seen golf before. There are certain people who say they're not sure it's golf, but it is the Phoenix Open."