



## UNDERCOVER TOUR PRO

# HOW A US OPEN CHAMPION RANKS THE MAJORS

I've won a US Open, though it's probably my least-favourite Major. When you play in all four every season, which I've been fortunate to do for a solid chunk of my career, you learn what to expect from each.

I can't speak for the fans, but to a golfer, each Major championship is like a different character.

At the Masters, the overriding sense is that the members of Augusta National want you to have the best day of your life.

Monday through Sunday, every time you enter their gates, you feel like a priority.

One can only imagine the decision-making that goes into every detail.

The set-up of the locker room and the practice facilities, the choreography of security and waste management, parking, dining options – it's all perfect and elegant and yet somehow they find subtle ways to make improvements each year.

The moist towel when you most need yet least expect one. The members are a presence in their green jackets, but mostly they just recede into the frame.

They want to deflect attention away from themselves and onto us. I'd imagine the "patrons" feel somewhat the same way.

At the US Open, on the other hand, the week is all about the United States Golf Association. We take a back seat to whatever initiatives or campaigns the USGA is trumpeting.

Forget about the host course, the story is going to be what the USGA has done to it to protect par.

We're welcomed as the world's best golfers, certainly, but there's a weird psychological edge to many of the gestures.

It's the same spirit of condescension that reminds me a lot of amateur tournaments when I was a teenager: You go out and play on our golf course, sonny; we'll be inside the clubhouse in our blue blazers, running the show.

### THE MEMBERS OF AUGUSTA NATIONAL WANT YOU TO HAVE THE BEST DAY OF YOUR LIFE.

That the USGA insists on tee times for practice rounds is just one example of the ridiculousness.

At virtually every other event we play, there's the option to practice and then casually link up with others on the way to the tee.

But at the US Open we have to notify them of our plans in advance.

Because this system prevents guys who just want to play from easily jumping around the guys who want to seriously study the course, it inevitably leads to six-hour rounds for everyone.

This past year the USGA had its embarrassments with the Dustin Johnson ruling and Brittany Lang being called the wrong name at the awards ceremony. All I'll say is, I wasn't surprised.

The British, or Open Championship, is somewhere in between.

A lot of that same imperious attitude exists, the old chums in charge, spilled brandy on dusty blazers – or kummel or port or whatever old Chappy likes to start with at lunch.

But the R&A officials don't seem as adamant about asserting that they're in control.

The weather decides the tournament, and they're fine with that.

The towns and the people capture your attention, but the weather is always what I remember most from each year.

Stark skies, gray rains, mists that feel saturated with the ghosts of old caddies. Just being there is a special feeling of connection to the game and time.

I always look forward to playing.

The US PGA Championship is run great and is probably the smallest departure from what we're used to at a regular Tour event.

If that sounds like a backhanded compliment, that's because it is. We all feel that extra major pressure, but the energy is somehow slightly less than the other three.

Partly, I think it's because the PGA of America often chooses sites based on economic reasons.

Not that there's anything wrong with that – rationally is how the world ought to behave – but I think if the US PGA was played exclusively at historic courses, its character might change.

Next year it's at Quail Hollow. The atmosphere will inevitably feel somewhat like the Wells Fargo Championship, which the course has hosted for years.

If you've never won a Major, I think the tendency is to see each as an equal opportunity.

Maybe I've become somewhat settled about my career and accomplishments, but nowadays when I pack my bags, I'm thinking about the experience I'm about to have.

— with Max Adler