



# TOUR PROS

An inside look at a few Santa Barbarans who've been there and some local young lions with dreams. By D. B. Pleschner

SITTING IN THE SANTA BARBARA SUN, Buddy Allin muses, half-smiling, "When I was a kid we just teed it up and went around the golf course as many times as we could. A friend had six clubs, and we split them three and three." Today, still wiry and freckle-faced, a grown-up Huck Finn comfortable with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other, Allin is one of the best golfers in Santa Barbara—indeed, the world. He is one of several Santa Barbarans who have succeeded, or hope to, at an envied, idolized livelihood—the Professional Golf Association, or PGA, tour.

In the old days, golf was a rich man's sport played behind the hedgerows and iron gates of manicured, exclusive estates. Even then it was a game of strategic shot placement—a test of physical and mental control. The poor gained entrance as caddies, took to the pastime of swatting "featheries" (old-time balls) with "mashies" and "nibblicks" (old-time clubs), and became as addicted as the landed gentry whose golf bags they carried. Today, of course, golf's popularity approaches worldwide mania; Santa Barbara is aptly described as wall-to-wall golf. But less than 200 men in this country have the talent to become touring pros.

The benefits of touring seem glamorous—a chance to win a few hundred thousand dollars a year and see a lot of spectacular real estate. As an added attraction, top players make fortunes on advertising endorsements. But appearances can be deceiving. Touring is hard work demanding countless hours of practice to hone skills that must survive capricious terrain, all kinds of weather, and 18-hole rounds of mounting tournament pressure. Competition is intense; thousands of dollars can ride on a single shot. But just as a bad shot might cost bankrolls, a great shot, or a succession of

them, can open the door.

Buddy Allin's door opened the year he got his PGA tour card, a feat accomplished by few of the multitudes who try. In fact, his story could be titled, "Santa Barbara Boy Makes Good." It began in 1958, the year the Santa Barbara Community ("muni") course was built. The *Santa Barbara News-Press* ran an ad for caddies and Allin showed up; he was 13 at the time. By the age of 14, he was working toward the tour. "But," he says, "if they hadn't built the muni golf course, I never would have thought of golf."

Allin joined the tour in 1971 with a burning drive to master the two-faced game—skills and scores here today, gone next week (the lament of everyone who plays golf). Adapting to the lifestyle wasn't easy, either. A touring pro's schedule resembles that of a traveling circus. He arrives and sets up tent on Monday; measures the course and finds the nearest laundromat on Tuesday; plays a practice round on Wednesday; then hopes all the odd hours spent on the driving range pay off during competition Thursday and Friday. If things go well, he makes the 36-hole cut (only the top 60 entrants and ties play the final two rounds). He competes again on Saturday and Sunday, and maybe finishes in the money if he fails to win. In any case, the procedure begins anew on Monday with a new town, a new motel, and a new golf course. Allin says, "On the road you can work hard and still use up only eight hours a day playing and practicing. So you've got 16 hours of 'What to do?' Mostly, you end up stuck in a motel room."

Certainly the life commands attention and adulation—a heady, sometimes unnerving experience. And the strain of competition, concentration, grate on a pro when he misses a cut. Tempers flare. "Sure, I have a temper," Allin admits. "Everybody does. I've thrown about as many clubs as anyone. Well..." he thinks a minute, "not everyone. We never once play a round without being

a little angry. But that's what golf is—highs, lows, knowing you can do better."

Still, touring does have rewards. Any pro will enthuse that the possibilities are endless, from earning a tour card and making cuts to winning major tournaments (by themselves, worth a million dollars in endorsements). "Tour life was fun when I had lots of desire," Allin reminisces. "When desire's strong and burning, you don't think about the grind, you go for the big things. The rest of life is unimportant."

Some wives have a tough time accepting that philosophy and the single-minded dedication needed to attain it. Maintaining a well-rounded personality is difficult when a pro eats, sleeps, and thinks golf. Consequently, the tour suffers a high divorce rate. And broken marriages can rust dreams. "When I lost desire," Allin says, "the tour got to be a hassle. The crummy things became all important—restaurants you don't like, beds too hard, pillows too big. With desire you think big; without it you think small." He left the tour in 1981.

But was the life worth the effort? Allin's face lights up. "I'm just a little guy who grew up on the muni who had a dream. I never thought of being up there with the big shots. I just wanted to go out and see how I fared. I wound up winning five tournaments. It's in black and white—something nobody can take away. It's a great life, but it doesn't have to go on forever. There are other things to do."

Although Allin is no longer touring, his life still revolves around golf. He is teaching now at Fairview Golf Center in Goleta. And his Buddy Allin Golf Week, begun in 1974, has evolved into the Santa Barbara Junior Golf Association, one of the finest junior programs in the nation. Added to a yearlong playing climate, the SBJGA is a key reason Santa Barbara develops a surprising number of quality players for an area so small. Many local aspiring pros attribute their beginnings to Buddy Allin and junior golf. One of them is John Hughes.

*Opposite: Eighteen-year-old Sam Randolph, Jr., demonstrates a winning swing that many observers predict will lead him to PGA tour stardom.*

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Lean, dark-haired, with an engaging smile and quiet confidence, Hughes personifies the tour candidate. He is one among thousands of hopefuls currently straining for the tour like kids for a carnival brass ring. Santa Barbara-raised, he has played golf for 13 of his 25 years—his first priority even through college. He has trained hard, grinding out thousands of hours on the driving range, hitting balls until his arms felt like soggy spaghetti and his hands refused to clench into fists. Last fall he tried to qualify.

Most hopefuls earn their tour cards through the PGA national qualifying tournament, now held once a year. First, they must show financial support amounting to about \$30,000 (an average year's expenses). Then, if they survive regional competition, they travel with their peers, the country's best amateurs, to PGA tour headquarters in Ponte Vedra, Florida, for the finals—108 grueling, pressure-packed holes.

The odds are stacked against success. Only the top 50 finalists and ties make the big time under new PGA tour regulations. Card-carrying pros must finish each season among the top 125 tournament money winners to stay on tour, although beginning this year, pros finishing higher than one hundred twenty-fifth, along with the second 50 qualifying finalists, will be able to join a second, smaller tour.

Despite the obstacles, Hughes is eager for the chance. "I'm at a spot where I have to play for a living or do something else," he says. "I'd sure love to make it, but there's no shame in failure if you give it your best shot." Nevertheless, his best game disappeared at the regionals along with his qualifying hopes; few make it the first time out. So Hughes will try again next year. "There's a lot to be won out there—fame and fortune," he says. "It's the challenge that brings you back."

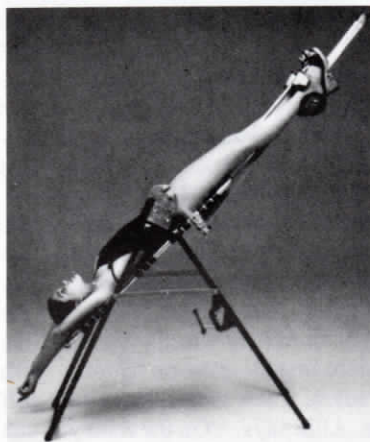
Sam Randolph, Jr., knows about golf's challenge. One of the best young shot makers in Santa Barbara, Randolph has the makings for tour stardom, according to many observers. A clean-cut, all-American 18-year-old, he takes these predictions in stride, grinning infectiously and exclaiming, "I sure hope so!" His achievements point that way. He matter-of-factly reels them off, an impressive list including a record win at the 1981 Junior World tournament in San Diego. In 1982, he became the youngest amateur ever to make the cut in the L.A. Open, competing against tour pros and winning the Low-Amateur trophy.

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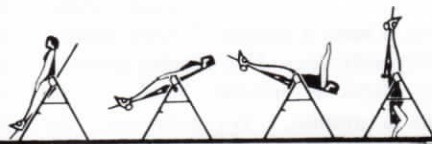
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Playing hard, working hard since he was 13, Randolph deserves recognition. He accepts it modestly, saying, "If you're going to do something, you might as well be serious about it." His eyes reveal the lust for challenge that inspires every player on tour. He enjoys the sport; he thinks practicing hard and traveling are fun. And he likes golf's individuality. "Whatever happens," he explains, "you did it yourself. If you do good, you get credit. If you mess up, you take the blame. You don't have to depend on a team." Now a freshman on USC's golf team, he is already making his mark. "But I'm really not thinking about the future now," he says. "There's a heck of a lot of competition in college golf."

For the aspiring pro, there are other alternatives to touring. Randolph's father, Sam Randolph, Sr., exemplifies one of them—the club pro. Randolph, Sr., his son's coach and mentor, has been head pro at Santa Barbara's La Cumbre Country Club for 25 years. The job involves bushels of paperwork, a head for merchandising, and the ability to keep the peace among the membership. Teaching is another way for a golf addict to keep his hand in the game and pay the rent at the same time. Santa Barbaran Dave Atchison, "the swing doctor," has followed this route. His classroom is the municipal driving range; his text, an instant replay setup. (His knowledge of the mechanics and theory of golf recently won him a second job as UCSB's golf coach.) Still, the plum of the golf world is touring. Atchison relishes the glory vicariously through his star pupil, Mike Nicolette.

Nicolette finished second at the 1982 Doral-Eastern tournament and wound up among the top 100 tour money winners. He has toured for four years now. His impressions? "You get a lot of different impressions," he says, his dark eyes sparking a rueful grin, "depending on where you stand on the money list."

A typical rookie pro, Nicolette thought he was pretty good when he joined the tour; his scores started out low enough. "Then I got to play with the big boys," he recalls. Near the lead, with one round left, he began blowing tournaments. It's called choking—a common malady when a player first realizes that victory is within reach.

Nicolette's career slid downhill. He missed cuts, took lessons, thought about changing his swing. "I lost confidence," he says. "I began to think, 'I can't beat those guys. I'm playing my best and it's not good enough. What am I doing

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*Above left: Many locals started with Buddy Allin (left) and the Santa Barbara Junior Golf Association. Here the tour veteran helps John Hughes prepare for a PGA qualifying tournament. Above right: Home from the tour, Mike Nicolette (right) visits "swing doctor" Dave Atchison at the municipal driving range. A Graph-Check camera pinpoints room for improvement.*

here?" He discovered he had a lot to learn, right down to where not to stay. "You try to save a few dollars on inexpensive motels," he says, then grimaces, "but you can wind up in some pretty crummy joints."

Unfortunately, losing on tour costs as much as winning. When Nicolette failed to qualify for an event, he checked the cheapest airfare home. If it cost less than a week's room and board, he left. He lost his card in 1981. He requalified that fall. But 1982 was different; there was the Doral.

"That tournament really restored my confidence," Nicolette recalls. He played well and the last day found himself paired with Jack Nicklaus, the winningest player on tour. "What better way to choke! I mean, everybody's gagging," he laughs. "I was afraid of being intimidated, so I had this plan. I walked up to Nicklaus before the round, looked him in the eye, wished him luck, and never looked at him again until the eighth hole."

By then, Nicolette had settled down; he finished second and proved he wasn't "a chokin' dog." He also realized he was good enough to win, a peculiar thought for a man who had spent years training for it. "Here's your hero," he explains, "someone you've idolized most of your life, and you're trying to beat him. It's the confidence factor that beats the hell out of everybody else. You're up against the best in the world. If you doubt yourself, you might as well go home."

Despite an ardent dislike for travel, Nicolette is looking forward to this year, to the ecstasy of winning—"walking up the eighteenth fairway on the last day with a three-shot lead and 10,000 people

cheering . . ." He trails off, momentarily lost in thought.

Al Geiberger has walked those victorious final yards a dozen times in a career that spans over two decades. He has won over a million dollars on tour, along with a major event (the 1966 PGA). Even more enviable, he scored the lowest 18-hole round ever recorded in PGA competition. Where each hole has a designated "par," or regulation number of shots, and the combined total usually adds up to 72, Geiberger shot a 59—13 under par—as close as anyone has ever come to playing perfect golf. And he nearly lost the tournament.

Geiberger's lanky frame folds itself loosely in an easy chair. Behind him, a wall of his comfortable Santa Barbara home is plastered with pieces of his life—photographs, plaques, and other memorabilia commemorating his achievements. A bemused smile plays on his face. "That's my sales point," he says. "'What's Al done? Oh, he's the one with the 59.' People thought it was a misprint. I can't believe it either. It's become my after-dinner speech." It also was the motivation and lead chapter for his popular golf instruction book, *Tempo*. And it all began on a blistering hot day, the second round of the Danny Thomas Memphis Classic in June 1977.

The round sneaked up on him; he was really just trying to make the cut. "It had to sneak up," he declares. "I'm no tower of strength to carry pressure." With one of the classic, fundamentally sound swings in golf, Geiberger grew more confident as the day progressed. "I hit the ball better and better and kept sinking every putt I saw," he recalls. His was an exceptional display: seven straight holes under par; 12 sub-par holes for the

round—11 birdies and an eagle (a birdie is one under par for the hole; an eagle, two under). With three holes left, the crowd started yelling, "59! 59!" "Then I realized all I needed were two more birdies," he exclaims.

The gallery grew enormous. Everyone who wasn't competing was following Geiberger, cheering every shot. He birdied, then made par. On the last hole, he knocked his approach only eight feet from the flag. "People said I didn't look very nervous," he recounts, smiling, "but I was—in a confident way." When the ball dove in the hole for birdie, "all hell broke loose," a moment he'll never forget.

"But the second round is a bad time to shoot 59," he says, chuckling. "It doubles the pressure. You are supposed to win when you shoot 59, right?" He was six strokes ahead at the halfway mark, but at the end of the third round his lead had dwindled to three. And after nine holes the last day, he found himself two shots behind. "About that time I convinced myself to forget the 59 and get back to reality," he remembers. He shot four under par on the final nine holes. "I made one of the great comebacks of all time to win," he says. Geiberger won by three, a remarkable victory on top of a record that won't soon be broken.

Perhaps more remarkable, however, is the man himself. On a tour full of burning ambitionists, there is "Easygoing Al" (a companion nickname to "Mr. 59"). "I've seen guys so intense about the game, they look like they're going to blow up," he says. "I lacked that hard-driving intensity, or I could have been a Nicklaus. But my tempo has given me longevity." His secret is the key to surviving on tour: learning how to control



*Above left: Number one on the European tour for four straight years, Peter Oosterhuis moved to America and the PGA and now calls Santa Barbara home. Son Rob, age nine, plans to be a golf pro just like dad. Above right: Al Geiberger arranges a hectic schedule from his home office in Santa Barbara, surrounded by mementos from his long, successful career.*

the adrenalin, how to pace down. "Everybody's personality is different," he explains. "You have to play a lot of little games with yourself, find out what bothers you, what helps. It all gets around to a repeating swing and gaining enough confidence to relax.

"I loved to practice when I was a kid, and I still do. I'm still learning the game, just as everyone is. Only now I feel guilty taking time from other things." Geiberger suffered a series of major surgeries a few years ago. He thought he was through with golf. "It's hard coming back after a two-year layoff," he says, "even without surgery. I'm lucky I have a lifetime exemption [courtesy of winning the PGA], so I can pick and choose, play the tour part-time."

Geiberger has become one of the most popular public relations men on tour. He parlayed a well-publicized craving for peanut butter sandwiches into a job representing Skippy, entertaining clients at business outings, conducting golf clinics, disseminating charm. He does the same for several other companies. He also plays pro-amateur tournaments, and won the Frontier Airlines event a few months ago.

In short, he has built a new career around golf, marketing his success. He is director of golf at Beaver Creek, Colorado, during the summer. The rest of the year he travels, a formal dinner here, clinic there, pro-am or business outing or tour stop somewhere else. But he always returns to home base in Santa Barbara and his sons, who all learned golf's fundamentals from dad and are, consequently, good players. (Stepson Rob plays on the USC team along with Sam Randolph.) Geiberger's schedule is still hectic, yet he tackles it at the lyric pace so

characteristic of the man. And along the way he has a lot of fun.

Fun is a word Peter Oosterhuis (pronounced Oosterhouse) has a tough time associating with golf. Although Geiberger and Oosterhuis are close friends, Peter's is a different story, shedding yet another, international light on touring.

Before immigrating from London, Oosterhuis was the Jack Nicklaus of Europe, the European tour's top player for four straight record-breaking, trophy-winning years. A move to the PGA tour was a logical step. His first year, 1975, he finished thirty-fourth; he thought he should have done better.

His six-foot-four-inch bulk padding about his mirrored living room, thoroughly at home in Santa Barbara with his elfin South African wife Anne nearby and two tow-headed sons clattering dishes in the kitchen, Oosterhuis flashes a warm smile. Talking about the merits and problems of tour golf, he admits he really hates flying. So why tour? He offers a sample of his dry British wit: "So I don't have to vacuum the house." His blue eyes twinkle merrily.

At a career crossroad, his world stature garners tournament invitations from around the globe. Have fun, they promise. A vacation, Anne suggests. But to Oosterhuis, fun is fun and golf is golf. "I'm still trying to shoot my score," he explains. "I get depressed when I hit loose shots." That means practice, which curtails sightseeing. Then there is the chaos of travel, the jet lag, finding a "nanny" for the boys. They have toured the world many times before. "Just being home is a vacation for me," Oosterhuis insists, settling deeper into the sofa for emphasis.

Oosterhuis plays over 30 tournaments

a year, traveling for weeks at a stretch. Although he feels capable of ranking among the top ten players, confidence in his game has ebbed along with one-track dedication to it. He says, "It's tough to maintain the drive after one achieves his goals." That disarming twinkle returns as he adds, "But then I'm supposed to set new goals, aren't I?"

His first American tour victory, the 1981 Canadian Open, restored the winning image, yet the ambivalence persists. "It's hard to figure what drives me," he muses. "I like being home. I like the tour—the change of pace. If I could stay home and make as much money, what would I do?" He hesitates. "I don't know." He leaves the impression he would simply like to play his best game and let everything else take care of itself.

While the tour seems romantic and exciting, in reality, touring is as variegated as golf. It is called a game of misses. But that is the beauty, the agony of the sport. There are no absolutes. The adage "practice makes perfect" does not apply. In golf, practice only makes better, develops a swing so second nature it withstands tremendous tournament pressures. Sometimes.

The challenge is to hit the perfect shot, that sweet, exultant, addictive feeling of effortless power that restores confidence, hooks the beginner, and goads the diehard golf nut to slog on through pouring rain. But the game has always been a great humbler. No matter how you played yesterday or today, there is still tomorrow. And even for the touring pro, there's always room for improvement.

*When she isn't covering environmental issues, free-lance writer D. B. Pleschner "relaxes" with golf.*

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Cover photo © 1983 Henry L. Fechtman: Linked to Santa Barbara by air, sea, and land, PG&E's Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant looms on its bluff like a threat or a promise.



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