



AT THE PLAYERS, IT'S LIKE YOU HAVE 300 PEOPLE RUNNING AROUND WHO ALL THINK THEY'RE YOUR BOSS.

UNDERCOVER TOUR PRO

WHY I DON'T LIKE PLAYING AT THE HOME OFFICE

My least-favourite tournament is the Players Championship. Ask around the locker room, and you'll find some guys with the same answer.

This might surprise you given the money – the \$1.8 million first prize and \$10.5 million purse are tied with the US PGA Championship as the largest we play for.

But a slightly more lucrative T-20 or T-40 doesn't change the vibe. For me, that week at TPC Sawgrass is a guaranteed bad mood.

I'm a fan of firm and fast, but there they bake out the fairways so much that it's Mickey Mouse.

If your ball lands on the front-right fringe at 18, there's a good chance it'll kick all the way into the water over the green, which is just ridiculous.

The course plays completely different the other 50 weeks a year. When I play there outside of the event, I always move up two sets of tees so I can practise hitting the same irons into greens.

But the set-up is only the start.

The main problem is, it's the office. US PGA Tour headquarters is right there in Ponte Vedra Beach, so it's like you have 300 people running around who all think they're your boss. And the golfers aren't the only ones who feel this.

Last year I was hitting balls on the range, and in the span of 40 minutes I witnessed three different suits tell the same assistant superintendent to rearrange the practice area three different ways.

Our Tour is a bureaucracy like any big organisation. People who are overpaid and underworked try to assert power in pointless ways. And the Players is a major for it.

I've made over \$5 million in winnings. Frankly, I don't really have the looks or personality, or desire, to supplement my income with lots of off-course activities.

The US PGA Tour does an amazing job of providing a system that allows anybody who's good enough to compete.

If you shoot low scores, there's no way they can keep you out. It's just that if you're not one of the top-30 guys, sometimes it feels like you're playing under different rules.

Preferential treatment makes for bad feelings in any line of work. Because all the faces are there that week at the Players, you're reminded of all the bad things.

I was once told I couldn't practise when I'd withdrawn from a pro-am. I'd hurt my back stepping in a hole and had limped to the range to see if I could even swing, or if I should just withdraw.

"Looks like you're hitting it pretty good to me," this official tells me. He radios another guy, who's just as snide, and pretty soon it develops into this big deal.

I'll play in 28 pro-ams a year. The one time I miss, they try to embarrass me in front of everybody. That no one can skip pro-ams is supposed to be this hard rule, but the stars get out of them all the time.

When I was a rookie, I was paired with a Masters champion on a weekend. We were putting out on 16 as the group ahead was shaking hands.

I'm running down the 17th fairway. Mr. Green Jacket is taking his sweet old time, same as he'd been all day.

I'm like, "Come on, man, I cannot afford a 20-grand fine."

The guy's like, "Dude, we're good. If a rules official comes over, I'll take care of it."

My group once got dinged for slow play when we were actually under the time par for the course.

We appealed, and in the end the error was admitted, and we didn't have to pay anything.

If you're part of the marketing campaign, you don't get these sorts of headaches. Tell me how Jim Furyk doesn't get 10 slow-play fines every year.

Drug testing and medical leaves of absence? Don't even get me started.

I've got all sorts of stories, more than can fit in this column. But I promise you this: If I win the Players, I'll tell a few more when they hand me the trophy and the microphone.

— with Max Adler