

BILLY'S RULES

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO HORSCHEL, FROM MONEY TO TWITTER TO STYLE

t's the age of the posse. Close-knit circles of trust that are almost like support groups. Bubba Watson, Rickie Fowler and Webb Simpson are the ultimate posse on the US PGA Tour, though there are a couple of others. On the Champions Tour, there's the posse of Brad Faxon, Jeff Sluman and Jay Haas. I'm not a long-term posse guy. I'll hang around with a group of guys for a while, then start fresh with a whole new crew. People do get tired of each other. After I've been home for a few weeks (wife) Brittany will say, "Don't you have somewhere to go?"

WITH GUY YOCOM

I can't say I'm a fan of the task force to fix what's wrong with the American Ryder Cup team. Jim Furyk phoned me to explain the reasoning behind it, which was nice of him because I've yet to play Ryder Cup. Like I told him, "task force" sounds desperate. After two years of public talk about the task force, what happens if it doesn't work? You're going to get hammered worse than ever. Getting veteran players and past captains together to discuss ideas is smart. But by making it public, it adds a lot of pressure.

The US would do better in Ryder Cups if our guys felt freed up to show more emotion. There was a time when an outward show of fire from a Lanny Wadkins or Raymond Floyd was welcome. Over the past 20 years, the media has pretty much beat it out of them. In international team play, where you're playing for your country and each other, it's natural to show excitement. It can lift you up, take you to another level. But our players have been ridiculed so much for celebrating, they tend to rein it in – to their detriment. So long as you're respecting the other players, the course and the game of golf, everything else is fine.

Say every hole I played was the 13th at Augusta National. I'm in the middle of the fairway, conditions ordinary, four-iron to the green. Do I go for it in two or lay up? I go for it, every time. Every great person in business, athletics or anything else, has had the nerve to gamble on himself. They have a deep self-belief. That's why, when I hit a shot fat into a hazard on the final hole at the Deutsche Bank in 2014, I stood in the fairway and laughed. It cost me a chance to win the tournament, but what the heck. I knew then and know even more now that most times I'll pull it off.

Everybody says they aren't scared of dying, but it sure scares the crap out of me. Death is the ultimate thing you can't control. You never know when or how it will happen. Heaven or hell, there's no guarantee. If I could buy more time, I would. Say, \$50 million for a hundred extra years.

I asked Tiger a while back, "Want to go grab some dinner?" He gave me sort of a look, and I immediately understood. He can't go out to eat without being mobbed, or at least interrupted. That's how it is for Tiger and Rory. I don't think I'd like the total loss of privacy. But I'd like to be good enough to find out how tough it is.

The final round of the US Open at Chambers Bay, I made some gestures on TV that indicated how bad I thought the greens were. Man, did my Twitter (@BillyHo.Golf, with almost 100,000 followers) explode. There were maybe 4,000 tweets about my fake-slammng the sixth green with my putter, and that night I read every single one of them. I blocked a lot of people, including a lot of media members. I blocked so many, I later had trouble remembering who I'd blocked, and why. I didn't sleep. Even with horrible greens, the cream rose to the top. It always does. But if the greens were better, I think Dustin Johnson would have won. He hit so many great putts that should have gone in but wiggled all over the place and stayed out.

I'm not quick to block by the way. After almost 9,000 tweets, my skin has gotten thicker, but I do draw a line. When I sense that someone is being disrespectful or tweeting something at me that they wouldn't say to my face, they're gone. Not just muted, but blocked.

We all know that a lot of famous people don't compose their tweets. That includes some Tour players who hire people to do it for them. You can tell who's real and which ones are fake. I like to keep it real. If you're putting your name on something, it should be authentic, straight from you.

Jamie Sadlowski, the two-time long-driving champ and a good buddy of mine, put on an exhibition at the CVS Charity Classic last June. You can't watch Jamie without wondering, What if he were my designated driver on every hole? What kind of scores would I shoot? He hits it over 400

yards, so I'd have flip wedges into every par-four and short irons into most of the par-fives. He might hit a couple of crooked drives, but he'd be past most of the trouble. Thing is, my wedge game isn't very good right now. So at first, I'd score slightly worse. If my wedges were dialled in, it would be lights out.

Distance is huge in golf. You can only teach it to a point. As a little kid, I was dying for my dad to take me to the course for the first time. There was a little stream running across our property, and he said, "Not until you can hit a ball over that creek." I wound up as far as I could on every swing, trying to hit over that creek, and the day I finally did it was huge. It was a great lesson. Kids should be encouraged to hit the ball as far as they can and let the accuracy come later. They also should play other sports. That's how they develop that "snap" that leads to average-size guys hitting it a mile.

Bubba said he might retire at 40, which got some laughs. But when I heard him my first thought was, I might be right there with you. I'd love to reach the goals I've set and just walk away at 40, or 45 at the latest. I'm only 29 and a long way from hanging it up, but already I find myself being tempted not to put in the time with golf that I used to. That happened when my daughter, Skylar, came along. When you stop putting in as much time but expect the same results, that's when the game starts to eat away at you. I really want to avoid that.

But what do you do instead? Morris Hatalsky, a veteran Tour player now in his 60s, was telling me a lot of players reach a point where they want to switch careers, but they have a hard time drifting out of their comfort zones. So they continue doing what



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they do best, which is to play golf. I'm trying to get a jump on how to buy, sell, renovate and develop property. That's my other passion. After I won the FedEx Cup and almost \$13 million over two weeks in 2014, I asked a very smart financials guy how I should invest it. He said, "Buy real estate in good locations, the best you can afford." I asked him why he liked land so much. "Because they aren't making any more of it," he said. "Whatever you pay for it, there's almost a 100-per cent chance it will increase in value, long term."

My dad worked construction. Down-and-dirty-labour stuff – drywall, stucco, framing, you name it. He'd be up at 4am because he had a personal rule about being on the work site 30 minutes before sunrise. He'd work nonstop until 2pm, then come home in time to coach our baseball and football teams. He slept very little and had this incredible energy that I inherited. I don't need much sleep. Playing 36 doesn't faze me. I recover very quickly. Natural energy is an underrated quality.

Discipline was big around our house. My dad spanked me with a belt a few times, which people today find horrifying. He never hurt me, but I sure got the message. It was the sound of it more than anything. I think our society has gotten too soft. Punishments that worked for a thousand years are suddenly rejected because a tiny percentage of people don't know where to draw the line. Grounding a kid doesn't mean anything; they just go play video games or hang out on their phones. A good old-fashioned spanking is more effective.

Money mattered when I was younger because my family didn't have much. When I made a couple hundred grand my first year as a pro, it suddenly didn't matter any more. Then I injured my wrist hitting a bunker shot at the AT&T in 2010. Sitting out the rest of the year after reconstructive surgery, money mattered again – a lot. Now I'm in a position where I hopefully won't have to worry whether I'll have to live in a cardboard box. Bottom line, money only matters when you don't have it.

When I gave my caddie, Micah Fugitt, \$1 million of my \$10-million bonus for winning the FedEx Cup, it was only the quickest way to show my gratitude. But money isn't the only way. Growing up, if there were older people who couldn't mow their yards, or neighbours who'd had surgery and needed help, the Horschels were there for them. If a hurricane came through, we were there cleaning up for residents. There are a lot of ways to show generosity.

My mum worked, too, so every day she'd drop me off at the golf course at 7.30am, and I'd be at The Habitat at Valkaria all day. The pro, Alex Romanoff, and some of the older regulars sort of kept an eye on me. Kids should hang out not just with other kids but also with older people. I learned a lot about manners and communicating

with people. And the grown-ups were a lot more fun than other kids gave them credit for. The jokes and one-liners I learned travelled very well. The adults at The Habitat weren't all great golfers, but it still helped my game because I learnt from watching what works and what doesn't.

Every player has a moment when he realises he can be really good. When I was 15, I worked part-time at a course called The Majors. There are thousands of good players in Florida, and one day a mini-Tour player from Kentucky came through. We played, and for the better part of the round I had him. I think I got about \$200 ahead, and the guy was playing as good as he could play. He came back at the end and barely beat me, but after matching him shot for shot, I realised I was pretty good and only going to get better. That's when I decided this was what I wanted to do for a living.

As a proud Floridian, I've always wondered why my state has produced hundreds of good Tour players, but no really great ones. Texas has this badass sense of pride and toughness. California has awesome courses, all kinds of geography and a huge population. Florida has fantastic weather, which seems like a plus but actually is kind of a handicap. There's this grinding year-round golf, where kids with talent do little else but play golf. I for one never saw snow falling until I was 25. I think Florida kids get a little sick of not doing much else but playing golf, and being pushed into it. By the time they mature, they're dying to try something else. They've lost that hunger.

I'm low on superstitions, big on rituals. I carry four white tees in my right pocket, and if I break one, I immediately go to my bag and replace it. I mark my ball with a 1936 quarter I got nine years ago from the cashier at a Checkers drive-through. I've used the same divot-repair tool for eight years. I'm not big on change.

I always thought Pebble Beach was as good as it gets, but Pine Valley, which I saw for the first time last year, is on another level. It's the one course I could play every day without getting bored. Everything there, from the cottages to the clubhouse to every hole on the course, is exactly where and how it should be. There's nothing that can be improved. The atmosphere is unreal. I hate country-club stuffiness more than anybody, and here you have the greatest course on the planet without a hint of pretentiousness. The staff, members and visitors are all raised to this incredible level of pure golfiness, where nothing else matters.

You don't get to know many truly great people, but I'd put my coach at Florida, Buddy Alexander, on that list. He taught me how to really play golf. Advanced stuff on course and self-management I hadn't heard before. Life lessons and wisdom you can't get anywhere else. When he was recruiting me, he got my parents on the phone and said, "Every young

man who comes through here believes he will someday make it to the PGA Tour. Many will have the right stuff to do that, and some will not. I've been around and will know whether they have that ability. My promise to you is, if Billy doesn't have it, I will see to it that he leaves here fully prepared to have success in another walk of life." That sold them, and it sold me. Coach Alexander retired at the end of 2014, but I'll always feel close to him and grateful for how he looked after me.

Not that we Florida guys were angels. We had fake IDs and enjoyed everything that comes with them. At a tournament in Las Vegas, we hit the casinos. I got killed playing blackjack the first couple of nights. And I got my money back, or close to it. One time I was down US\$1,000, which was catastrophic. Before the red-eye flight back to Florida, I went back to the casino, and after several hours got to where I was down only a couple of hundred. It felt like winning.

Chris Kyle wrote in his book, American Sniper, that his goal was to tell the story of the people he served with. In so many of the books I've read on war, it comes out that people fight for each other as much as they're fighting for their flag. What makes the European Ryder Cup team play so hard? It isn't for that blue flag with the gold stars on it, because the flag is not from a country. The flag represents the group of players and their supporters. It's powerful motivation.

Check the history books. You'll find the 2006 US Amateur was played at Hazeltine, one of the toughest courses in the nation. And that I shot 60 in the first round. I've gotten a lot of compliments for that over the years, and I just say thanks, but here's the secret: I didn't shoot the 60 at Hazeltine. I shot it at Chaska Town Course, a nice public course nearby. The early stroke-play rounds were played over two courses. Still, it was a 60.

My favourite thing to do is to get on the couch, turn on "Mickey Mouse Clubhouse" and wait for Skylar to crawl up and snuggle next to me and watch. She's 15 months old, and I get as absorbed in watching kids shows as she does. I've actually caught myself watching "Frozen," "Ice Age" and "The Land Before Time" when she isn't there.

Look good, play good. White belts are out, except with white pants. The days of khaki pants and white shirts are dead. But if you wear a brightly coloured shirt with those khakis, you get a pass. Iron your stuff every day, even if it just came back from the dry cleaner or is fresh out of the dryer. Shirts and pants, a little too small beats a little too big. Socks, anything goes – loud is good. The days of matching them to your trousers or shoes are over. Never leave the house without a head-to-toe check. Even if you're headed to the gym, you can adjust the drawing on your shorts just right, check your shoelaces and give your socks a tug. Look good, play good. ☺