

The **GREATEST SHOW ON TURF**



THE PGA TOUR IS A LONG-RUNNING CIRCUS OF **NICKNAMES**

icknames are one of golf's most entertaining traditions.

Not long ago, *The Wall Street Journal* lamented that this era of Tour players is woefully short on sobriquets. But hang around the clubhouse, the clubhouse range or the locker room and you find the contrary. The name game is still very much a part of the grand old game.

We caught up with Bubba Watson, who answers to Freak Show: "Ryuji Imada started that. He said, 'You do some freaky things that no one else can do.'"

If previous generations seemed more creative with colourful labels, one could argue that the game was populated with more colorful characters—like Bubba (whose birth

name is Gerry).

Harry Vardon owned two of the first most memorable monikers: The Stylist and Greyhound. Weird, though, that he invented the Vardon Grip but it's obscure Ed Fiori who is known as The Grip.

The coolest nicknames, perhaps coincidentally, belonged to the greats. Gene Sarazen was The Squire, Tommy Ar-

mour the Silver Scot, Walter Hagen was The Haig, Byron Nelson was Lord Byron, and Mildred Didrikson Zaharias went by, simply, Babe. And Ben Hogan was so good that he had three aliases, all of them enviable: Bantam Ben, The Hawk and Wee Ice Mon.

But not all fine players are so lucky. The Chocolate Soldier is unfortunate, but better than the Hershey Hurricane, which sounds like a personal problem. Both were the burden of Hershey Country Club pro Henry Picard. And there was a guy once called Pudgy, Whaleman, Blob-o and Baby Dumpling, all courtesy of the rabid fans of Arnold Palmer, The King. But Jack Nicklaus got the last laugh with his Major-championship record and winning nickname, the Golden Bear.

It's a jungle out there. Or a menagerie. We know of the Walrus (Craig Stadler), Shark (Greg

Norman), Lion (John Daly, aka Wild Thing), Bulldog (Corey Pavin), El Pato (the Duck, Angel Cabrera) and Goose (Retief Goosen). To those we can add the Penguin (Tim Clark), Monkey (Zach Johnson), Turtle (Colt Knost), Shrek (Louis Oosthuizen) and Sasquatch (Steve Stricker).

Why Sasquatch? He has always been Stricks, one of many modern creations born of lazy contractions: Kooch, Poults, Badds, Sneds. Ugh. Stricker picked up his new handle last year during a lightened tournament schedule. "Because a Stricker sighting is more rare than Sasquatch," said a fellow player.

Chris Kirk is known as Slim, "but it's not what you think," says the skinny golfer. "I was a big skateboarder when I was a kid, and I still wear skateboarding shoes around home. When I went on my recruiting trip

(to Georgia), I had on my skateboarding shoes, and I was wearing a hoodie. My hair was dyed bleach-blond. Guys thought I looked like Slim Shady (aka Eminem)."

Zach Johnson's college nickname started out as Z until taking a wholly illogical evolutionary turn. "Then it went to Z-man. Then it went to Z-money, and then guys got cute and went to Z-monkey. Then it was just Monkey. So no rhyme or reason to it."

Indeed, creativity is flourishing. Robert Garrigus is known as Gorillagus for his long drives and long arms. The stocky K.J. Choi is Tank. And one of our favourites: Kent Jones, Hamburger. (It fits, Google Images confirms.) Of course, a nickname alone suffices for the greatest player of this era. Eldrick Tont Woods always has been Tiger. But his Stanford buddies called him Urkel. **G**

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