

Long days ahead at Hazeltine

Associated Press

CHASKA, Minn. — Paul Azinger pulled the driver from his bag because there really is no other option at Hazeltine. The sign post on the opening hole has two words and two sets of numbers that serve as a not-so-subtle welcome to the PGA Championship.

490 yards. Par 4. If that's not enough, the wind was in his face.

A stream of fans were crossing the fairway about 200 yards off the tee, and as a marshal frantically waved his arms to stop the traffic, Azinger told him not to worry. He figured even he could keep the ball in the air that long, and he then ripped a shot that traveled well over their heads.

No need to put the cover back on the driver or any of the fairway metals for most players in the PGA Championship.

The final major gets under way Thursday, already in the record books without a single shot having been hit that counts on the card. Hazeltine National measures an official 7,674 yards, making it the longest course in major championship history.

The previous record was 7,643 yards last year at Torrey Pines for the U.S. Open. Before that, the record belonged to Medinah No. 3, which was 7,561 yards for the 2006 PGA Championship. And before that, it was 7,514 yards at Whistling Straits for the '04 PGA.

You get the picture. "Looking forward to playing a major one day that does not promote itself as the longest ever," Geoff Ogilvy said on Twitter.

If that's the worst anyone can say, Hazeltine is doing much better. Dave Hill brought plenty of attention to his course in the suburbs of Minneapolis in the 1970 U.S. Open when he said, "All you need is 80 acres



of corn and some cows." And he was the runner-up.

The buzz word this week is long.

Scott Verplank, who is more on the short side of driving distance, was asked how many players could talk about Hazeltine without mentioning length or some variation of the word. "Zero," he said.

"The best hole on the course is No. 16, and it's the second-shortest hole," he said of the 402-yard signature hole that runs along Hazeltine Lake. "The shortest one is No. 14, the one the same length as the par 3 before it."

The PGA Championship bills itself as "Glory's Last Shot" because it is the final chance of the year to win a major. That takes on particular significance for Tiger Woods, whose five victories this year do not include the kind he covets the most.

Woods is trying to match Jack Nicklaus and Walter Hagen with his fifth PGA Championship victory, and continue toward a more obscure record. Hagen won a major six years in a row; Woods is at four.

The world's No. 1 player came close seven years ago at Hazeltine, closing with four straight birdies to finish one shot behind Rich Beem. The course was a mere 7,360 yards for the 2002 PGA Championship. Woods couldn't help but notice the difference.

"Oh, man," he said when asked what he had seen of the course. "It's a heck of a lot longer than what we played in 2002. It's going to be a great test all week. You're going to have to hit the



Tiger Woods chips to the putting green during Wednesday's final practice round for the 91st PGA Championship at the Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn. Hazeltine has been set up as the longest course ever used in major competition.

ball pretty good here."

Hazeltine gets most of its length in the par 5s, the shortest of which is 572 yards and might be the only one where players can try to reach in two shots. Conveniently enough, the left side of the green is guarded by water.

The others are 633 yards (No. 3), 606 yards (No. 11) and 642 yards (No. 15).

That means the length could be somewhat of an equalizer if no one can reach most of the par 5s in two. Zach Johnson won the Masters (7,445 yards) in 2007 by laying up on every par 5. Verplank is another player who thrives on making birdie at par 5s with his wedge.

"That's not a bad assessment, except I can't hit a wedge into any of the par 5s," he said with a laugh. "It plays into the hands of a certain style of player."

He didn't mention any names, perhaps because he hadn't heard all the stories, such as Alvaro Quiros reaching the 15th hole with a driver and a 5-wood during a practice round Wednesday.

Majors are loaded with horror stories dur-

ing practice rounds. Even at Whistling Straits, several players said they would take even par for the week and wait in the clubhouse. The first day, Darren Clarke opened with a 65.

The yardage, however, is just a number.

PGA Championship director Kerry Haigh is known to move tees around, making it play shorter and adjusting to the weather. He might move the tees up on the par-4 12th (518 yards) and the par-3 13th (248 yards), or one of the par 5s.

"There's a lot of scope to adjusting the setup," Ogilvy said. "It appears there might be a few holes they can play forward. The best hole is the 14th (352 yards), and I hope they move that up so you can have a go at the green."

Wouldn't that be a relatively easy hole?

"There are 17 other bogey holes out there," Ogilvy replied.

Attention shifts from the course to the guys playing it Thursday. The defending champion is Pádraig Harrington, who showed his return to form in a spirited duel that Woods won last

week at Firestone. Phil Mickelson missed the British Open while tending to his wife's battle with breast cancer, and he's hopeful of ending his turbulent summer on a high note.

Masters champion Angel Cabrera, U.S. Open champion Lucas Glover and British Open champion Stewart Cink already have hit their high and are looking for more.

Cabrera would figure to have the best chance because he has been pounding the driver lately, so his answer was no surprise when asked he like the golf course.

"Si," he replied. And why is that?

"Es largo," Cabrera said, which translates simply to "It's long."

Still, the strongest field of the year — 98 out of the top 100 in the world ranking — typically allows for multiple possibilities, especially in the final major of the year.

"This golf course, for a long course, doesn't necessarily favor a long hitter as most other courses do," Paul Goydos said. "It favors a good player. It's amazing how golf works out that way."

Little League captures Corbo win

Norwalk Little League defeated Cranbury West, 10-0, in Tom Corbo Tournament action Tuesday to improve to 5-1 in this year's event for 9-10-year-old players.

Norwalk can win the tournament championship with a Cal Ripken loss or will be co-champions with Ripken if the West Norwalk entry wins its two remaining games.

Norwalk had blanked West, 20-0, in their first meeting and again blanked West, 10-0.

Moe Ortiz tossed the first inning striking out three batters. Joey Benincaso hurled the final 3 innings, allowing no runs and two hits with two strikeouts and no walks to earn the win.

At the plate, Mike Pascarelli tripled in a run and singled in two others. Alex Marino singled twice, had two RBI and scored three times. Jake Fishman had a pair of singles, an RBI and three runs scored. Joey Benincaso singled twice and drove in the final run in the fourth inning. Tommy Benincaso singled and scored two runs and Kyle Mossop singled and scored.

For Cranbury West, Max Berman pitched well for three innings, allowing three earned runs and fanning three. At the plate, Ari Lander singled twice and Wilton St. John singled.

Brady itching for action

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — He spent a supermodel, spent quality time with his 2-year-old son and appeared on the television show "Entourage," which joked about his knee surgery in a way Bill Belichick would never let him talk about for real. New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady has been everywhere in the last 11 months. **NFL**

Except playing quarterback for the New England Patriots.

After a year off worthy of a rock star — right down to the police investigation into whether his bodyguards shot at photographers covering his Costa Rican wedding — Brady is ready to return to the NFL tonight when the Patriots open the exhibition season in Philadelphia against the Eagles.

And that's when the two-time Super Bowl MVP plans to prove that, despite all the trappings of his success, he hasn't gone soft.

"I'm a believer that talk is real cheap," Brady said this summer. "I know it looks glamorous at times, but I think what I enjoy the most is playing football and being with my family, and those are the kind of things that I do. I'm excited to go out there and compete. And anytime I have a chance to compete, I love that."

Brady, who had started 128 consecutive games, has played just 5 minutes, 58 seconds since a loss to the Giants in the 2008 Super Bowl spoiled the Patriots' chances at a perfect, 19-0 season.

He sat out the entire exhibition season last year because of an unspecified foot injury, then was knocked out for the year in the first quarter of the season opener.

Former NCC standout Bedard facing surgery on shoulder

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Mariners left-hander Erik Bedard is having another surgery on his throwing shoulder, all but ending his season and perhaps his time with Seattle.

Manager Don Wakamatsu said Wednesday that Bedard — a former standout at Norwalk Community College — will have exploratory surgery on Friday in Los Angeles with Dr. Lewis Yocum, who removed a cyst from Bedard's shoulder in September.

Wakamatsu said the procedure will inspect a frayed labrum and examine the joint.

"Unless they find something (else), it would be considered minor," Wakamatsu said.

The 30-year-old former ace of the Baltimore Orioles is in the final months of his contract and could become a free agent this winter. He has been experiencing pain in his shoulder since at least early June and was placed on the disabled list for the second time this summer on July 26. He's been on the active roster for just 20 days since June 17.

Last season, he didn't pitch after July 4 because of shoulder pain.

Bedard said Friday this discomfort is coming from the top of his shoulder, puzzling and frustrating him. Wakamatsu

said the Mariners' medical staff suspects this latest pain may be from impingement — pressure on the rotator cuff.

"It's frustrating, I can tell you that," said Bedard, who is on the disabled list for the fourth time in the last two seasons. "Being hurt for two seasons, new team, everyone thinks ... That's all I'm going to say."

Youkilis, Porcello suspended

Boston star Kevin Youkilis and Detroit pitcher Rick Porcello were suspended for five games each Wednesday and fined by Major League Baseball, a day after their brawl at Fenway Park.

Youkilis began serving his suspension dur-

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ing Wednesday night's game against Detroit. Porcello appealed, and no penalty will take effect until the process is complete.

"Basically, I left everything in the hands of the front office," Youkilis said. "Whatever they thought was best for the team was good for me."

Youkilis leads the Red Sox in getting hit by pitches this season with 10 and was tied for fourth in the AL entering Wednesday.

"I don't have any regrets," he said. "There comes a point in your life when you can only take so much. When people don't do things in the right manner, you get kind of fed up with it and

you have to do what you have to do in life to protect yourself. I take one ball off the eye, my career could be over."

Wednesday's games

Red Sox 8, Tigers 2

Jason Bay and Mike Lowell homered to pace an 11-hit attack that backed seven strong innings by Boston starter Josh Beckett (14-4) as the Red Sox rolled to their third straight win.

Braves 6, Nationals 2

Adam LaRoche gave the Braves the lead with a seventh-inning homer, his second of the game, and Atlanta continued its second-half surge by beating the Washington Nationals.

LaRoche snapped a 2-2 tie with his seventh-inning homer off Jorge Sosa (1-1). He had a sec-

ond-inning homer off Craig Stammen and drove in a third run with a bases-loaded walk in Atlanta's three-run eighth.

Giants 4, Dodgers 2

Juan Uribe hit a game-ending two-run homer with one out in the 10th inning and the San Francisco Giants avoided a three-game sweep by the archrival Los Angeles Dodgers.

Brian Wilson (4-5) pitched 1 1-3 innings with four strikeouts for the win on a wild day in which the benches cleared and both Giants manager Bruce Bochy and bench coach — and acting manager — Ron Wotus were ejected in separate arguments.

Athletics 6, Orioles 3

Landon Powell homered in Oakland's four-run fourth inning, and the Athletics won their straight series for the first time since April 2008.

Angels 10, Rays 5

Gary Matthews Jr. put the Angels ahead with a three-run homer in the sixth, Howie Kendrick added another three-run shot in the seventh, and Los Angeles finished a three-game sweep of the Rays to move a season-best 24 games over .500.

Rangers 5, Indians 0

Rookie Tommy Hunter turned the shutout tables on the Cleveland Indians, pitching into the eighth inning to lead the Texas Rangers to victory.

Patriots rally in eighth to defeat Bluefish

BRIDGEWATER, N.J. — The Somerset Patriots snapped a 5-5 tie with a run in the bottom of the eighth inning and held on to defeat the Bridgeport Bluefish, 6-5, Wednesday afternoon at TD Bank Ballpark.

Somerset shortstop Anthony Granato singled, stole second, advanced to third on a throwing error, and scored on a wild pitch for the 6-5 lead.

Jesse Hoorelbeke gave Bridgeport an early lead with a three-run homer in the top of the first.

Freedom Division-leading Somerset (21-11) got a run in the

bottom half of the first but the Bluefish countered with a run in the second on a sac fly by Adam Greenberg.

Somerset cut the deficit to 4-3 in the second and tied the game in the bottom of the fourth. The Patriots took a 5-4 lead in the fifth.

Bridgeport (18-14) tied up the game at 5-5 in the top of the seventh inning on an RBI single by Colin Roberson.

Bluefish reliever Casey Hoorelbeke (3-3) absorbed the loss after allowing one run on one hit in two innings pitched.