

3M Open TPC Twin Cities	1 Tony Finau 4 -17	T2 Sungjae Im 4 -14	T2 Emiliano Grillo 4 -14	T4 James Hahn 4 -13	T4 Tom Hoge 4 -13
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APPROACH SHOTS

Masters 2022: As conditions firm at Augusta National, iron play separates contenders from pretenders

Holding greens in difficult conditions relies on precision from the fairway.

By **Matthew Rudy**



David Cannon

Golf Digest 50 **Best Teacher Mark Blackburn** walked almost 25,000 steps with students Max Homa, Gary Woodland and Mike Weir yesterday at Augusta National—and saw the conditions change from cool and damp to warm and breezy. He thinks the scoring

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conditions in the middle of the day yesterday were as inviting as anyone will see the rest of the

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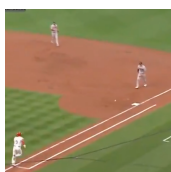
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conditions in them, the field average was only 57 percent for greens hit. The greens are only going to get firmer and harder to hold. The person who has the best ability to adapt from different lies—and hit the opposite shot that the lie dictates—will thrive. The greens are so undulating that it negates some of the putting."

When a player is in control of his ball, even his misses tend to be in the appropriate places. That's often the difference between a routine par and the doubles that can derail rounds for anybody other than Cam Smith. "Why is it rare for rookies to do well here? Because it takes time to learn where you can hit it and where you can't," says Blackburn. "When the greens are firm, you absolutely have to be where you're not only putting uphill but chipping uphill. Those often can be longer shots, but they're in places where you can attack instead of being extremely defensive.

"That said, you can see how Augusta National consistently tries to take away some of what the players 'know,'" says Blackburn. "The 11th is essentially a new hole with what they've put in down the right side. If you decide to go down there, you have to hit up to a precise plateau now. 15 is playing longer, which changes some of the geometry. The challenge is to avoid getting tricked by what you think you recognize and making sure you're hitting the appropriate shot the actual situation."

Augusta National's seductive charm? "It often forces players to get anxious early, feeling like they have to catch up," says Blackburn. "You have to be very disciplined and wait for your opportunities. When you get out of position, don't take more than a bogey. Know that you're going to have five wedges—at worst—in your hand at 2, 3, 8, 13 and 15, and maybe even 7. You have to cash in—and not give it away other places."

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