

ALL IN A WEEK'S WORK

South African specialist swing coach Jamie Gough is riding high. We caught up with him on one of his whistle-stop trips home to the KZN Midlands.
By Gaynor Lawson

His protege, Hao Tong Li, won the Dubai Desert Classic in late January and at the end of 2017 he won the PGAs of Europe's John Jacobs Award for Teaching and Coaching. It's not an easy life, being on Tour for 32 weeks of the year, but for Gough, it's what he does best.

Settling back with a cold beer, he ponders the question: What does he bring to the players he works with? It's not as simple as just working on the game, he says. He also focuses on his players' mental state, including their preparation and course management, and the short game.

'I think my biggest strength as an instructor is that I tend to teach the individual, rather than having a standard one-dimensional method,' he says. 'I will always formulate a blueprint in my mind of how I would like to see a player swing the club and guide them through that process rather than trying to radically change the way they swing the club.'

'A large part of my success with top players is that I work hard to improve what they already do well and slowly iron out the faults and idiosyncrasies while keeping them in form and making

money. The key to playing consistent golf at Tour level is being able to control your ball flight under enormous pressure and that's what I try to develop with my players: a swing that repeats under the pressure of tournament golf.'

Gough works with Li, Brandon Stone, Andy Sullivan, Soo Min Lee, David Drysdale and Justin Walters, finding six players to be 'a manageable number to work with at an event'.

Having received the John Jacobs Award for his coaching, it's fitting that Gough is a fan of the 'doctor of golf', whose attention to the flight of the player's ball enabled him to diagnose details about the swing. 'I'm a strong believer in John Jacobs, and a lot of the technology today largely supports much of what he said.'

'I'm a mix of old and new school ... much of what I do each day is basic maintenance, reinforcing good habits. If a guy is playing well you have to keep him playing well - and earning well.'

Gough's golfing credentials are impeccable. After an initially promising junior career in the 1980s (he represented South Africa), he turned pro at 18. Over time, he felt drawn to coaching, a calling that saw him opening a chain of Jamie Gough Golf Schools across South Africa. The first branch opened in Cape Town

in 1997 and at one stage he had 30 teachers working for him. But he sold the academies to focus on coaching. He's been doing it for 35 years.

Ball skills run in the Gough blood: older brother Richard was a top footballer, playing for Dundee United, Rangers and Scotland. But for Jamie, it's more than an affinity with sports and looking with a clinical eye at players at the peak of physical fitness. He remains a good golfer and is disciplined about staying in shape. It helps him cope with his punishing year-round schedule.

'I try my best to do a bit of gym work or treadmill at least three times a week on Tour as I find staying physically fit helps me stay mentally strong through the weeks on the road. On average, I travel 32 weeks a year so there are lots of long-haul flights and too many hotels to remember. Sometimes I wake up and don't know where I am!'

He continues the fitness focus even when away from the Tour, relaxing at home with his fiancée, Lani, and their three dogs and her horse on a smallholding near Nottingham Road. Their home gym is comprehensively equipped and Gough also runs a few times a week.

It's a lifestyle that wouldn't suit many, especially after so many years. 'My

JAMIE GOUGH

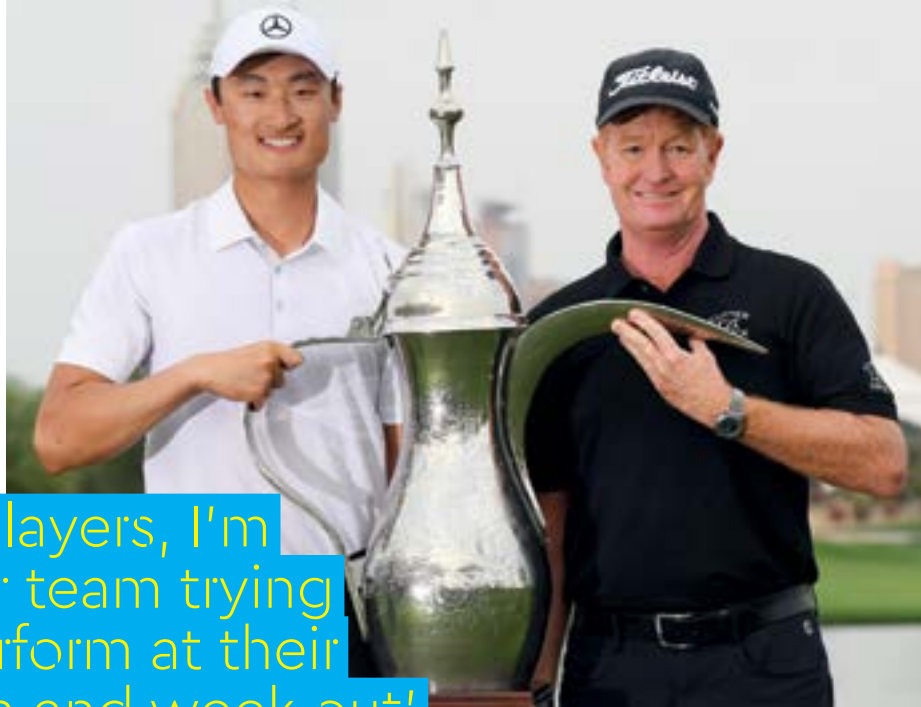
average day is about 10 to 12 hours; most of that is spent standing on the range teaching, or out walking the course to observe my players in tournament conditions,' he says.

'Most tournament weeks we arrive at the course on a Monday and leave on a Sunday, heading on to the next venue, so it's a seven-day-a-week occupation. It's incredibly stressful and draining, so staying physically fit is of massive importance to me.'

'For most of my players, I'm a member of their team trying to make them perform at their optimum, week in and week out'

The bond between the guys helps relieve the stress. 'The highlight of most days is dinner time where we often have a mix of players and caddies, and there's great camaraderie and banter. The days of late nights and drinking on Tour are long gone. Golf has become such a multimillion-dollar business that the modern players are professional athletes. Most of them have full-time coaches, physios, nutritionists, managers and psychologists.

'For most of my players, I'm a member of their team trying to make them perform at their optimum, week in and week out.'



How many 'touristy' things does he manage while trotting the globe? 'My favourite cities are Singapore and Austin, both, funnily enough, for the food!' he laughs. 'Great Asian cuisine in Singapore and the best barbecue ribs in the world in Austin. On Tour we rarely go sightseeing - it took 10 years at the tournament in Paris before I even saw the Eiffel Tower - but we do get to sample food in restaurants around the world, which is a plus.'

And his favourite event? 'It has always been the one in Vilamoura in Portugal. It feels like a holiday as we generally stay down at the port, which is beautiful. The

course is great, as are the people. I love peri-peri chicken, so Portugal is home away from home.'

Gough cannot ignore the lure of 'the big guns', though. 'Obviously, events like The Masters at Augusta are amazing to work at, as are all the Majors, especially The Open. Last year was incredible with Hao Tong finishing third. My previous best finish at a Major was fourth at Augusta with Miguel Angel Jimenez.'

The afternoon sun is fading and Jamie needs to get home to fire up his pizza oven for some friends. It's now that rare moment in a week: Jamie Gough downtime. ☺



THE JAMIE GOUGH CV

PGA qualified pro since 1983, has been teaching for 35 years
Coached the men's SA Eisenhower Trophy team in 2006

Accolades include: PGA Teacher of the Year in 2005;
Golf Digest's No 1 teacher in SA in 2014; PGAs of Europe's John Jacobs Award in December 2017

Current stable: Hao Tong Li, Andy Sullivan, Brandon Stone, Soo Min Lee, David Drysdale and Justin Walters

Past clients: European Tour winners such as Miguel Angel Jimenez, Thomas Bjorn, Anders Hansen, David Howell, Gregory Havret, Michael Hoey, Bradley Dredge and Alex Noren. Also names such as Jose Maria Olazabal, Charl Schwartzel, Richard Sterne, James Kingston, Haydn Porteous and George Coetzee

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