

## OPINION

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### PGA Tour Playoffs: Championships are Only as Meaningful as the Competition

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Professional golfers seek to perform at the highest level and beat the best competition. They train and practice for countless hours to reach such lofty goals. For the very best, they can win large amounts of money, as fans are willing to pay for the opportunity to watch them in action, and companies are willing to sponsor their events to gain visibility for their products and services. The end result is that 50 PGA Tour golfers have won over \$3 million so far this season.

The PGA Tour playoffs are now beginning, as the top 70 golfers in the FedEx standings advance for the opportunity to reach the top 30. If successful, this will give them entry to the very best tournaments and make their scheduling in 2024 that much easier.

Despite the excitement of the start of the PGA Tour playoffs, not all the best golfers in the world are participating.

World-class golfers like Cameron Smith and Brooks Koepka are LIV Golf tour golfers currently ranked among the world's top 20.

The only events that mix golfers from the PGA Tour and LIV Golf are the four majors. While the Saudi-backed LIV Golf and the PGA Tour are in the midst of a merger — after a fierce rivalry for the best golfers, as well as a number of lawsuits and countersuits — their golfers will continue to compete in largely separate silos until the deal is finalized and implemented. However, plans to merge the two tours remain shrouded in uncertainty, as the venture has caught the attention of government officials, with Senate committees reviewing what the deal entails and if it serves the best interests of the nation, along with the Department of Justice reviewing if the merger would violate U.S. antitrust law.

Regardless, the rivalry means the talent pool is split, leaving LIV golfers out of PGA Tour playoffs. Money cannot buy competition — it seems LIV golfers got their money, but they lost their competition among the world's best.

At The Open this year, just two LIV Tour golfers finished in the top 20 (Henrik Stenson and Laurie Cantor). LIV golfers performed better at the Master's, the PGA Championship and the U.S. Open, where four finished in the Top 20 in each event, including Koepka winning the PGA Championship. Clearly, several LIV Tour golfers have the talent to compete against the top ranks.

With the PGA Tour playoffs, nationwide coverage and fan interest are immense. Players like Scottie Scheffler, Rory McIlroy and Jon Rahm, all fan favorites, are also the favorites to win, as they sit atop the FedEx standings.

Players like Koepka, Bryson DeChambeau, Dustin Johnson and Phil Michelson, all of whom joined LIV Golf, have been handsomely paid for their decision. The entire group of LIV Golf members were paid around \$800 million dollars to jump ship from the PGA Tour.

Yet, there are no free lunches. The LIV Golf members compete amongst themselves. What is lacking is what the PGA Tour seems to offer at every tournament: the highest level of competition that professional athletes crave.

What will transpire at the FedEx St. Jude Championship, the BMW Championship, and the Tour Championship is the very best golf in the world. No amount of money can buy such competition.

So, whoever wins the FedExCup championship, every LIV Golf member will likely be watching, knowing that they could have been part of these events.

That is why people are willing to watch the very best athletes compete and why the very best athletes want to compete with each other.



A close up of Matt Fitzpatrick's shoes as he stands on the seventh hole during the second round of the Wells Fargo Championship at Quail Hollow Country Club on May 05, 2023 in Charlotte, North Carolina. Mike Ehrmann/Getty Images

Championships are only as meaningful as the competition. If you want to assess how good a tournament is, you need look no further than who finished second or third. If they are exceptional athletes, then the win is more meaningful than if they were lesser performers.

Merit is at the very center of professional sports, and for that matter, amateur sports. Everyone wants to win. Yet, winning is most meaningful, if when you do win, you are able to defeat the very best competition.

That is why the four golf majors attract as much attention as they do, particularly this year. They effectively broke down the barriers between the PGA Tour and LIV Golf, giving fans what they want. More importantly, they offered the world's top golfers the opportunity to compete against each other, which is why many became professional golfers in the first place.

It is unfortunate that money can tarnish sports competition. I imagine that some of the LIV Golf members have regrets about their decision to leave the PGA Tour and join LIV Golf. None is likely to openly make such a statement. Yet, it is during the PGA Tour playoffs that such decisions become most visible.

LIV Golf has four more events in their season.

The ultimate outcome of their planned merger remains uncertain. What is certain is that the PGA Tour playoffs will not include all the best golfers in the world, and those who have been left out made their choice willingly and voluntarily, with money certainly facilitating their decision.

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